

SERVANT TO ENGLAND
The Biography of Adam Marsh (de Marisco)

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by

Jason A.S. Drake

For my mother.

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Introduction

The friend and confidante of Robert Grosseteste, the teacher of such academic luminaries as Thomas of York and Roger Bacon, and the spiritual advisor and counselor to great magnates such as Simon de Montfort and King Henry III, Adam Marsh has long been recognized by scholars as an important figure in England's tumultuous thirteenth century. Still, it is only in the biographies of these other great men that he can be found; to date, there are no published studies of Adam Marsh. While Adam's achievements have been acknowledged, they have also been overshadowed by those of his contemporaries. In regards to his character, he has often been used as a foil or indicator of these other men's personalities. Thus R.F. Treharne might characterize Simon de Montfort as possessing an active and morally sensitive mind due to "his learned friendships with men such as [Adam] Marsh," without any attempt to explain just who Adam Marsh was.¹

It is the purpose of this thesis then to elucidate the life and character of Adam Marsh on his own terms. More than just a background character, Adam himself was a complex human being with his own worldview. Late in life he abandoned the prospect of a comfortable secular career to live the ascetic life of the Franciscan, and to become the humble servant of all men. That he did so at a time when the Franciscan Order was undergoing an important period of change and transition only makes his story all the more compelling. In many ways, Adam's career as a Franciscan reflected the significant shift in identity the Order underwent its founder's death. Where Francis had delighted in the simplicity of his early companions, Adam was a theologian with a continental reputation. The first Franciscan to hold a chair in Theology at Oxford, the academic

¹ R.F. Treharne, *The Baronial Plan of Reform*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1971) p. 71.

infrastructure of England and the reputation of the Franciscan school there owe much to his efforts. Also much unlike Francis, Adam moved and worked in the highest social circles of his day, serving kings and popes alike as advisor and ambassador. In turn, he relied on the patronage and support of these great men in the furtherance of his goals. Ultimately, however, he remained true to the Franciscan spirit and mission, embracing the physical and social formalities of poverty even as he equipped himself with sophisticated tools for the salvation of men's souls.

In studying Adam's life it will eventually become necessary to consider his relationships with the great men of his day. Indeed, Adam spent much of his time and energy in service to one important figure or another. This is not to suggest that we should necessarily consider Adam as being the lesser agent in these arrangements. While historians have long recognized the important role Adam played as agent and counselor to great men, they have rarely followed this to its full implication: that the respected advisor often himself wields a certain power. Thus no less a moral authority than Robert Grosseteste himself found in Adam Marsh more than just a good friend. He instead found his conscience and a trusted confidante.

In the end, Adam Marsh was very much a man of his time and place. That this place was England during the early thirteenth century is part of Adam's appeal. This was an important formative period for the English realm. The disintegration of the Angevin Empire and the terms of Magna Carta had greatly compromised the sovereignty of the king. The barons, not normally accustomed to participating in their own government, were being forced to slowly realize a new national political identity. Meanwhile, the English Church under the leadership of men such as Robert Grosseteste and Walter de

Cantilupe were fighting hard to assert ecclesiastical rights and to rid the church of abuses. Presiding over all was Henry III, by all accounts not an evil man but ineffectual as a ruler. Over the years dissatisfaction with the crown's government swelled, until in the summer of 1258 a unified reform movement of clerics and barons seized the government apparatus. At the head of this movement was Simon de Montfort, a conscientious but severe and acquisitive man. It was in this environment that Adam plied his career as an advisor, diplomat, and teacher, one which he himself ultimately played an important role in shaping.

The Letters of Adam Marsh

Evidence for the biography of Adam Marsh comes from some 247 extant letters he himself dictated to secretaries. These cover the period of his life roughly from 1241 until his death in 1259. It is not likely that Adam himself ever considered the compilation and circulation of his own letters. They instead seem to have been collected and compiled by an unknown copyist some twenty to thirty years after his death.² Rather than chronologically, they were instead arranged according to the status and prominence of the recipient. Thus the first section of letters is composed of those sent to ecclesiastical authorities, starting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and followed by prelates, archdeacons, abbots, and *magistri* respectively. The second section is for those letters sent to lay persons, including Simon de Montfort and Queen Eleanor. Lastly and characteristically in the most humble position are the letters sent to his fellow friars, including the provincial-minister William of Nottingham. Since medieval epistolary

² C.H. Lawrence, "The Letters of Adam Marsh and The Franciscan School at Oxford," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol 42, no. 2, (April 1991): p. 219.

conventions did not often include a concern for dating, their chronology must be established through internal evidence. In this I am heavily indebted to work of C.H. Lawrence, who has recently released a critical edition of the first 111 letters.³ I have used Lawrence's work as a base in my attempt to date Adam's letters, the full collection of which is found edited in J.S. Brewer's *Monumenta Franciscana*.⁴ For the sake of consistency, Adam's letters will be referenced in this work as they appear in Brewer's edition.

The majority of Adam's letters are practical in nature: requests for patronage, reports on his activities or on the affairs of the Order, or administrative advice. Several, however, go a long way toward expressing the concerns and worldview of their Franciscan author: lamentations for the state of the Church, exhortations to good pastoral practice, and deft spiritual direction and encouragement. But as revealing as the content of these letters may be, Adam's literary style leaves much to be desired in determining his tone and character. His contrived Latin style has been alternately described by leading scholars as "impenetrable," "tortuous," and "infuriatingly obfuscatory."⁵ This is in part due to Adam's only half-grasped understanding of the *ars dictaminis* of his time. His more formal letters show that he had made a start of studying the *ars*, probably as a part of his training to become a secular clerk. He must not have fully mastered their rules, however, as his convoluted rhetorical style suggests.⁶ Perhaps he had abandoned their study when he decided to join the Franciscans. Regardless, his writing remained highly

³ These make up the first section of letters, those sent to ecclesiastics. C.H. Lawrence, *The Letters of Adam Marsh, vol. i*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2006. An index and further set of letters is expected to follow in volume two, due for release in the Spring of 2009.

⁴ J.S. Brewer, ed. *Monumenta Franciscana*. London: Rolls Series, 1868.

⁵ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 223. Charles Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968), vol. i., p. 63. J.R. Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 85.

⁶ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 222.

artificial, and is full of circumlocutions which make his sentiments difficult to pin down. His character is likewise buried beneath a thick veneer of Franciscan humility. He writes to his recipients always from an inferior position whatever the reality of the circumstances may have been, and speaks of himself primarily in deprecatory terms. Even in those situations where he was required to exhort or command his correspondents, he rarely assumes a tone of personal authority. Instead he tended to rebuke, order, or encourage in terms of biblical scripture, rendering all authority and agency to God, for whom he was but a humble messenger.

Adam's artificiality is somewhat repulsive to the modern reader. However, we should be careful not to underestimate the value that Adam's contemporaries placed on his correspondence. Robert Grosseteste once assured Adam that his letters, far from being burdensome, were instead the sweetest consolation to him.⁷ This was at a time of physical and spiritual distress for Robert, and his exhortation to Adam to write further is a powerful testimony to the esteem in which Marsh was held.⁸ Likewise Simon de Montfort's frequent correspondence with Adam during the former's difficult tenure in Gascony suggests the importance the Earl placed on Adam's spiritual guidance.⁹ William of Nottingham relied on his advice in the administration of the English province, and no less a figure than the minister-general John Bonaventure saw fit to solicit Adam's correspondence. Whatever their deficiency in style, there is no denying the influence Adam's letters had on his contemporaries, both great and small. We now turn to the study of the man himself to perhaps discover why.

⁷ Robert Grosseteste, *Episcopi quondam Lincolniensis Epistolae*, ed. H.R. Luard (Rolls Series, 1861), p. 45.

⁸ Robert had recently fallen ill, and was facing criticism for surrendering his prebend as Archdeacon of Leicester. It is telling that the only other person Robert confided in concerning this issue was his sister, the nun Juetta. Grosseteste, pp. 43-5.

⁹ Maddicott, p. 118. See below, pp. 38-40.

I. Birth of a Servant

Profession, Education, and Early Career (12?? - 1248)

Little is known about the life of Adam Marsh before he took the Franciscan habit in 1232. What evidence we have suggests that he came from a wealthy and well-connected background, and had already made significant progress in his academic career by this time. He seems to have been set for a vocation as a secular clerk, whose promise and abilities had marked him out for high office. Matthew Paris tells us that Adam gave up “worldly greatness and large revenues” to join the Franciscans, and that he was already advanced in years.¹⁰ A letter on the Close Rolls shows that he had incepted as a Master of Arts by 1226, and that he was a nephew and heir to the late Richard Marsh, the former royal chancellor to King John and the bishop of Durham.¹¹ Richard’s episcopate had been marked by the typical abuses of nepotism, and it could have been that he was grooming Adam to be his successor. In addition to bequeathing his library to Adam at his death, Richard had gifted him with the rich rectory of Bishop Wearmouth, a lucrative preferment.¹²

The dates of Adam’s tenure at Wearmouth are uncertain. If the Lanercost Chronicle can be believed and Marsh held the rectory for a period of three years, then the period of 1229-32 would seem to be the most likely candidate. Marsh’s name appears in the Durham cathedral *Liber Vitae* as rector next to that of his friend Robert Grosseteste, who is listed as “Archidiaconus Leycestr.” The names are written in the same thirteenth-

¹⁰ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Maiora*, ed. H.R. Luard, (Rolls Series, 1857) vol. v., p. 619.

¹¹ Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 224.

¹² Robert C. Stacey, “Marsh, Richard (*d.* 1226),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/18061>, accessed 10 April 2008]; *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson (Edinburgh: 1839) p. 58. C.H. Lawrence values the Wearmouth rectory in 1291 at £100, the second richest in the diocese. Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 224.

century hand, suggesting that they were entered at the same time.¹³ Since Grosseteste only held the Archidiaconate from 1229-32, we can assume the names were entered sometime during this period. Placing Marsh's abandonment of his preferment in 1232 also makes sense when we consider that such a chronology neatly coincides with his entry into the Franciscan Order, and the fact that Grosseteste's surrender of his own prebend in that year seems to have been influenced by Marsh's advice and example.¹⁴

An important question remains, however, as to the reliability of the Lanercost Chronicle. Though a first-rate source for many subjects spanning the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the Chronicle presents a somewhat romanticized account of Marsh's life and death.¹⁵ It is possible that the Chronicler may have confused Marsh's tenure with Grosseteste's three-year role as the archdeacon of Leicester. Equally conceivable is the possibility that the author wished to downplay what would have been a lengthy example of absenteeism in Adam's career. We can be relatively certain that Adam was at this time in possession of an all too common *licentiate studendi*, which would have permitted him to offset the cost of his ongoing studies at Oxford with the revenues from the rectory. Throughout his later life Adam was known as an energetic and zealous reformer, who strongly condemned such practices. It simply might not have done, then, to have him collecting revenues *in absentia* for more than "only three years."¹⁶ While the evidence supports that Marsh must have relinquished Wearmouth sometime after 1229 and no later than 1232, it is probable that he held the rectory at least as far back as 1226, while his uncle Richard was still alive. Indeed the Lanercost Chronicle itself suggests as much,

¹³ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 224.

¹⁴ Grosseteste, pp. 45-7.

¹⁵ In particular it has him dying soon after Robert Grosseteste, following him 'like a shadow' for affection six years before his actual death. *Lanercost* p. 58.

¹⁶ *Lanercost* p. 58. The emphasis is my own.

claiming that Richard, “having been consecrated Bishop of Durham, drew into that country his nephew Adam Marsh.”¹⁷ Since Richard was consecrated in 1217, it is possible that Adam held the rectory as early as this.¹⁸

Beyond this, the early fourteenth-century Dominican chronicler Nicholas Trivet provides us with our only clue as to Marsh’s earliest origins, briefly referring to him as “Adam de Marisco Bathoniensis dioecesis.”¹⁹ Hailing from Somerset himself and having been familiar with the history of the Oxford schools where Marsh spent much of his career, there is little reason to doubt Trivet’s testimony on this point.²⁰ While the surname “de Marisco” was a common one throughout Somerset and England more generally (meaning simply “from the marsh”), C.H. Lawrence has drawn attention to the Mariscos who held the manors of Huntspill, Marreys, and the Island of Lundy as Adam’s most probable relations.²¹ Like Richard Marsh they were prominent administrators in King John’s royal service, and it has been suggested that Geoffrey de Marisco, the Justiciar of Ireland, was Richard’s brother. If this is true, then Adam was probably one of several otherwise un-named sons of William de Marisco, Geoffrey’s older brother. Such a genealogy would certainly fit in with Paris’ evaluation of the wealth and position Marsh gave up to become a Friar, having as he did a justiciar and a royal chancellor in his family.

¹⁷ *Lanercost* p. 24.

¹⁸ Stacey, “Marsh, Richard.”

¹⁹ Nicholas Trivet, *Nicholai Triveti Annales*, ed. Thomas Hog, (London: English Historical Society, 1845) p. 243.

²⁰ James G. Clark, “Trevet, Nicholas (b. 1257x65, d. in or after 1334),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/27744>, accessed 10 April 2008]; Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 224.

²¹ J.S. Brewer, introduction to *Monumenta Franciscana vol. I*, ed. J.S. Brewer, (Rolls Series, 1858) p. lxxvii; Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 225. The suggestion of kinship between Richard and Geoffrey appears in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xxxvi, ed. Sidney Lee (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1893) p. 161, and is admittedly speculative in nature.

Why did Adam turn his back on such promising prospects? In contrast to Paris' assessment, Lawrence suggests that the falling fortunes of the Marisco family in the 1230s may have played a role in convincing Adam to abandon a secular career and embrace Franciscan poverty.²² While it is perhaps compelling to imagine Marsh as a man disappointed by diminishing prospects turning to a religious order, the chronology simply will not do. It is true that the palace coup of Peter des Roches in 1232 had disrupted the careers of many at court.²³ At the time, however, the Mariscos were aligned with Richard Marshal, the earl of Pembroke, who had supported the ousting of the old Justiciar Hubert de Burgh. It was not until later in 1233 when Richard suddenly rose in armed rebellion that the Mariscos became enemies of the new government, and not until 1234 that Geoffrey de Marisco saw his ignominious imprisonment.²⁴ Either event is too late for Adam to have taken his vows out of despair in 1232.

Far more likely (and Lawrence admits this) is that Adam, like many of his contemporaries at Oxford, simply experienced a conversion of spirit and a new calling to the mendicant life. The visitation of Jordan of Saxony in 1229-30 had already convinced many academics there to become friars.²⁵ Indeed, Jordan's preaching was so compelling that Robert Grosseteste himself, who was teaching at Oxford at the time, was nearly convinced to assume a religious habit.²⁶ As Adam's friend, Robert may have played a role in convincing him to join. Equally if not more important was the influence of Adam

²² Lawrence, "Letters," p. 225.

²³ See Treharne, pp. 21-30 for more details.

²⁴ B. Smith, "Marisco, Geoffrey de (b. before 1171, d. 1245)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/18060>, accessed 10 April 2008]; D. J. Power, "Marshal, Richard, sixth earl of Pembroke (d. 1234)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/18124>, accessed 10 April 2008]

²⁵ Jordan was then the Master-General of the Dominican Order. Lawrence, "Letters," pp. 225-6.

²⁶ R.W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p 74. Paris, vol. iv., p. 599.

of Oxford (also called “of Exeter”). Describing him as a world-famous scholar in his own right and as a friend of Marsh “ad robas suas,” the thirteenth-century Franciscan chronicler Thomas of Eccleston tells us that it was this Adam who induced Marsh to join the Order not long after taking vows himself.²⁷ He then goes on to relate for us a particular dream Marsh is purported to have had involving this Adam, one which in part helped inspire his decision:

“One night Adam de Maricsco dreamt that they came to a castle, and above the gates was an image of the crucifix, which all who passed through the gates must kiss. Now Brother Adam of Oxford went through first after kissing the crucifix, and the other Brother Adam, kissing the crucifix, followed. But the first, at once discovering the stairs in the tower, ran up swiftly and was soon out of sight. The other, following, cried out ‘Not so fast!’ But never again was the first one seen.”²⁸

Eccleston’s testimony on even this seemingly improbable detail deserves our trust. His *Tractatus de adventu Fratrum Minorum in Angliam* was completed around 1257-8, at a time when Marsh was still alive.²⁹ Furthermore, Eccleston claims that the *Tractatus* was the culmination of his twenty-five years’ experience as a friar, placing his entry into the Order at roughly the same time as Adam’s.³⁰ We know also that he studied as a friar at the Oxford *studium*.³¹ Given the overlap of their experiences, it seems likely that Thomas was acquainted with Marsh and had the story from him personally. We can

²⁷ Thomas of Eccleston, *Liber de adventu minorum in angliam*, in *Monumenta Franciscana*, ed. J.S. Brewer. p. 15.

²⁸ Eccleston interpreted this dream to be a prophetic vision of the death of Adam of Exeter, who soon after his profession was killed performing missionary work to the Tartars. Eccleston, pp. 15-6.

²⁹ Rosalind B. Brooke, “Thomas (fl. c.1231–c.1258),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/8439>, accessed 10 April 2008]

³⁰ Eccleston, p. 3.

³¹ Brooke, “Thomas.”

therefore take some confidence in Eccleston's statement that Adam entered the Order at Worcester "for love of greater poverty."³²

Adam's commitment to the Franciscan life is testimony to the appeal it held in the early thirteenth century. By all accounts, Adam had every reason not to join the Order. His background and abilities had already guaranteed him a comfortable and stable future. Nor was the Order yet renowned for its learning, whatever gains it had made at Paris; it would be up to Adam himself to secure Oxford's academic reputation amongst the friars. Finally, the harsh asceticism of the mendicant life could not have been an easy prospect for someone advanced in years as he was. Indeed, as we shall see, his decision would later cause Adam all manner of physical turmoil. He probably would have been "better off" if he had merely continued on his present course and adopted a secular career.

Adam, however, was not interested in material benefits or security. Instead, he was attracted to the inherent spirituality of the Franciscan lifestyle. As letters to his fellow brethren would later bear out, Adam perceived the *vita* primarily as a penitential one, whose adherents were drawn from the lowest sinners.³³ The existence of the Order itself was a gift from God, and so dedicated to continuing his saving work on Earth.³⁴ Though admittedly composed much later, we can see the origins of such ideas in Adam's profession. It was precisely because he had thus far led a long and worldly life that Lady Poverty was so seductive for him. Adam, unlike so many of his clerical contemporaries, was concerned about his soul first and his career second.

If Adam had sought to trade worldly fame for the life of a Franciscan, then he must have made a good start; the ten years immediately following his induction and

³² Eccleston, p. 16.

³³ Adam Marsh, *Adae de Marisco Epistolae* in *Mon. Fran.*, ed. J.S. Brewer, pp. 411-2.

³⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 304-5.

novitiate are for the most part undocumented. Most of this time was spent pursuing his doctorate in Theology. Still, a man of his abilities would have been ill-spent in study alone. We can catch sporadic glimpses of him over the years, usually performing important services for the Order and others.

One of these activities, for which he would later become distinguished, was the preaching the Holy War. In 1236 the Pope had ordered the Minorite brethren in France and England to promulgate a Crusade.³⁵ This was a widespread effort, one which necessitated the recalling of many of the learned brethren from their regular duties, and Adam was no exception.³⁶ Adam was a dedicated proponent of the Crusade who closely followed news from the Holy Land, and so likely would have taken to this task with zeal.³⁷ Later in 1247 he would again be intimately involved in Crusade work, both on the part of King Henry III and with the papal nuncio to England, John of Kent.³⁸

In 1239, Adam likely attended the General Chapter held at Rome. The primary purpose of the Chapter was to address the despotic rule of Elias of Cortona. As minister-general, Elias had attempted to consolidate power within the Order to his own office. To this end he held few General Chapters, and regularly ordered harsh visitations of the various provinces.³⁹ The ascetic rigor of his personal life also left much to be desired.⁴⁰ More importantly for the shape of the Order, he had a tendency to promote lay brothers to office over the ordained intellectual elite. The best that could be said about him by many

³⁵ Paris, vol. iii., p. 373

³⁶ Even those brethren in service to Robert Grosseteste seem to have been recalled: in this year he wrote to Adam, complaining of his loss and requesting that they be replaced. Grosseteste, *Epistolae* pp. 79-81.

³⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 270, 276, 280.

³⁸ See Below, pp. 17-8.

³⁹ These visitors were often armed with the power of excommunication, and were generally considered to be very disruptive in the discharge of their duties. Eccleston, pp. 29-31.

⁴⁰ This famously earned him the vitriol of the chronicler Salimbene. Salimbene de Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, trans. By Joseph L. Baird et al., (Binghamton, New York: University Center at Binghamton, 1986.) pp. 74-87, 149-57.

of his detractors was that he had promoted the study of theology, and even this had earned him the distaste of the so-called “spiritual” faction. The airing of these and other complaints at the 1239 chapter resulted in his deposition by the pope.

The anonymously authored fourteenth-century *Chronica XXIV Generalium Ordinis Minorum* places Adam at the Chapter as a companion of Anthony of Padua, where he played a leading role in the proceedings.⁴¹ Due to a number of factual errors and inconsistencies, though, we must qualify its account.⁴² For one thing Anthony of Padua had died in 1231, and so would have been unavailable to attend this or any other Chapter eight years later. For another, none of the contemporary accounts of Elias’ deposition make any mention of Adam. Thomas of Eccleston and Jordan of Giano, for example, instead attribute leadership of the movement to men such as Alexander Hales, John of La Rochelle, and Haymo of Faversham.⁴³ Still, this does not mean we should discount the possibility of Adam’s involvement. The English Franciscans in particular had chafed under Elias’ generalate, and so Marsh had reason to partake in the movement against him. It was probably Adam who induced Robert Grosseteste to write to the Cardinal-Protector of the Order in 1238 in support of Elias’ deposition.⁴⁴ His capabilities as a scholar and a negotiator would also have made him an attractive candidate to help represent the interests of the English Province. It is probable therefore that Adam attended the Chapter in Rome, where he played a minor but noteworthy role which would later be exaggerated after his death.

⁴¹ *Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis minorum*, in *Analecta Franciscana vol. III*, ed. The Fathers of the College of St. Bonaventure, (Quaracchi: College Of St. Bonaventure, 1897), pp. 229-31.

⁴² Amongst others, these include a claim that Adam attended the 1230 chapter, again as a companion of Anthony of Padua, two years before his entry into the Order.

⁴³ Rosalind B. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 162.

⁴⁴ Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 231; Grosseteste, *Epistolae* p. 181-2.

That Adam's opinion was indeed held in high regard by his peers was exhibited in 1241, when he was elected to a commission to examine and comment upon the Order's *regula*. This was occasioned by the shift in the Order's priorities that followed Elias' deposition. In his place was elected Albert of Pisa, who was in turn followed by Haymo of Faversham after his death a scant year later. While Elias had promoted study within the Order to some extent, it was under these two that it was transformed into a learned institution. Both had been Provincial-Ministers in England before their election, where they had worked to increase the learning of the brethren by establishing and expanding the province's academic infrastructure.⁴⁵ Both continued these policies as Minister-Generals, forever moving the Order toward an academic bent similar to that of their Dominican counterparts.⁴⁶ Such a shift necessarily called into question many of the ideals espoused in the Order's *regula*, and in 1241 the various provinces were ordered to elect trusted committees to comment on the nature of the Rule. Adam Marsh was one of those so elected in the English Province alongside Peter of Oxford, Henry de Bruford, and "certain others."⁴⁷ Unfortunately their report is not extant.⁴⁸ Thomas of Eccleston provides us with its gist, informing us that the brethren sent along only brief comments to the Minister-General in an unsealed box, and begged him "by the overflowing blood of Jesus Christ to leave the Rule as it was written by Saint Francis under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Haymo of Faversham went so far as to increase the acreage of Franciscan convents, so that the Brothers might more readily provide themselves with food. This was so they could spend more time in study rather than in begging. Eccleston, pp. 34-5.

⁴⁶ See Rosalind Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government* pp. 183-210 for a detailed discussion of these two men's contributions to Franciscan learning.

⁴⁷ Eccleston, p. 48.

⁴⁸ For those interested, the returns of French Province have endured. See *Exposition Quattuor Magistrorum super Regulam Fratrum Minorum* ed. by L. Oliger, (Rome, 1950).

⁴⁹ Eccleston, p. 49.

By this Adam and his colleagues were not proposing a return to the strict interpretation of Francis' rule as it was written in 1223. To do so would have seriously undermined their academic careers. Francis had been firmly opposed to the possession of goods or property for any purpose, including education. A return to such an ideal would have deprived them of the books, buildings, and other goods which provided the stable environment necessary for study. They must have instead meant the interpretation of the rule promulgated by Gregory IX in his famous bull *Quo elongati*. Issued in 1230 after Francis' death, this bull allowed the free use of goods, houses, and other property for the maintenance of the brethren so long as they themselves were not its legal owners. Originally these were to be limited only to the most necessary and basic items. The brethren were still expected to remain satisfied with the shabby clothing, bare feet, and meager living for which the Order was famous. Gregory's interpretation was meant to address the practical needs of a fast growing and increasingly sophisticated international organization, while still maintaining the spirit and in many ways the reality of its ideal of poverty. It was probably against the myriad abuses and expansion of privileges that had sprung up in *Quo elongati*'s wake that the English committee was directing its appeal. Though they had certainly taken advantage of the bull's terms to advance learning in the province, they still maintained a strict devotion to Lady Poverty. Thus Thomas of Eccleston could fondly reminisce about the early student brethren, who "did not hesitate to go daily to the theological schools, no matter how great the distance, and went barefoot even in severe cold and deep mud."⁵⁰

The response of Adam and his colleagues says much about their view of Franciscanism. In resisting new privileges they were acknowledging the powerful

⁵⁰ Eccleston, p. 21.

spiritual benefits of the impoverished life that St. Francis had espoused. But where Francis had intended such unadorned simplicity to be the primary means of living the gospel, this new generation of friars desired a more complicated life through study. Poverty was still the means of spiritual temperance by which a brother was to be prepared for his mission. Even the nature of this mission, the promulgation of the kingdom of God, was yet the same. It was the methodology that was changing. Learned preaching was instead becoming the preferred mechanism for performing God's saving work. We can see the echoes of such sentiments in some of Adam's letters to his provincial-minister, William of Nottingham. In one of these he complains about the practice of sending novices out to beg for alms without first providing them with sufficient spiritual and academic instruction.⁵¹ The simplicity that St. Francis had so valued in his early companions had become a liability for his successors. Instead it was the learning which he had been wary of that prepared one for the *vita apostolica*. It is perhaps telling that in the letters in which Adam attempts to exhort his brethren to the proper living of the Franciscan life he not once makes reference to St. Francis as an example.

Adam himself played an important role in the development of Franciscan learning in England.⁵² In 1240 William of Nottingham was elected provincial-minister of England to replace Haymo of Faversham, who had been made minister-general of the Order. William's major achievement during his ministry was the systemization of learning in the Province, a feat he accomplished relying heavily on Adam's input and advice. Within just a few months of William's election, Adam had written him concerning the placement of brother N. de Anilyeres, who had come from France to study in England. Having

⁵¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 361-3.

⁵² A more detailed investigation of Adam's role at the Oxford *studium* forms the basis for chapter two. See Below, pp. 21-33.

examined the candidate with the aid of Peter of Tewkesbury, Adam recommended him for placement in one of the houses at Oxford, Cambridge, or London.⁵³ In this instance we see the first of many similar letters whose advice would prove invaluable to the work of organizing the academic infrastructure of the English province.

One of Marsh's most notable contributions to Franciscan learning was to be the first brother to obtain a chair in Theology at Oxford, which he did late in 1247. This leads us to the question of where and when he incepted as a doctor. Unfortunately the answer is not entirely clear. Roger Bacon tells us in his *Opus Tertium* that Robert Grosseteste was his master.⁵⁴ It is likely though that by this he was referring to Marsh's study of Arts, not Theology, as it is usually in terms of this former discipline that he associates the two.⁵⁵ Moreover Grosseteste does not seem to have been available for Adam's theological education. In 1235 he was consecrated as the bishop of Lincoln, and so ceased to teach at Oxford. If Marsh did study theology under Grosseteste, it would have been for only a short time before his replacement at the Franciscan school by a certain Master Peter, later a bishop in Scotland.⁵⁶

The *Chronica XXIV Generalium* provides us with an admittedly dubious lead. It tells us that in 1230 both Adam Marsh and Anthony of Padua were commissioned to teach theology by St. Francis himself, and so sent to St. Andrew's in Vercelli to study.⁵⁷ Setting aside the severe chronological and ideological difficulties of such an event,

⁵³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 316-7.

⁵⁴ Roger Bacon, *Opera quaedam Hactenus inedita*, ed. J.S. Brewer, (Rolls Series, 1857) p. 187.

⁵⁵ For their mastery of languages and mathematics. Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, trans. Robert Burke, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), pp. 82, 126.

⁵⁶ Eccleston, pp. 37-8.

⁵⁷ *XXIV generalium*, p. 130.

Vercelli at first seems like a viable candidate for Adam's place of study.⁵⁸ As the *Chronica* mentions, the Abbot of St. Andrew's, Thomas Gallus, was a renowned theologian well-versed in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius.⁵⁹ As we shall see later, Adam was himself intimately familiar with the pseudo-Dionysian corpus, which exhibited a strong influence on his work. Moreover both Adam and Grosseteste seem to have been on relatively friendly terms with the Vercelli *magister*. Sometime around 1242-3 Adam wrote to Thomas, reporting Grosseteste's good health and sending along his own commentaries on the *Angelicam Ierarchiam* and other pseudo-Dionysian texts. In return he requested that Thomas send him some of his own work, a request he made in light of Thomas' "Fatherly kindness, of which I have much experience."⁶⁰ The sentiments here would seem to fall neatly in line with those of a former student, sending along his latest work for inspection and eager for his master's wisdom.

Still, we are not compelled to accept the *Chronica*'s testimony on this matter, and so we may be open to other interpretations of Marsh's relationship with the abbot of St. Andrews. Thomas Gallus was a part of a network of academics interested in collecting, translating, and commenting upon Greek texts whose membership included Robert Grosseteste, Nicholas the Greek, and Marsh himself.⁶¹ It is possible that Adam's association with him may have been strictly in terms of this endeavor, and that the *Chronica* has confused the matter due to their mutual expertise with the pseudo-Dionysius. If we must account for Adam's tone in his letter to Thomas then it can be said

⁵⁸ Francis, who had died in 1226, vehemently opposed the growth of learning in his Order. Neither will this chronology due for Adam, who had not yet joined the Franciscans by 1230.

⁵⁹ *XXIV generalium*, p. 130.

⁶⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 206.

⁶¹ D.A.Callus, "Robert Grosseteste as Scholar," in *Robert Grosseteste: Scholar and Bishop*, ed. D.A. Callus, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) p. 40.

that his sense of Franciscan humility caused him to be humble and deferential with most everyone. His Latin in this instance is particularly contrived, and is probably more representative of a clumsy attempt at the epistolary mode of the *ars dictaminis* than his own sentiments.⁶² More telling is the lengthy post-script which follows Adam's letter.⁶³ Here, Adam reminds the abbot of his pastoral obligations in England in the stern terms of biblical fiat.⁶⁴ Such an admonition hardly speaks to the respectful attitude we might otherwise expect had Thomas been Adam's master. When we further consider that a core of evidence presents Adam as being active in English affairs during the time he would have been pursuing his doctorate, we are led to reject Vercelli as his place of study.⁶⁵ In light of this it seems safe to say that he instead pursued his education at Oxford.

Though the date of Adam's inception is similarly uncertain, we know he must have done so by 1244. Late in that year Adam accompanied Grosseteste to attend a general council in Lyons.⁶⁶ They were accompanied by Adam's *socius*, brother John of Stamford, who fell ill at Nantes on the return trip. Adam opted to remain in France to care for his friend, a matter which was of some concern for Grosseteste. The recent deaths of Alexander of Hales and John de le Rochelle had left the Franciscan theological chairs at Paris vacant, and it seemed that Adam was being seriously considered to fill one

⁶² I am indebted to Alison Beach and Giles Constable for helping me work through this point. Dr. Constable's work on the *ars* can be found in his *Letters and Letter Collections*, (Turnhout: Ed. Brepols, 1976).

⁶³ Longer than the letter to which it is attached, it follows the valediction in the manuscript without skipping any lines. Such post-scripts are not uncommon in Adam's letters, so we should have little fear that this was an error on the part of the copyist.

⁶⁴ The parish church of Chesterton in the diocese of Ely had been gifted to St. Andrews in 1217. C.H. Lawrence, *The Letters of Adam Marsh vol I*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 221 (n. 5)

⁶⁵ Besides being on hand to comment on the state of the Franciscan *regula* in 1241, Adam seems to have been witness to the settlement of a dispute between Robert Grosseteste and Henry III over the appointment of canons to Lincoln Cathedral. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp.185-6.

⁶⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 376. Grosseteste was there to argue his case against the canons of Lincoln Cathedral, who were disputing his right to visitation. In this instance the Pope ruled in his favour. See J.H. Srawley, "Grosseteste's Administration of the Diocese of Lincoln," in *Robert Grosseteste: Scholar and Bishop*, ed. D.A. Callus, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 171-7 for more details.

of these openings. Grosseteste therefore wrote to the provincial-minister of England requesting that others brothers be sent to relieve Adam, lest “you and I be deprived of our great solace.”⁶⁷ As it is highly unlikely that Adam would have been considered to replace such renowned scholars if he had not held a doctorate in Theology, we can reasonably assume that he had incepted before departing for Lyons.

Having thus incepted, when did Adam begin his teaching career at Oxford? Lawrence has suggested that he did so immediately after obtaining his doctorate, which he places in 1242.⁶⁸ However, such reasoning is based on two erroneous assumptions: that the Franciscans were eager to replace the secular masters at their school as soon as possible, and that Adam was the first qualified candidate to do so. The official Franciscan mission to England had arrived in 1224, and had already made significant gains amongst the academic population at Oxford when Agnellus of Pisa founded the school there in or about 1230. It is difficult to believe that none of these recruits were fit to teach theology, or at least were not prepared to do so before Adam’s inception in 1242. Even if this had been the case, there seems to have been no qualm with importing Franciscan teachers from the continent who might have otherwise filled the position; Eccleston tells us that Adam’s successor at Oxford, Ralph of Colebridge, was just so imported from the *studium* at Paris.⁶⁹ Instead the provincial-ministers were content to maintain secular masters as long as they provided quality instruction. It was for this reason Agnellus had sought and obtained the services of Robert Grosseteste as master when he first formed the school.

⁶⁷ Grosseteste, *Epistolae*, pp. 334-5.

⁶⁸ His dating for Adam’s inception is based on an eight-year program of study he believes similar to Paris’, and beginning at the end of Adam’s novitiate in 1234. Lawrence, intro. to *Letters*, pp. xv-xvi.

⁶⁹ Eccleston, p. 38

The last of these secular masters was Thomas Wallensis, who was translated to the see of St. David's in 1247.⁷⁰ It was only then that Adam finally stepped in to teach at the school.

The delay between Adam's inception and his appointment at Oxford was in part due to the high demand placed on his service during this period. By the middle of the thirteenth century the mendicant Orders had become popular recruiting grounds for kings, popes, and bishops. As members of increasingly sophisticated international organizations, the minor brethren could be counted on to perform a wide variety of functions. As we have seen the Pope took advantage of their wide dispersion and preaching abilities to help organize his crusade in 1236; in fact, mendicant preachers would remain a staple of the crusading effort throughout the middle ages. Kings utilized their popularity and moral authority to send them abroad as messengers and ambassadors. Bishops were eager to have them on their personal staffs, if not always to have them freely preaching in their dioceses. Perhaps most appealing of all though was the fact that, being devoted to absolute poverty, they ostensibly did not require recompense for their service. In these ways the minor orders saw their influence and authority grow throughout the courts of Europe, much to the chagrin of Matthew Paris and other more traditional religious.⁷¹

Adam Marsh was particularly sought after amongst the English Franciscans. If he had joined the Order to escape worldly concerns then in this he was partly a failure. The same qualities which had before marked him out for a promising secular career now made him desirable as a Franciscan agent. As we have seen, he accompanied Robert Grosseteste to visit the papal curia in 1244, probably at the latter's request. He was also

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; Mary Bateson, "Thomas Wallensis (d. 1255)," rev. Marios Costambeys, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/28553>, accessed 10 April 2008]

⁷¹ Paris, vol. iii., p. 627.

known at court, possibly from when his uncle was the Royal Chancellor, where he regularly served as an advisor to the king and queen.⁷²

Later in July of 1247 he was again at the papal court at Lyons, this time at the king's request. There, amongst other business, he was to secure permission for English crusaders to delay their departure for the Holy Land until one year after Louis IX's own army left.⁷³ Though he was ultimately unsuccessful, his selection for the task points to the level of trust and regard he was held in by the royal family. Henry's disastrous Poitevin campaign in 1243 had left him in a weak position vis-à-vis his dwindling continental holdings, and had placed a lasting strain on his finances. These problems were exacerbated by a Welsh rebellion in 1245-6, to which Henry's military response was characteristically ineffectual and costly. When we further consider that in 1247 Henry was involved in a contest with Louis IX over the succession to Provence, we begin to appreciate the delicacy of Henry's situation and his need for some boon or leverage in France.⁷⁴ That Adam failed to succeed in his task did not diminish Henry's faith in his abilities, however. His service and advice would be regularly sought after by the royal family throughout the rest of his life. In particular he would often be forced to make excuses to avoid Queen Eleanor's frequent requests that he attend her at court.⁷⁵

Adam was a respected supporter and organizer of the Crusade, and it might have been that Henry chose him for the Lyons mission hoping Adam's reputation would lend extra weight to his request. This was not an entirely misguided assumption, as it may

⁷² *Lanercost*, p. 24.

⁷³ *Calendar of the Liberate rolls of Henry III*, ed. W.H. Stevenson and Cyril Flower, (London: 1916) vol. III, p. 132.

⁷⁴ Henry and Louis had married the eldest daughters of Raymond-Berengar, Count of Provence, who had died without surviving male issue in 1245. Louis had the better claim, however, as his queen Marguerite was older than Henry's Eleanor, and the Pope eventually ruled in his favour. For a more detailed look at Henry's situation during this time, see Maddicott, pp. 31-7, and Treharne, *Baronial Plan*, pp. 47-63.

⁷⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 291, 307.

have been Innocent IV who commissioned Adam to aid the papal nuncio in England, John of Kent, in the organization of crusade work there. Presumably writing from Lyons, Adam promised John that he would meet him at Grosseteste's Episcopal palace on the fifteenth of August to discuss a matter of great importance.⁷⁶ Grosseteste himself had recently laid the groundwork for an English Crusade. Several weeks earlier he had issued a letter backed by papal authority which ordered money collected for the holy endeavor to be deposited with the mendicant orders, who would be responsible for its preaching.⁷⁷

Adam himself was likely involved in the preaching of this Crusade. Robert Grosseteste had taken the opportunity of his own preaching obligation to conduct visitations throughout his diocese. Adam was likewise involved in the oversight of Grosseteste's parishes and religious houses, often reporting to the bishop on their circumstances whether favorable or otherwise. Thus he wrote concerning a certain Anora de Baskerville, the prioress of Elstow, whom he considered unfit to properly discharge her duties.⁷⁸ Many such letters, this one included, cannot be properly dated from internal evidence, and so we must find ways of fitting them into the scheme of Adam's already spotty chronology. Though admittedly speculative in nature, having Adam engage in a scheme of preaching and visitation similar to that of Grosseteste (and likely at his request) has the dual benefit of filling a gap for Adam's activities over the Summer of 1247, and for explaining when and how he found time to collect testimony concerning such matters.

Late in the year Adam stepped in to assume the Regency at Oxford. It may have been that he was appointed to this new role to facilitate a change of pace. Though it was

⁷⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 386.

⁷⁷ Paris, vol. vi., pp. 134-8.

⁷⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 149.

uncharacteristic of him to complain directly about his work, it was obvious that his duties were beginning to take their toll. As we have seen he was already an old man when he joined the Order, and fifteen years later the frequent travel which his business necessitated must have begun to get the best of him. In the Autumn of 1247 he was expected to meet with William of Nottingham at Bedford to discuss some unknown matter. Instead he wrote to the provincial-minister begging to be excused, citing his ill-health, troubled mind, and the burden of his current employment, and promising to send along Peter of Tewkesbury in his stead.⁷⁹ It was obvious that Adam was much in need of some respite from his work, a point which was not lost on his provincial-minister. William probably took advantage of the opening created by Thomas Wallensis' departure for Wales to gift Adam with the less physically demanding task of managing the school at Oxford. Ultimately such a design would prove fruitless, as Adam would remain in high demand even through his regency. At the time however it must have seemed a great relief to the travel-weary Franciscan, who valued the peace of mind afforded by quiet study. It is telling that soon after taking up his new position he declined to attend Thomas' consecration, despite the fact that the latter had probably at some point been his master and that he had been asked for personally in affectionate terms.⁸⁰

Adam's early years as a Franciscan were an important formative period in his life. More than just a change in career, his decision to join the minor brethren represented a total break with his past, one which would significantly reshape his lifestyle and identity. As a friar he learned the gratification of the impoverished life, while his years studying theology prepared him for a new, more spiritual outlook on life. Still, the experience had

⁷⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 318.

⁸⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 150.

not been an entirely gratifying one. Already an old man upon joining, the physical rigors of his new life were proving to be more troubling than he had perhaps expected. The popularity of the Mendicant Orders had perhaps ironically made him a more valuable commodity than he would have been as a secular clerk. He therefore struggled to strike a balance between the demands that were made on him by others and his own personal desire for rest. Still, he had emerged from these trials as a proven man, and more and greater burdens awaited him.

II. Doctor Illustris

Service at Oxford (1248 - 1253)

Regent and Counselor

Adam held the regency at Oxford through 1250.⁸¹ The work there greatly engaged him, and he seems to have taken to it with a special zeal. There he worked diligently to secure the education of not only the Oxford brethren, but also to greatly increase the number of qualified *lectors* throughout the whole of the English province. In doing so he was addressing what was a growing crisis in the province's academic community. The great success of the friars in the towns had generated more recruits than could be properly assimilated.⁸² Many of these were students and *magistri* like Adam himself had been, in need of someone to further their education. The problem seemed to be a lack of qualified *lectors* to provide instruction at the friaries throughout the province. During his ministry William of Nottingham devoted special energy towards rectifying this paucity. By the end of his tenure in 1254, Eccleston tells us that there were no less than thirty learned readers holding disputations throughout the province.⁸³ It was for this achievement that he would be best remembered by his successors. It was also one which relied heavily on the collaboration of Adam Marsh.

As Regent of Studies at Oxford, Adam was in a unique position to advise William about the province's academic future. As many of his letters to the provincial-minister bear out, it was Adam who kept track of the most promising talent at the English schools and then recommended them for appointment to the various lectureships. He also helped design a system of assignation, by which students still in the schools were assigned to a

⁸¹ In a 1253 letter to William of Nottingham, Adam describes himself as an outsider at Oxford, not having taught there for three years. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 348.

⁸² Lawrence, "Letters," p. 232.

⁸³ Eccleston, p. 38.

particular friary. After graduation the brother would then serve as *lector* to that house. In return, the house could be relied upon to offset the cost of their student's education and to provide him with books and parchment.⁸⁴ This way the friaries would not be subject to long gaps in their academic viability if their *lector* was reassigned; there would already be a replacement waiting in the wings. This also in part helped solve the problem of how to pay for the upkeep of the many students at Oxford so that they could be freed from the onerous activity of begging in favour of study.

Adam was also greatly concerned about the quality of education at Oxford itself. The very best students were not to be sent out to the friaries, but instead were marked out for a university career. Thus Thomas of York, whom Adam had described as “active, discreet, full of goodwill and devoted to the cure of souls,” was recommended for the Oxford lectureship.⁸⁵ This was so that he might continue his study under the Doctors there and so one day rise to the regency, which he did in 1253 with Adam's help.⁸⁶ Adam jealously guarded such talent, and sometimes had to pull strings to protect his interests. The case of Eustace de Normanville provides an instructive example. As Thomas of Eccleston tells us, Eustace had been a celebrated gain for the brethren at Oxford, having previously been Chancellor of the university and a regent in the canon law schools.⁸⁷ When he entered the Order in 1250, the brethren at Norwich immediately sought him for their lector.⁸⁸ Eustace was reluctant to take up the position, however, claiming he was ill-prepared for the task. Adam therefore wrote to the provincial-minister in support of

⁸⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 357, 390.

⁸⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 114, 357.

⁸⁶ See below, pp. 28-30.

⁸⁷ Eccleston, p. 39.

⁸⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 319.

Eustace's request, opposing the obedience which ordered him to Norwich.⁸⁹ He did not want to see his pupil's talent wasted on a hasty posting. Thanks to Adam's intercession, Eustace was permitted to stay at Oxford, where he would later succeed Ralph of Colebridge as Regent of Theology.⁹⁰

Sometimes, however, Adam was unable to retain his best and brightest. The prestigious school at Paris in particular threatened to draw away Oxford's top talent.⁹¹ Near the beginning of Adam's regency in 1249 one of his favoured pupils, Richard of Cornwall, was seeking to transfer to the Paris *studium*. Earlier in the year Richard had secured permission for the move from John of Parma, the minister-general, while the latter was performing a visitation in England. Adam in response wrote to William of Nottingham, requesting that he intercede to keep Richard at Oxford.⁹² He even went so far as to recruit the papal nuncio John of Kent to his cause.⁹³ Ultimately however his efforts were for naught. Eventually Richard was able to remove himself to Paris, where he lectured as a bachelor. Fortunately for the school at Oxford this was not a permanent loss, as Richard later returned in 1256 to replace Thomas of York as Regent.⁹⁴ On another occasion his efforts were more successful. Here William of Nottingham had been ordered by the minister-general to send two student friars, John of Weston and Walter de Madele, to fill out the student ranks at Paris. In light of their abilities, however, Adam

⁸⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 321.

⁹⁰ Eccleston, p. 38.

⁹¹ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 234.

⁹² Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 365-6.

⁹³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 330.

⁹⁴ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 235.

instead suggested that the provincial-minister send other friars in their stead.⁹⁵ Of the two he was able to retain Weston, who later became regent of theology at Cambridge.⁹⁶

More than just securing talent for the school's future use, Adam helped further the growth of Oxford through his practical administration of the school's day to day affairs. Chief amongst these was the all-important work of finding money to support the school and its students. At the time of Adam's ascendancy there were already several reliable sources of revenue for the school's functioning. The ill-advised execution of several innocent clerks during the reign of King John had resulted in a generous settlement for the school.⁹⁷ Amongst other benefits, a Legatine Ordinance of 1214 ordered the town of Oxford to pay the school an annual fifty-two shillings for the use of poor scholars. In 1240 Robert Grosseteste ordered that this money be placed in a Chest at St. Frideswide's priory under the charge of a small elected committee.⁹⁸ From this chest poor scholars (those whose income did not exceed ten marks) could take out interest free loans, the value of which depended on their status.⁹⁹ This was the first, and until 1249, only regular source of financial relief for the benefit of the school's poor scholars.

Much as the sudden influx of student friars had strained the school's intellectual resources, so do did it strain its finances. Where the Fridewide Chest had served its purpose admirably throughout the early thirteenth-century, by the time of Adam's regency it simply was not enough to keep up with the high number of Franciscan

⁹⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 354.

⁹⁶ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 235.

⁹⁷ John had ordered the execution of these students in the stead of a still at large murderer. The papacy responded in full wrath, and eventually both John and the town were forced to cede important privileges to the school as penance. See Mallet, vol. i., pp. 31-3 for more details.

⁹⁸ One of these men was appointed by the Prior with the Chancellor's assent, while the two others were elected by the University in general. Mallet, vol. i., p. 34.

⁹⁹ These were one mark, thirteen shillings and four pence for a Master, eight shillings for a Bachelor, and five shillings for a Sophister. Mallet, vol i., p. 34.

students. Part of this undoubtedly had to do with the sheer volume of these new recruits. It is likely too, though, that undue strain was placed on the Chest from brothers who, like Adam before them, had surrendered their benefices before joining the Order. Whatever the cause, it fell to Adam to find the means to fund his poorer pupils. A welcome boon came near the beginning of his tenure in 1249. William of Durham, himself a famous scholar, died that year, leaving behind a bequest of 310 marks for the maintenance of theology students at Oxford.¹⁰⁰ We know of at least one instance where Adam took advantage of this second Chest, when he requested forty *libra* for the benefit of Symon de Valentinis.¹⁰¹ Whenever possible he did not hesitate to intercede on the behalf of students to help them develop their own means of support. Thus he helped Master Peter de Wyleby, a professor of canon law, obtain the speedy remittance of a legacy owed to him in the will of Robert of Abingdon.¹⁰² When all else failed he could turn to Robert Grosseteste or the rest of the scholarly community to contribute needed money.¹⁰³

Adam's involvement as the Regent of Oxford highlights several interesting contradictions. As a minor brother, Adam tended to emphasize the importance of religious obedience to his superiors. His desire to maintain Oxford as an academic powerhouse, however, often came into direct conflict with this ideal.¹⁰⁴ In attempting to retain talented students at the school he was forced to question and even circumvent his superiors' orders, including those of the minister-general himself. Throughout these proceedings his tone remained properly deferential; it was uncharacteristic of Adam to make strong assertions. Instead, and as was usual, he simply made strong suggestions

¹⁰⁰ Mallet, vol. i., p. 34.

¹⁰¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 256-7.

¹⁰² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 247.

¹⁰³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 122, 135.

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 235.

based on his opinion. Still, the sentiment is inescapable: the advancement of Oxford was worth the discomfort of opposing authority. In his tireless pursuit of money for the school's functioning, we see a different sort of discrepancy. Fundraising was not an activity which conflicted with Adam's moral code. As has been noted, the terms of *Quo elongati* were a part of his fundamental understanding of the Franciscan *regula*, and permitted him to collect resources for the expansion of learning. Nor was the act of begging necessities itself strictly at odds with Francis' ideals. Still, one must marvel at the relative ease with which Adam secured regular incomes for his students, just twenty some years after the great saint's death.

After his regency ended in 1250, Adam continued to be based out of the Oxford friary. In this, he was exceptional. Normally a Regent held office for two years, after which he stepped down and moved elsewhere. This was due to the fact that the University would permit only one Regent at a time for each of the Mendicant Orders, and so room had to be made for a successor. Though Adam had stepped down from office at the appropriate time, he was not afterwards assigned to another house as his successors later would be. There were several good reasons for this. Though he had ceased to teach at the school, Adam continued to play an important advisory role for the provincial-minister.¹⁰⁵ As late as 1253 he was keeping William of Nottingham abreast of developments at the school, and advising him about the promotion and placement of promising students.¹⁰⁶ He also performed a useful function for the school itself, serving as a liaison between the university masters and their Episcopal overlord, the bishop of Lincoln. Up until his final year, Robert Grosseteste exhibited strict oversight of the

¹⁰⁵ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 233.

¹⁰⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 334-40, 346-50.

school's functioning. It was he who appointed the university's Chancellor, who during Grosseteste's reign served more as a personal agent to the bishop than as an autonomous head of the school.¹⁰⁷ On the one known occasion that the Chancellor used the University's seal without Grosseteste's permission, he was subjected to a harsh rebuke. In this instance it was Adam that was called upon to make peace between the school officials and the bishop.¹⁰⁸ As Grosseteste's close friend and confidant, he was therefore in a unique position to communicate the bishop's wishes to the school while representing the latter's interests to its master.

An incident in 1251 illustrates Adam's importance in helping settle the affairs of the school. Early in February of that year Adam wrote to Robert Grosseteste concerning a recent disturbance. The king and queen had come to visit Oxford, and the scholars there soon began pressing them concerning two clerks who had been placed in a royal prison. The king initially refused to remit them to the custody of the chancellor as had been requested, and an uproar ensued as the junior and senior faculty became divided over the issue.¹⁰⁹ Henry, perhaps influenced by the advice of the queen, eventually capitulated and promised to release the prisoners on a later date. The school remained in disorder, however, and many masters abandoned their lectures. At the time of Adam's writing a resolution for this problem did not yet seem in sight.¹¹⁰ It was at this time that Adam decided to take a leave of absence, much to the detriment of the school.¹¹¹ When he returned in the winter the school remained in an uneasy state. At this time he again wrote

¹⁰⁷ Mallet, vol. i., p. 35.

¹⁰⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 99-102.

¹⁰⁹ The division was born out of Henry's reasoning for his refusal, which centered on the powers and jurisdiction of the chancellor.

¹¹⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 115-6.

¹¹¹ This was in response to the burden of his many duties outside of the school. See below, p. 41.

to Grosseteste at the behest of the Chancellor, warning the bishop about some “imminent commotion” concerning the governing of the school. The details of this matter he left to be communicated by Master Robert of St. Agatha, one of Grosseteste’s officials, though we can be relatively certain that this was a hold over from the earlier turbulence.¹¹² After hearing Grosseteste’s wishes he wrote to the Chancellor, informing him that the resolution of the matter was to be entrusted to the Dean of Oxford.¹¹³ The problem was afterwards quickly resolved and the school returned to relative stability.¹¹⁴ The link Adam maintained between the University and the bishop was an integral part to the resolution of this crisis. Limited by Grosseteste’s jealous grip on authority, the Chancellor was not able to effectively respond to the school’s problems. Grosseteste himself, however, perhaps distracted at this time by a visitation he was conducting, seemed unwilling to address his attention to the matter.¹¹⁵ It fell to Adam, then, to convince his friend of the severity of the situation and rouse him to action.

In the years which followed Adam began to limit his involvement with the school. This may have been in part due to the burden of his years. This, combined with the many duties he performed outside of the school, left him with little energy to devote to the *studium*’s affairs. The waning health of Robert Grosseteste must have likewise been a factor. As the ailing bishop was able to devote less and less time to the management of the school, Adam’s services as a liaison became less important. Indeed, the spring of 1253, only several months prior to Robert’s death, saw Adam’s last serious participation in the management of the school. At this time a dispute had arisen over the inception of

¹¹² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 107.

¹¹³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 248-9.

¹¹⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 116.

¹¹⁵ See below, p. 41.

Thomas of York as a doctor of Theology. The faculty held that he was ineligible to do so, as he had not yet incepted in Arts, a discipline not open to Franciscan scholars. The Chancellor convened a committee to examine the question, and Adam was invited to partake in the proceedings. Adam was at first reluctant to do so, claiming that because he had not taught at the school in three years he did not feel qualified to render judgment.¹¹⁶ It may have been that he was nervous to engage in proceedings which did not have Grosseteste's approval. The bishop of Lincoln's prolonged illness had necessarily resulted in the expansion of the Chancellor's powers: it had been the Chancellor himself who summoned the meeting on his own initiative. In the end, though, his concern for his former pupil compelled him to attend. Thomas was one of Adam's favoured pupils, one whom he had specifically groomed for a University position. Adam therefore vigorously promoted his case. The result was that a special exemption was made, and Thomas was permitted to incept on the thirteenth of March. A statute was drawn up following the incident, which hereafter barred anyone from incepting in Theology without a degree in Arts. A special clause was included for talented students like Thomas, whereby exceptions could be made by a unanimous vote of the faculty. Adam for his part refused to attach his support to the statute or to sign it. He feared that the faculty would abuse the exemption clause so often as to render the statute useless.¹¹⁷ He may also have feared the degree of control in promoting mendicant doctors this would have placed in the hands of the secular masters.¹¹⁸ Up until this point relations between the secular and friar schools had been more or less amicable. Given the strained relations that existed at the school at Paris, though, it did not take much of an imagination to see the situation quickly

¹¹⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 348.

¹¹⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 338, 346-50.

¹¹⁸ Lawrence, "Letters," p. 236.

deteriorating. Adam probably feared that this was the first of many conflicts to come, and so moved to secure the position of the mendicant schools. Ultimately, however, his non-compliance came for naught, and the statute passed into effect.

Despite this final failure in his policy, Adam could take pride in his accomplishments at Oxford. If tensions had finally arisen between the Franciscan school there and the secular faculty, then these were merely to be considered the necessary growing pains of what had become a successful institution. His contribution to the growth of England's academic structure was likewise no mean feat. The well ordered and fast growth of qualified *lectors* was a strong testimony to Adam's administrative and academic savvy, and perhaps represented one of the most important accomplishments of his career.

Scholarly Tradition

Adam's contribution to the academic structure of the English province was one of his most enduring legacies. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of his place in the scholarly tradition at Oxford. Undoubtedly one of Adam's most important activities as Regent was the instruction of his pupils. These included such luminaries as Thomas of York, Eustace de Normanville, and no less a scholar than the celebrated Roger Bacon. However, the non-survival of any of his *questiones* or theological treatises makes it extremely difficult to assess his influence on successive generations of scholars.

Still, a close analysis of his letters and some of the later traditions about him sheds some light on his academic achievements. That these were no mean matter is confirmed by some of his most reputable contemporaries. Indeed, Salimbene informs us that he

enjoyed a European-wide reputation as a learned scholar.¹¹⁹ Roger Bacon ranked him alongside Robert Grosseteste as a man perfect in his understanding of ancient languages and philosophy.¹²⁰ He similarly praised him for his intimate knowledge of mathematics, by the power of which he had “learned to explain the causes of all things.”¹²¹ In the light of such praise we can perhaps begin to appreciate why Adam’s contemporaries granted him the honorific title “Doctor Illustris.”¹²²

The “ancient languages” which Bacon lauded Adam for knowing were Hebrew and Greek. Like his friend Robert Grosseteste, Adam considered the knowledge of these languages indispensable for the understanding of scripture.¹²³ Also like Robert, Adam utilized this superior understanding of scripture in his teaching. Both men had shunned the Parisian practice of teaching theology primarily from the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. As the ecclesiastical master of the Oxford schools, Grosseteste had even gone so far as to attempt to ban it.¹²⁴ Instead, they preferred to root their lectures in the firm grounds of biblical exegesis.¹²⁵ It was probably their resistance to the new methodology that drove Richard of Cornwall, later famous for his lectures on the *Sentences*, to the school at Paris.¹²⁶

Adam’s opposition to the *Sentences* was in part due to his distaste of the systematic theology they were designed to teach. A list of texts he was known to have possessed or read as found in his letters instead betrays an interest in a mystical theology more similar to that of Bonaventure than Aquinas. Chief amongst these were the works of

¹¹⁹ Salimbene, p. 225.

¹²⁰ Bacon, *Opera*, pp. 70, 88.

¹²¹ Bacon, *Opus Majus*, p. 126.

¹²² Brewer, preface to *Mon. Fran.*, p. c.

¹²³ Callus, p. 42.

¹²⁴ This attempt was, of course, ultimately unsuccessful. Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 237.

¹²⁵ Bacon, *Opera*, pp. 329, 428.

¹²⁶ Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 237.

the Pseudo-Dionysius. As we have seen, Adam was intimately familiar with the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus. We know from his letter to Thomas Gallus that he had both extensively read and commented upon its texts, and was in correspondence with one of its recognized masters.¹²⁷ In fact, it may have been his work on the *De coelesti hierarchia*, in which light and illumination play a central theme, which earned him his moniker of “Doctor Illustris.” Adam’s devotion to these works led him to emphasize a theology based on a spiritual ascent toward God through an understanding of scripture. More mundanely, his familiarity with the *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* also helped shape his worldview, and his conception of his role as a friar.¹²⁸ Another important mystical work which appears in Adam’s letters is the *De trinitate* of Richard of St. Victor.¹²⁹ Here, too, Adam found a work that espoused a “biblically based, liturgically sensitive, and theologically sophisticated spirituality.”¹³⁰ It was also probably the Victorine school of thought that most influenced Adam’s own views toward the role of the priesthood. Richard’s writings emphasized the responsibility of clerics as spiritual leaders, a point that would emerge again and again in Adam’s letters.¹³¹

Adam’s partiality to such texts placed him firmly in the neoplatonic tradition. This itself might go some way towards explaining the non-survival of his work. Adam had the dubious fortune of living during an important transitional period in the nature of western theology. It was during this time that the works of Aristotle began to attract serious academic attention and replace the interest in neoplatonism. Adam himself was

¹²⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 206.

¹²⁸ See below, p. 38.

¹²⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 358.

¹³⁰ Grover Zinn, Intro to *The twelve patriarchs ; The mystical ark ; Book three of The Trinity* by Richard of St. Victor, trans. by Grover Zinn, (New York: Paulis Press, 1979), p. 4.

¹³¹ Intro to Richard of St. Victor, ed. Grover Zinn, p. 9.

not unfamiliar with the Aristotelian corpus. His knowledge of Greek and his partnership with Grosseteste had brought him into close contact with the works of “The Philosopher.” In particular he had aided in a translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹³² Still, the systematic theology which had sprung up in response to Aristotle’s rediscovery did not appeal to his contemplative nature. An anecdote passed down to us by Roger Bacon nicely illustrates this point:

“Unde quando per tentationem et derisionem aliqui Minores praesumptuosi quaesiverunt a frate Adam, ‘Quid est intellectus agens?’ respondit, ‘Corvus Eliae;’ volens per hoc dicere quod fuit Deus vel angelus. Sed noluit exprimere, quia tentando et non propter sapientiam quaesiverunt.”¹³³

The ascension of Richard of Cornwall to the Oxford regency in 1256 heralded the end of Adam’s brand of theology Oxford. Richard brought with him the *Sentences* of the Paris schools. From here on out, the metaphysical speculation of Aristotelianism would dominate the study of Theology throughout the English province. Though he ultimately had little impact on the content of this new scholarly tradition, it, too, was in some part his legacy. It was Adam’s tireless efforts in the development of England’s academic infrastructure that allowed such learning to flourish in the first place.

¹³² Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 112, 114.

¹³³ Bacon, *Opera*, p. 75.

III. England's Servant

Service and Reform (1250 - 1259)

While at Oxford

Beginning near the end of his regency and running until his death, the period of 1250-9 saw Adam's greatest involvement in the events of his day. During this time he regularly acted as an agent or advisor to the most influential people in the realm. He provided spiritual direction and comfort for Simon de Montfort and his wife. The king sent him abroad on the business of the realm, and consulted him at home about important domestic affairs. The queen was greatly desirous that he should attend her at court. The papacy appointed him to sensitive commissions, while the Archbishop of Canterbury relied on his abilities in administering his diocese. He likewise remained the close friend and advisor of Robert Grosseteste and the provincial-minister William of Nottingham until their respective deaths. In the midst of this maelstrom of activity he even found time to pursue his own pastoral interests and aided in the reform of the Church.

Adam's plunge into public affairs began while he was still teaching at Oxford. If he had accepted the Regency there as a means of escaping the burden of secular work, then he had done so partly in vain. Throughout 1250 the queen vigorously pursued his presence at court. Though he often attempted to excuse himself from her service, he wasn't always able to overcome her persistence.¹³⁴ It was in part due to her influence, for example, that he was denied permission to accompany Robert Grosseteste to visit the papal court in the Summer of 1250, where the latter made his famous deposition against the abuses of the Roman curia.¹³⁵ Even as the queen clamoured for his attention, Adam

¹³⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 290, 291, 342.

¹³⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 307-9. Adam had great hopes for the bishop of Lincoln's enterprise, and saw him off at Dover. He afterwards closely followed the events at Lyons, but Grosseteste's efforts proved to be

was appointed by the Papacy to judge a number of sensitive cases, as he would be again in 1253 and 1256.¹³⁶ The rest Adam had so hoped for at Oxford was simply not to be. In 1249 His extra-curricular duties were so pressing that he was forced to delay the start of his winter lectures until after Christmas.¹³⁷ His letters from this point forward bear out his distress, as he regularly laments his lost peace of mind and degenerating health.

More so than by the queen or by the papacy, Adam's abilities were eagerly sought after at this time by Boniface of Savoy. The queen's uncle, Boniface had been elected as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1241 thanks to Henry III's patronage. Except for a few brief months in 1244 during which he visited his Episcopal seat to survey his financial situation, Boniface had spent the majority of the time since his election outside of England. It was not until late in 1249 that he finally came to be enthroned as Primate of the English Church, and to take up residence at Canterbury. Despite this long absenteeism, however, he seems to have possessed something of a genuine vocation, and his career was marked by his resolute efforts to secure ecclesiastical privileges against secular interference. He was a capable administrator, shoring up the vast debts incurred by his predecessor, and genuinely interested in the reform of the Church. It was these qualities which attracted the attention of men such as Robert Grosseteste and Adam himself, who hoped to find in him a like-minded reformist with a strong influence at court. Thus Adam wrote to him in 1249 on the occasion of his formal investment with the

fruitless. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 153-7; Paris, vol. v., pp. 97-8. See Joseph Goering, "Robert Grosseteste at the Papal Curia," in *A Distinct Voice*, ed. J. Brown and W.P. Stoneman, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 253-76 for more details of Grosseteste's audience with the papal curia.

¹³⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 336, 342. Unfortunately the natures of these disputes remain a mystery, save in one case. See below, p. 55.

¹³⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 342.

Archbishopric, impressing upon him the gravity of his office and offering “saving advice” about how it might best be executed.¹³⁸

Boniface must have appreciated Adam’s admonition, particularly the part about the need to secure “efficacious helpers, faithful counselors, and just judges,” as it soon became apparent that he desired to have Adam as part of his permanent staff.¹³⁹ For his part, Adam was by no means eager to enter the Archbishop’s service. While to do so would have provided an invaluable opportunity to further direct Boniface in the cause of reform, Adam balked at the prospect of regular work, which would have interrupted his chances for independent study. Had Adam desired such an assignment, we can be sure that he would have joined the *familia* of Robert Grosseteste well before Boniface’s ascension to the prelacy. It might also have been that Adam did not find the archbishop personally attractive, whom Matthew Paris had described as “lacking in learning, manners, and years.”¹⁴⁰ Whatever the reason, Adam went through great effort to avoid going to work for Boniface. Protesting his responsibilities at Oxford, Adam suggested to his provincial-minister that Brother Gregory Bosell be appointed to serve in his stead.¹⁴¹ This was despite the fact that Adam had already promised to send Bosell to counsel the Earl of Leicester and his wife in Gascony.¹⁴² That Boniface at least approved of this as a suitable arrangement is exhibited by the fact that Gregory was soon after appointed as a *predicator* in the diocese of Canterbury.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 78.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Paris, vol. iv., p. 104. Though we should always be wary of Paris’ potentially biting bias in his descriptions of individuals.

¹⁴¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 368-9.

¹⁴² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 292.

¹⁴³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 135.

That Adam would not formally enter his household, however, did not prevent the Archbishop from seeking him out for other tasks. Early in 1250 he induced Adam to write an address to the pope concerning Henry III's assumption of a crusading vow, a task which Adam apparently did not relish.¹⁴⁴ Later in the summer he convinced Adam to accompany him on his first set of metropolitan visitations. At the time Boniface's suffragans were embittered against him for the financial burdens he had imposed on them after his brief visit in 1244, and as a result the visitation turned into a fiasco. Adam wrote to Robert Grosseteste from Sutton in Kent in June of 1250, updating his friend about the status of the endeavor. Things had begun well in Canterbury and Rochester, but Boniface had afterwards encountered resistance from bishop Fulk of London, who had appealed to the Pope to block the Archbishop's visitation. Boniface countered by excommunicating Fulk and his supporters.¹⁴⁵ What happened next is uncertain. Matthew Paris reports of a brawl that broke out in which Boniface, wearing armour beneath his robes, personally manhandled the sub-prior of St. Bartholomew's.¹⁴⁶ Marsh, however, assures us as an eye witness that accounts of the incident had been greatly exaggerated, though he fails to present his own version of events. Whatever happened, Boniface soon after left to present his case against the London bishop and canons before the Roman curia, while Adam remained in England at the queen's pleasure.¹⁴⁷ In the light of such turbulent proceedings, we can perhaps appreciate why, when Boniface continued to request his presence

¹⁴⁴ Adam had attempted to excuse himself from this duty, as he explained in a letter to Simon de Montfort. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 275. He was obviously unsuccessful in this endeavor, as his address is extant. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 414-38.

¹⁴⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 162-3.

¹⁴⁶ Paris, vol. v., p. 122.

¹⁴⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 163.

throughout the year, Adam went so far as to ask that William of Nottingham acquire a papal indult excusing him.¹⁴⁸

Adam's relationship with the Archbishop of Canterbury highlights an interesting conflict in the friar's priorities. On the one hand he was greatly desirous of quiet and stability so that he might devote himself to contemplative study. On the other, he viewed it as his moral obligation to obey the orders of his rightful ecclesiastical superiors. Perhaps ironically, both of these impulses were born out of his commitment to the theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius. For Adam quiet contemplation was more than a pleasant diversion; it was a spiritual necessity. As much was clearly set out for him in the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the other mystic texts he ascribed to. Of equal authority however was the pseudo-Areopagite's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, which laid out his obligations to the Divinely ordained structure of the earthly Church. It was largely in terms of this latter doctrine that he saw his role as a friar. His typical Franciscan humility led Adam to see himself as the lowest servant in the Dionysian scheme, bound to conform to the orders of his superiors. It was only in this way, with the minor brethren acting as the willing tools of the episcopate, that order and justice could be brought to the beleaguered Church and reform properly affected. Unfortunately for Adam, he was never able to strike a balance between these two demands. He would therefore spend the rest of his days bemoaning his lack of physical and mental tranquility while yet dragging his feet in the discharge of his duties.

One service at least that Adam was enthusiastic about was his ministering to the Montfort family. Between the earl of Leicester and his wife we have extant some twenty letters from Adam. This is the third largest group of his surviving collection, trailing

¹⁴⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 312-14.

behind only William of Nottingham and Robert Grosseteste in volume. Many of these letters deal with Simon de Montfort's governorship of Gascony, which he held from May of 1248 to November of 1252. This was an important formative period for the earl, both in his political and spiritual growth and in his relationship with the crown.¹⁴⁹ During this time Adam was arguably the Montforts' most important contact in England. His involvement with Henry's court allowed him to pass along news of the latest and most important developments there, and even on occasion to intercede favourably on the earl's behalf.¹⁵⁰ Adam was also an important facilitator of the Montforts' more logistical needs. Just prior to their departure the Earl and Countess had met with Adam concerning the education of their eldest son, Henry. They agreed that it would be best to commit the boy into the care of Robert Grosseteste, to whom Adam soon after wrote seeking his approval.¹⁵¹ They similarly looked to Marsh to provide for their spiritual well-being. Several of his letters, particularly those to the Countess, concern themselves with the difficulty of procuring a reliable preacher and confessor for them.¹⁵² Initially they had desired that Marsh himself should accompany them to Gascony, but the beleaguered Franciscan was unable to do so on account of his duties in England.¹⁵³ Instead he promised to send along Gregory of Bosell, though the latter's substitution for Adam in the Archbishop of Canterbury's service necessitated a delay in his departure.¹⁵⁴ In the interim Adam provided spiritual advice through his correspondence, urging the Earl to

¹⁴⁹ The personal and fiscal slights Montfort experienced at Henry's hands over the Gascony affair seriously damaged their relationship, and undoubtedly set Simon on the road to the Reformist movement of 1258-65.

¹⁵⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 268, 270-6.

¹⁵¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 110.

¹⁵² Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 292, 296.

¹⁵³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 310.

¹⁵⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 292.

patience and moderation in his task, and reminding the countess of her duty to support her husband.¹⁵⁵

We cannot underestimate Adam's interest in the affairs of the earl of Leicester and his wife. As C.H. Lawrence puts it, Adam found in Simon a sterling example of "the new type of devout layman of the thirteenth century, whose religious aspirations had been kindled by the evangelical mission of the Mendicants."¹⁵⁶ Although Montfort's acquisitive and severe nature sometimes put him in conflict with the finer points of Christian morality, he was nonetheless a serious and receptive charge.¹⁵⁷ Moreover he was literate, and Adam was able to direct him to seek guidance in Holy Scripture. Thus in regard to Simon's later difficulties with the king and nobles of Gascony Adam could advise him to "study diligently and repeatedly chapters twenty-nine, thirty, and thirty-one of the Book of Job" and so find inspiration for patience.¹⁵⁸ Whenever Adam felt that Montfort was being too harsh he was just as quick with a rebuke, such as when he disapproved of the strict financial exactions the earl was visiting on his serfs to finance his residence in Gascony.¹⁵⁹ Adam had high hopes that Simon could be tempered into an exemplar of the ideal lay noble, one devoted to the Christian moral life and Church while yet retaining the secular power necessary to rule his fellow men with justice. In this we can see some moderate success on the part of Adam, as Montfort's later leadership of the baronial reform movement of 1258-65 would be marked by special considerations of conscience and morality. In the end, however, Adam was not able to completely stamp

¹⁵⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 261, 264, 266-9, 297-9.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence, into. to *Letters*, p. xxxix.

¹⁵⁷ See Maddicott, pp. 77-105 for a detailed and perceptive look at Simon's spiritual life.

¹⁵⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 266-7.

¹⁵⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 276.

out the overbearing self-interest that marked so much of Montfort's career, and he was forced to keep a close eye and tight reign on his spiritual ward throughout his life.

Pastor and Reformer

In contrast to the whirlwind of activity he undertook in 1250, Adam seems to have spent a significant portion of 1251 in relative peace. This was primarily due to the fact that the two parties who had traditionally monopolized his time, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the royal family, had ceased to rely on his service. As we have seen Boniface had left for the continent in the summer of 1250, and, except for a brief visit in 1251, was not to return again until November of 1252. For the royal family's part it would seem that Adam had earned the king's odium, and had been temporarily banished from court. This was due to a sermon he had preached in the presence of the king in October of 1250, the subject matter of which is sadly lost to us.¹⁶⁰ Given Adam's regular laments about the state of the English church, we can hazard with some confidence that he had taken the opportunity to expound upon the need for ecclesiastical reform against secular interference.

Whatever the reason for his exile, Adam took the opportunity to catch up on some much needed rest. In the summer of that year he asked to be excused from accompanying Robert Grosseteste on a preaching mission in the north, a request which seems to have been granted. His intention in doing so was to withdraw himself to "some convenient place of quiet" in order to meditate on his spiritual well-being and to avoid some

¹⁶⁰ Adam wrote to Simon de Montfort soon after the event, relating the news of his expulsion. It is possible that he regretted his rash action: amongst other things, Marsh here warns the earl about the importance of guarding one's tongue. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 270-6.

unspecified turbulence.¹⁶¹ This was probably a reference to the row that had broken out at Oxford over the release of the clerks in the king's custody. Adam therefore spent at least some part of the middle of the year withdrawn from his regular business, and perhaps staying at one of Grosseteste's residences.¹⁶²

During this respite Adam devoted his energies toward pastoral concerns. Chief amongst his interests at this time was the well-being of two women's convents: Grace Dieu in Belton, Leicestershire, and Godstow Abbey, just a few miles away from Oxford. Both were contained within the Lincoln diocese, and so Adam could expect to solicit Robert Grosseteste for their aid; the house at Belton had itself been founded just ten years ago with Robert's help and so was his special responsibility; a point Adam was quick to remind him of.¹⁶³ Throughout the year Adam sent several letters to the Lincoln bishop on behalf of one or both houses, asking that Grosseteste take special care in ensuring their spiritual, academic, and physical well-being.¹⁶⁴ Some of these were simple requests to allow the admission of a particular woman to the life, while another asks that he make provisions for a visitation to the house at Godstow.¹⁶⁵ Adam would maintain his patronage over these houses for the rest of his career, even without Grosseteste's help; later in 1253 when the bishop's health had presumably begun to deteriorate (he died in

¹⁶¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 121.

¹⁶² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 121. Adam's letter refers to Robert's eventual return '*ibidem*,' which seemingly refers to the place of quiet retreat he had in mind. Another possibility is Reading; in an undateable letter to the Oxford *custos* John of Stanford, Adam suggests the he would like to spend some quiet time there. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 389-90.

¹⁶³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 115.

¹⁶⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 108, 115, 131.

¹⁶⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 98, 122, 116.

October of that year), Adam wrote instead to the Archdeacon of Leicester and his brother Robert de Marisco, the Archdeacon of Oxford, in his place.¹⁶⁶

Adam's interest in these houses is not entirely clear. He did not, for example, have any relatives at either house, nor was he particularly close to any of their residents. Rather it seems that Godstow's proximity to Oxford and Belton's close association with Robert Grosseteste were reason enough for his concern. If we must ask why he was interested in women's communities instead of men's, then it would be good for us to note that Adam seemed to have a special vocation for the spiritual care of women. Besides advising the queen and the countess of Leicester in their religious lives, he was known to regularly champion the causes of poor widows and other oppressed women.¹⁶⁷

Whatever the reason, Adam tirelessly sought to ensure the spiritual well being of the Godstow and Belton nunneries. To that effect he was concerned that the sisters discharged their religious duties properly. These included a chaste observance of the spiritual life, as well as the more practical administration of their property. Thus in the same short letter Adam exhorted the Abbess of Godstow not only to strictly rule her nuns for their salvation, but also to discharge a debt due to a certain William of Cirencester.¹⁶⁸ Adam's zeal for reform also led him to place under special scrutiny an unnamed priest at Bloxham, who had been appointed by the Abbess of Godstow for the living there.¹⁶⁹ Like

¹⁶⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 197, 198. On one occasion he is known to have interceded directly on the behalf of the Godstow house, when he requested that the Abbot of Dorchester, who had won a legal dispute against the abbess, postpone the execution of some censure against her. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 205, 239, 260, 398. Unfortunately the nature of these women's needs is not made clear, Adam's aid taking the form of an exhortation that the recipient of his letter hear out her request and do his best to accommodate it.

¹⁶⁸ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 286-7. In the Vitellius MS this letter is followed by a debate poem between the body and soul, written in Old French and in a hand different from but contemporary with the copyist of the letter. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 587.

¹⁶⁹ The parish church at Bloxham had previously been the property of Westminster Abbey, but had been granted to Godstow by Henry II.

many of his Franciscan brethren, Adam was critical of what he felt were the shortcomings of the secular clergy: a lack of learning, vocation, and moral continence. These prejudices were resoundingly confirmed in the person of this Bloxham vicar, who as Adam discovered had not only lied about the circumstances of his ordination, but who also had sired two children on a kept concubine.¹⁷⁰ He was accordingly relentless in seeking the dismissal of this unworthy candidate, writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury and garnering the written support of learned men such as Thomas of York in the matter.¹⁷¹

Though exceptional in the degree of scrutiny he came under the Bloxham vicar was not the only priest who so received Adam's attention. On another occasion he wrote to bishop Fulk of London, concerning a certain Geoffrey Gross. Though Adam confessed that this Geoffrey was not himself an evil man, he nonetheless felt that he was not fit for the rigorous duties of overseeing God's flock at the Church of Wikenden.¹⁷² Preceding this evaluation was a lengthy list of those qualities which a suitable candidate should instead possess. Adam was accustomed to sending such lengthy missives to recent appointees to pastoral offices, informing them of the gravity of their duties and the consequences of their failure to discharge them properly.¹⁷³ Even the Archbishop of Canterbury was no exception to this policy.¹⁷⁴ In these Adam preferred to rely on Scripture in his descriptions of good and bad pastors. In particular he drew on the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Thus in looking for a good pastor one should "take you wise and understanding men, such whose conversation is approved among your tribes, and I

¹⁷⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 108, 116.

¹⁷¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 114-5.

¹⁷² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 184.

¹⁷³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 77-82, 190-4, 226-9, 241, 254.

¹⁷⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 72-82. See above, p. 36.

will appoint them rulers over you.”¹⁷⁵ In contrast the pastor ignorant of his duties was compared to a “dumb dog, unable to bark.”¹⁷⁶

Adam’s severity in these cases was due to his incredibly low opinion of the secular clergy. His sentiments on the priestly class are perhaps best summed up in a statement he made to Gregory de Bosellis: “while the world is full of priests, scarcely anyone can be found who is at all suitable for priestly office.”¹⁷⁷ Such an assessment was born from the *laissez-faire* attitude which then prevailed concerning the pastoral care of souls. To abandon one’s flock either through absenteeism, pluralism, or by hiring or appointing an incompetent vicar was tantamount to leaving these poor parishioners for dead. For Adam, the negligent pastor was essentially a murderer of souls, a crime for which he would be forced to answer before the dread judgment seat of the Lord.¹⁷⁸

In espousing such views Adam was merely concurring with the prevalent views of his Order. Like many of his contemporaries, Adam saw it as the role of the minor brethren to correct the ills of the secular clergy and help lead Christianity into a new golden age of spirituality.¹⁷⁹ In this, he seemed to be promoting the ideas of Joachim Fiore. Indeed, Adam’s letters suggest that he was familiar with the Joachite corpus. In one of his letters to Robert Grosseteste, Adam had seen fit to enclose a *libellus* of some of Joachim’s writings.¹⁸⁰ Salimbene informs us that Adam was also a close friend and correspondent of Hugh of Digne, the famous Joachite scholar.¹⁸¹ Nor had Joachim’s ideas

¹⁷⁵ Deut. 1:13; Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 168.

¹⁷⁶ Isa. 56:10; Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 182.

¹⁷⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 406-7.

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence, “Letters,” p. 230.

¹⁷⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 408.

¹⁸⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 146-7.

¹⁸¹ Salimbene, p. 225.

by this time been condemned as heretical, and so Adam would have been safe to speculate on their veracity. Was he then himself a Joachite?

The answer seems to be no. If Adam had expressed disgust for the clergy or perhaps even any millenarian assumptions along the lines of Joachim's theology, then it should perhaps be remembered that such views were commonplace during the middle ages and not limited to any one doctrine.¹⁸² In the letter Adam sent to Grosseteste along with the Joachite *libellus* there is no indication that he is promoting the views contained therein. In fact, he instead asks Robert to report to him his opinion of the work without suggesting his own views either way. Moreover while Joachim's vision of a Church purged of abuses would have been appealing to a reformer of Adam's ardour, his scheme of a Church likewise purged of its hierarchy would not have sat well with Adam's Dionysian beliefs. Adam at best probably appreciated the mystical nature of Joachim's theology but did not strictly subscribe to the abbot's worldview.

Return to Service

The year 1252 saw Adam's return to public life, where he would more or less stay until his death seven years later. During this period he would again resume his regular services to Boniface of Savoy, the royal family, the Montforts, and the Papacy. Though some of these duties were doubtless some of the most important of his career – his solicitation of support for Simon de Montfort during the earl's famous trial, for example, or his involvement in peace negotiations with France – he never quite able to match the level of energy that had characterized his career even just two years ago. As we have seen, he became less involved with the affairs at Oxford. He likewise excused himself

¹⁸² Lawrence, "Letters," p.230.

early from serving on a visitation with Boniface of Savoy. Finally, he remained totally uninvolved in the most important event in the nation's recent history, the imposition of the Provisions of Oxford on the king in 1258. Part of this to be sure, was the result of his age, and his letters now more than ever reflect the adverse effect his work was having on his physical health. Mostly, however, he seems to have been affected by a certain sense of world-weariness. The years 1253 and 1254 would see him deprived of two of his closest friends, Robert Grosseteste and William of Nottingham. Furthermore, the deteriorating state of English politics must have caused him the same anxiety it did countless others of the period. In response he began a slow withdrawal from the world. Still, if he had abandoned the spotlight he never quite left the stage, and he remained partially involved in events almost right up to his end.

Adam's return to court life in 1252 was primarily due to the influence of the queen. Having spent Christmas peacefully in Oxford, the following February he was summoned to Reading at Eleanor's "vehement insistence."¹⁸³ There he was expected to partake in important discussions concerning the business of the king and his heirs.¹⁸⁴ It is likely that these centered on the status of Gascony. The queen was anxious that the province be preserved for her son Edward, its nominal lord, and the deteriorating situation there must have alarmed her. In 1248 Simon de Montfort had accepted a seven-year contract to govern the region and to bring Henry's rebellious Gascon vassals to order. To that end he had been granted wide powers of authority, as well as free use of the duchy's revenues during his tenure. By 1252 he had already made good progress on his promise to subdue the region, though by means which displeased Henry. Where the

¹⁸³ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 152.

king might have hoped for a more diplomatic approach, Simon had instead (and perhaps more realistically) engaged in a vigorous military campaign, imprisoning those whom he felt to be the king's enemies and quashing local aristocratic privileges. This greatly embittered the Gascon nobles, who complained directly to the king about the harshness of Montfort's rule. In response Henry launched an inquiry into Montfort's government and summoned representatives from Gascony to come to London to state their case against the earl. He likewise undertook the pardoning and release of a number of nobles whom Montfort had imprisoned, including the famous robber baron Gaston de Béarn. Montfort in turn viewed Henry's actions as a gross betrayal, and as an infringement on the terms of his contract. He felt that the king's reception and pardoning of the Gascon nobles had seriously undermined his progress and authority. To make matters worse, Montfort's campaign costs had far outstripped the revenues he had been granted from the duchy, and he had been forced to draw extensively on his own financial resources. Thus disaffected he had returned to England early in the year to meet his accusers and air his own grievances against the king.¹⁸⁵

It was to counter this highly volatile situation that the queen summoned Adam. She herself had supported Montfort in the matter, and likely hoped that Adam would be able to facilitate some reconciliation between the king and the earl. After spending a few days with the royal family in Reading Adam transferred himself to Odiham. This was a favoured residence of Eleanor de Montfort and here he met with the earl and countess. From there he returned to Reading, after which he traveled to a Benedictine monastery at Bromhall to again meet with the Montforts.¹⁸⁶ Despite so much back and forth the

¹⁸⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 264.

¹⁸⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 152.

negotiations did not seem to go well. Adam wrote to Robert Grosseteste concerning the affair, describing himself as being physically exhausted and full of such mental anxiety that he was “weary of life.”¹⁸⁷

Adam’s failure to bring about a settlement would be borne out by events later in the year. In May he was present at court when the king summoned the earl to stand trial and account for his actions in Gascony. Like the queen Adam sided with Montfort against his accusers, and during the proceedings he played an important role in winning the support of the prelacy and great magnates for Simon’s cause.¹⁸⁸ It was in light of this large backing that Henry was eventually forced to rule in the Earl’s favour.¹⁸⁹ Soon afterwards, however, he would characteristically vacillate on his decision and again begin to abuse the earl, much to the embarrassment of the assembled nobles.¹⁹⁰ Adam’s description of the events he later wrote to Grosseteste, which closely resembles that of Matthew Paris, is a telling indication of how many in the kingdom must have felt at the time. In it the king comes off as fickle, petty, and ill-advised, while Montfort emerges as composed, capable, and even righteous. In the end settlement of the Gascony question was merely postponed, and Adam accompanied the earl as far as Dover before seeing him off to France once again.¹⁹¹

Early in 1253, Boniface of Savoy was again seeking to recruit Adam into his service. Late in the previous year the archbishop had come into conflict with Aymer de

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ These included men such as the bishop of Worcester, Peter of Savoy, and the king’s brother, the earl of Cornwall. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 122-3.

¹⁸⁹ Maddicott p. 118.

¹⁹⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 127.

¹⁹¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 129. Henry had made plans to relieve Montfort either with his own presence or that of the Lord Edward. Montfort continued to press the provisions of the contract made in 1248, however, and ultimately Henry was forced to buy him out with a generous settlement. Maddicott, p. 119.

Lusignan over the patronage of St. Thomas Hospital in Southwark.¹⁹² Aymer had responded by sending men to ransack Boniface's manor of Lambeth, where they manhandled and kidnapped one of his officials, Eustace de Lynn. Boniface in turn, understandably upset, excommunicated the involved parties, including Aymer.¹⁹³ Early in January of 1253 Boniface sent a letter to Adam detailing these events, and ordering him and Grosseteste to attend a convocation in London on the thirteenth of January for the settling of the dispute.¹⁹⁴ Adam was characteristically distressed at this request. The Archbishop had likewise asked for his aid in a forthcoming visitation, and he justly feared that if he attended the meeting in London he would be compelled to participate in the visitation as well. Worried that this might mean the end to any chance for quiet study in the future, he wrote the Oxford *custos*, John of Stanford, requesting his advice.¹⁹⁵ Though John's response is not extant he must encouraged Adam to attend, for in the end he did so. There he worked successfully with Grosseteste to affect a reconciliation between the Archbishop and bishop-elect.¹⁹⁶

After the convocation Adam remained in London to meet with the Archbishop and several of his close associates.¹⁹⁷ Adam responded to their insistence that he join the Archbishop's *familia* with a seven-point list of reasons why he was unsuited to do so.

Amongst these included his physical infirmity, an overly modest evaluation of his own

¹⁹² Aymer was the bishop-elect of Winchester and one of Henry III's highly unpopular uterine brothers. The Lusignan faction's unchecked ascendancy and arrogance as Henry's favourites was a point of serious contention in the realm, and played a major role in prompting the reform movement of 1258. As a Savoyard, the court faction made up of the queen's relatives and in opposition to the Lusignans, Boniface had particular reason to dislike Aymer.

¹⁹³ Clive H. Knowles, "Savoy, Boniface of (1206/7–1270)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/2844>, accessed 10 April 2008]; Paris, vol. v., pp. 348-54.

¹⁹⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 166.

¹⁹⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 343-5.

¹⁹⁶ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 166; Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 337; Knowles, "Savoy, Boniface."

¹⁹⁷ These included the bishop of Hereford, the archdeacon of Canterbury, and Hugh Mortimer. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 334.

abilities, and his commitment to other work judging cases for the pope.¹⁹⁸ Though Boniface went so far as to induce the queen to petition Adam on his behalf, the aged friar remained determined to stay out of the Archbishop's permanent service. Instead a compromise was made, and he agreed to at least partake in the work of visitation after the Lenten season. This was to give him time to visit the Montforts in France, who were at this time residing in Boulogne.¹⁹⁹ It is not clear, though, if he was ever able to do so. In the same letter in which he explains to William of Nottingham his reasons for declining Boniface's employment, he likewise complains to that he had not yet received permission to leave England.²⁰⁰ There is also no indication in any of Adam's letters to Grosseteste that he was visiting with the Montforts at this time, though he would have been eager to pass along news of their mutual friends. At the time, though, Adam remained hopeful, and accordingly sent a letter to the countess of Leicester, promising to attend her with all haste if it was at all possible.²⁰¹

Adam may have instead been retained in England to deal with business at Oxford, for it is about this time that he appeared there to argue for Thomas of York's inception. After this his visitation work with Boniface was comparatively uneventful. Popular discontent with the Archbishop's financial policies had died down, and the program went off without any noteworthy incidents. In late July he requested and received permission to leave Boniface's service in London, securing from the house there brothers Robert de Rostun and a G. de Ver as substitutes for the Archbishop.²⁰² He then removed himself to

¹⁹⁸ Amongst these cases included disputes between the king and the bishop of Menevia, and between one of these two ('eundem dominum') and the Abbott of Gloucester. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 334-6.

¹⁹⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 339.

²⁰⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 338.

²⁰¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 339.

²⁰² Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 328.

Buckden, the favoured residence of Robert Grosseteste, to visit with the bishop who was now seriously ill.²⁰³ He was still there at least through the sixth of August, when he wrote to the provincial-minister suggesting that Gregory of Bosell again return to Boniface's service, and so relieve Robert de Rostun.²⁰⁴

Adam was not in attendance at Buckden on October ninth, when Grosseteste died.²⁰⁵ After attending his funeral, at which Boniface of Savoy gave the oration, he accompanied the Archbishop to London to help make arrangements for the administration of the diocese of Lincoln *sede vacante*.²⁰⁶ He spent the remainder of the year with Boniface, spending Christmas with him in Kent at the Archbishop's request.²⁰⁷ Grosseteste's death left Adam understandably heart-broken. Though his letters are devoid of the heart-felt lamentations we might have expected his close friend's demise to engender, a telling exchange between Adam and Richard of Gravesend bears out Adam's feelings.

Richard had likewise been an intimate friend and officer to Grosseteste, who had previously been the Archdeacon of Oxford. After Grosseteste's death he had been promoted to the Dean of Lincoln Cathedral, filling in the gap left by Henry of Lexington, who had been elected bishop. Early in 1254 he wrote Adam requesting some unknown translation of Grosseteste's.²⁰⁸ In this letter he had included the bit of news that the new bishop had requested he accept the prebend of Thame, and that he was well disposed to

²⁰³ Paris, vol. v., pp. 400-2

²⁰⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 329.

²⁰⁵ Paris, vol. v., p. 407.

²⁰⁶ In particular he helped mediate a dispute between the Archbishop and the Canon of Lincoln Cathedral. Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 324.

²⁰⁷ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 325.

²⁰⁸ Grosseteste had bequeathed his library to the Oxford Franciscans, as Trivet tells us, out of his love for Adam. Trivet, p. 243.

do so as the living included a perpetual vicar, “who would for the most part exonerate me from the cure of souls.”²⁰⁹

Adam responded with a long, harsh rebuke, reminding Richard of his accountability before the dread judgment seat of Christ, and exhorting him “to strive to banish the infernal darkness that blinds you.”²¹⁰ He even goes so far as to hint that the new bishop’s scheme of appointments lacks the noble pastoral concerns of Grosseteste’s former program, and was instead subject to common abuse.²¹¹ As Lawrence has pointed out, there is a hint of irony in this letter, as Gravesend himself was a well-respected and zealous reformer with whom Adam himself was on intimate terms.²¹² The severity of Adam’s admonition probably had as much to do with his sense that Richard had in some way betrayed the memory of their former friend as it did his distaste with the Dean’s actions. He must have felt similarly about Henry of Lexington, Grosseteste’s replacement and by all accounts a mediocre bishop, for from this point forward he no longer appears involved with the affairs of the diocese of Lincoln.

1254 saw the lost of another valuable friend and colleague of Adam, this time the provincial-minister William of Nottingham. For reasons unclear, at the General Chapter held at Metz that year he was discharged from his duties as provincial-minister.²¹³ The English brethren upon hearing this immediately convened a provincial-chapter at which they re-elected William as their minister.²¹⁴ Adam was commissioned by the chapter to write to John of Parma, the minister-general of the Order, informing him of their decision

²⁰⁹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 186.

²¹⁰ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 185-90.

²¹¹ Marsh, *Epistolae*, p. 187.

²¹² Lawrence, intro. to *Letters*, p. xxviii.

²¹³ Eccleston, p. 33.

²¹⁴ Eccleston, p. 70.

and requesting the return of William.²¹⁵ Though John held the English friars in the highest respect, he informed them that this was not permissible and that they must instead elect a new candidate.²¹⁶ Even if the Minister-General had been more accommodating, the English brothers' efforts would have come for naught; William had died heroically caring for the sick in Genoa before he was ever "re-elected."²¹⁷ Instead the minister-general left the power of confirming the new English minister-elect in the hands of brothers John of Kethne, John of Stamford, and Adam himself.²¹⁸

The deaths of two of Adam's closest friends and associates in such quick succession must have been a hard blow for him. For the historian interested in his activities, however, they present an altogether different problem. It was to these two men, Robert as his close friend and advisor, and William as his superior within the Franciscan Order, that Marsh was accustomed to regularly reporting his activities. Grosseteste was a singular and irreplaceable entity in Adam's life, and so we should not be surprised that he did not find someone similar to so confide to after his death. Neither would it seem, if his extant letter-collection is any indication, that he developed a close relationship with the new provincial-minister Peter of Tewkesbury, for whom no correspondence survives. Save for a late admonition concerning the dress and behavior of the countess of Leicester, there similarly is no further material for the Montfort family.²¹⁹ We must then rely primarily on the spotty evidence offered by chronicles and administrative documents to construct the final years of Adam's life.

²¹⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 302-3.

²¹⁶ He had earlier praised the English over all other provinces as best embodying the spirit of the Franciscan rule. Eccleston, pp. 68, 70.

²¹⁷ Eccleston, p. 71.

²¹⁸ Peter of Tewkesbury was the popular choice to replace William. *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ In this letter Marsh begs her forgiveness for his direct manner, as he feels he shall not live long enough to see her in person again. Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 294-6.

Adam's doings for the rest of 1254 and the whole of 1255 must remain a mystery to us, for he next appears with any chronological certainty in the summer of 1256. On June 22 he was appointed by Pope Alexander IV to investigate the life and miracles of Richard de Wyke, the recently deceased bishop of Chichester.²²⁰ Likewise in that year the pope appointed him to serve as judge-delegate in a dispute between the bishop-elect of Winchester, Aymer de Lusignan, and the monks of St. Swithun's. Amongst other grievances the monks were protesting Aymer's attempts to replace their officers with his own appointees, and to force them to render accounts to the Episcopal exchequer. The king himself was present at the proceedings, and both a report of the event in the Patent Rolls and the papal commission empowering Adam as arbiter are extant.²²¹ Ultimately Aymer's continued abuse of his office would allow Adam to impose only a brief peace on the matter.²²²

In 1257 the king was eager to secure Adam's loyalty, and so attempted to promote him to the bishopric of Ely.²²³ Earlier he had intended the see for his chancellor, Henry of Wingham, but the monks there had defied his wishes by electing one of their own.²²⁴ Though Wingham was apparently willing to stand aside, Henry was insistent on asserting what he felt was his prerogative. He therefore challenged the election on the grounds that the bishop-elect was unsuitable for office, claiming he was "only a simple monk,

²²⁰ Lawrence, intro. to *Letters*, p. xlii.

²²¹ *Patent Rolls of Henry III*, ed. Henry Lyte and J.G. Black (London, 1906), vol. iv., p. 522; *Mon. Fran.*, p. 609.

²²² Nicholas Vincent, "Lusignan, Aymer de (c.1228–1260)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.wm.edu/view/article/941>, accessed 10 April 2008]

²²³ Henry's effort to secure the Ely bishopric for Adam is related by Matthew Paris in his *Chronica Maior*, Paris, vol. v., pp. 619-20, 635-6.

²²⁴ This was Hugh de Balsham, who had previously been a sub-prior.

inexperienced in worldly matters, and totally incompetent to rule.”²²⁵ It was partly in this vein of attack that Henry instead promoted Adam for the bishopric. Adam was a scholar with a continental reputation, and was well-regarded by the papacy for his experience and capabilities. He therefore presented a striking contrast to the king’s evaluation of the bishop-elect, and would have had a good chance of winning Alexander IV’s approval. More than this, though, Henry was simply interested in winning Adam’s support for himself. By 1257, Henry’s government had earned the near universal disapproval of the realm. His wild promotion of the unpopular Lusignan faction was a point of contention for many at court. Worse, his commitment to the pope’s Sicilian scheme had put him deep into debt, and the financial policies he had adopted to combat the problem were causing serious discontent amongst the barons and the prelacy.²²⁶ Henry was therefore eager to gain the loyalty and services of a man like Marsh, who had a strong influence with reformist leaders such as Walter de Cantilupe and Peter of Savoy.²²⁷ In the end, however, Henry’s scheme came for naught. Later that year the Pope upheld the rightful election of the Ely monks. This probably came as something of a relief to Adam who, despite what Matthew Paris claimed, would not have enjoyed such a preferment anyway.²²⁸ By this time he was seriously advanced in years, and his primary wish was for peace and quiet, not the advancement of his career.

²²⁵ Paris, vol. v., p. 635

²²⁶ Henry had without consultation promised extensive military and financial support to Alexander IV’s ill-conceived plan to oust the Hohenstaufen dynasty out of Sicily. In exchange he could expect to see his second son, Edmund, crowned as king there. The barons, who thought little of the plan, refused to vote Henry the money he needed, while the English Church stalwartly resisted his efforts to collect a Crusading tenth for the plan. See Treharne pp. 47-63 for more details.

²²⁷ The Bishop of Worcester and the queen’s uncle, respectively. Simon de Montfort would not emerge as a leader of the reformist movement until 1258, though Henry undoubtedly would have enjoyed Adam’s influence with the popular and capable earl of Leicester at any time.

²²⁸ Paris, vol. v., p. 620

Henry's high opinion of Adam's service was further exhibited in the summer, when he appointed him as part of a three-man commission to treat with the king of France. Along with Walter de Cantilupe and Hugh Bigod, and relying on the advice of Simon de Montfort, he was expected to discuss the terms of a forthcoming peace treaty between England and France.²²⁹ It was for the completion of this business that he departed from Dover in December of 1257, later returning in late February of the next year.²³⁰ Though Montfort's personal grievances with the king would later complicate the proceedings late in 1258, there is every indication that these early efforts met with considerable success.²³¹ Perhaps if he had continued to be involved in negotiations he might have restrained his avaricious charge, and things would have gone smoother. As it was, though, Adam was getting old, and his journey into France represented the last of his public acts.

Unfortunately, Adam does not appear to have attended the famous "Mad Parliament" of 1258. Held at Oxford, it was here that the collective baronage finally reached their breaking point concerning Henry's gross misgovernment. Having come armed to this parliament on the pretext of a Welsh campaign, they instead rose against the king.²³² Led by Simon de Montfort, they forced Henry to sign the so-called "Provisions of Oxford," effectively leaving control of the kingdom in the hands of the barons. Adam's opinion of these events don't survive anywhere in his letters. It is difficult to say how he might have felt in the absence of his own words. On the one hand he must have

²²⁹ *Patent Rolls*, vol. iv., p. 594.

²³⁰ *Liberate Rolls*, vol. iv., p. 416. *Calendar of the Close Rolls of Henry III*, (London, 1902), vol. x., p 197.

²³¹ Part of the agreement reached required that Eleanor, the king's sister and Simon's wife, should renounce all claims to Normandy. Simon was able to use this crucial point as a lever against Henry for the settlement of personal debts. See Maddicott, pp. 155-6.

²³² See Treharne, pp. 62-81 for more details about the Oxford Parliament.

had great hope for the endeavor, as the involvement of men such as his friends Simon de Montfort and Walter de Cantilupe boded well for the fate of the English Church. On the other, the novelty of the Baronial government which the Provisions established must have seemed like a gross inversion of the natural order to Adam's Dionysian sensibilities. We know he stayed in regular contact with Montfort throughout this period, as in 1259 he appears as a designated advisor in Simon's will.²³³ During this time he must have continued to keep close watch over Simon's behavior. It is telling that Simon only managed to keep his personal interests from interfering with the new government while Adam was still alive. In 1260 only a few months after the friar's death, Simon more or less abandoned the reformist program to pursue his prospects in France. Without his support the movement began its slow slide toward disarray and the violence of 1264-5. If Adam had been available to keep his friend and charge on task and to remind him of his responsibilities, perhaps such violence could have been avoided.

Instead Adam spent his final year in the relative quiet he had always desired. He took advantage of this lull before his death to begin a correspondence with Bonaventure, the recently elected Minister-General of the Order. In one of his letters he promises to write for the general a description of the practices of the English Franciscans, though it is uncertain if he ever carried this out.²³⁴ These letters also bear out the deteriorating health of their author.²³⁵ His last appearance is in the will of Simon de Montfort, written in 1259, wherein the earl commanded his wife and son as executors to rely on Adam's counsel in the event of his death. Not surprisingly, though, Montfort did not predecease his friend and mentor, who died under unknown circumstances on the eighteenth of

²³³ Maddicott, p. 177.

²³⁴ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 304-5.

²³⁵ Marsh, *Epistolae*, pp. 304-5. 306-7.

November, 1259.²³⁶ He was afterwards buried next to his closest friend in life, Robert Grosseteste, at Lincoln Cathedral.²³⁷

The final phase of Adam's life was marked by the deterioration of not only his own mental and physical health, but also that of the realm at large. The deaths of both his closest friend and his superior must have left him feeling adrift and anxious in what was fast becoming an uncertain world. The great men of his day continued to rely upon his not inconsiderable services, but his heart simply was not in it, instead passively accepting what came his way. Near the end his betters seem to have caught on and decided to leave him in peace. It is telling that neither side of the reform movement, whether the barons or the royalists, called upon him to serve as a negotiator for their interests, though he was imminently situated to serve either side. His appearance in the earl of Leicester's will shows that he was still involved in the personal lives of the Montforts, but he does not appear to have broken with the royal family, either. Instead he merely settled into the sort of quiet retirement he had always desired. One hopes in the brief time between this retirement and his death that he was able to find the peace of mind he longed for. His distinguished service to the province and realm of England seems to have earned him that much, at least.

²³⁶ As found in the necrology of the Salisbury Franciscans. Lawrence, intro. to *Letters*, p. xvii (n. 24).

²³⁷ Salimbene, p. 225.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Adam Marsh

The year after his death, the memory of Adam Marsh was honored at the 1260 General Chapter of Narbonne. Along with two other Franciscans and a Dominican, the *Officium Defunctorum* was ordered to be celebrated throughout the Order on his behalf. This was done “propter suorum exigenciam meritorum,” here referring to Adam’s tireless service to the English Province and for the eminence of his scholarship.²³⁸ Later writers picked up on this tradition, and in brief, broad strokes kept his memory alive. His student Roger Bacon immortalized him alongside Robert Grosseteste as “one of the greatest clerks in the world.”²³⁹ The chronicler Salimbene had never met Adam Marsh, though was a contemporary of his. He preserved for us Adam’s continental reputation, saying of him that “Brother Adam Marsh, a friar minor and another great scholar...was also famous in England and wrote many books.”²⁴⁰

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, a clear tradition of Adam’s life had already begun to fade. Nicholas Trivet, the Dominican chronicler who famously gave us Adam’s place origin as Bath, nonetheless only remembered him in terms of his friendship with Robert Grosseteste and his failure to obtain the see of Ely.²⁴¹ By the time the Lanercost Chronicle was written at the end of the century, Adam’s friendship with Grosseteste had become the overriding feature that was remembered about him. So strong was this tradition that the author of the Chronicle had Adam dying in 1253 soon after his

²³⁸ Ferdinand Delorme, ed. “Diffinitiones Capituli Generalis O.F.M. Narbonensis (1260),” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, vol. iii., p. 504.

²³⁹ Bacon, *Opera*, p. 75.

²⁴⁰ Salimbene, p. 225.

²⁴¹ Trivet, p. 243.

friend, such that “they who had been inseparable in life could not be parted by death.”²⁴²

Admittedly the *Chronicle* remembered Adam’s importance as the first Franciscan Regent at Oxford, but had nothing more to say about this accomplishment.²⁴³

By the time the *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals* was penned, the truth of Adam’s life had been utterly lost. Adam instead became a revisionist tool in the hands of the *Chronica*’s author. By associating him with saints Francis and Anthony of Padua, the author was deliberately manipulating the past to address later developments in the Order. If Francis had ordered Adam to teach theology to the brethren and Anthony had helped him depose Elias in 1239, then neither learning nor the clericalization of the Order that followed Elias’ deposition could be viewed in a negative light. Adam served as the perfect vehicle for this deception, since vague memories of his achievements in learning had survived without any significant biographical details to accompany them.

Why then was Adam, at the time of his death recognized as one of the greatest friars of his time, so quickly forgotten? It can be argued that this was because he left no enduring legacies to carry on his memory. Though he was famous in his life for his scholarly ability, everything about his theology was out of date even before he died. Even his star pupil, Thomas of York, preferred the new metaphysical speculative theology of Aristotle to Adam’s semi-mystical Neo-Platonism. His precocious interest in Hebrew and Greek as tools of biblical exegesis likewise gave way before the more practical scholastic instrument of the *Sentences*. As Adam’s work became less and less relevant over time it ceased to be preserved. Eventually the content of his theology came to be forgotten, even if its quality was not.

²⁴² Lanercost, p. 58-9.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

In other regards, too, Adam's efforts resulted in failures. The vision he shared with his friend Robert Grosseteste of a church purged of abuses was simply never to be. Despite their best efforts to seek out and promote only suitable candidates to ecclesiastical office, they both failed to recognize and so address the overriding social and institutional ills which plagued the Medieval Church. It wasn't necessarily just that the wrong people were in the wrong places, but that the system itself was in desperate need of reform. In overlooking the underlying problems of the Church's structure, Adam and Grosseteste were doomed to fail from the beginning.

Other important failures came in the person of Simon de Montfort and the cause of peace. Though Adam had worked diligently to convert this promising spiritual pupil, in the end he was unable to overcome Montfort's most tragic flaws. Though he was at times able to suppress Simon's avariciousness and brutality, his control of these tendencies died with him. Nor was he ever able to mediate a satisfactory settlement between Montfort and the king during his life, though he had had some success in imposing lengthy if shaky peaces. His presence was merely a buffer to the impending crisis of the mid-thirteenth century, not a solution, and five years after his death the kingdom would be embroiled in civil war.

Even in his victories he was overshadowed by others. In the academics that were his special achievement, he was regarded second to Robert Grosseteste. Eventually, he would come to be outshone by his own students, as well. His tireless work in developing the academic structure of the English province went unaccredited; instead it was William of Nottingham as provincial-minister who reaped that glory. Adam lived his life in the

background of other men's lives, sometimes playing a supporting role and rarely emerging as the star.

This was not due to any deficiency in character or ability on Adam's part. If Adam never emerged as a leading figure, it was in part because he never wanted to. Instead he preferred working in the background, aiding others as a trusted and reliable servant. It may have in part been for this reason he abandoned his promising secular career to join the Franciscan Order, though its difficulty to determine if these sentiments prompted his conversion or were caused by it.

Adam's great legacy, then, was to play an integral part in helping great men achieve great things. Without his advice, support, and aid, it is uncertain how effective the endeavors of those he served would have been. D.A. Callus, in describing Adam's role in helping Robert Grosseteste, perhaps best captures this sentiment:

“But we cannot exactly assess his part in the work of the translation. One is rather inclined to think that it consisted mainly in the invaluable, though often indefinable, assistance resulting from friendly talks and scholarly discussion, from criticisms, advice, suggestions: in a word, in that help scholars nowadays acknowledge in the preface to their books.”²⁴⁴

Ultimately Adam's impact on the shape of thirteenth-century England is similarly too diffuse to be conveniently summed up in just a few statements. We must therefore instead attribute to him in part the achievements – and the failures – of those people and endeavors he involved himself with. In this way we must attribute to him some part in the formation of Simon de Montfort's political and spiritual ideals, in the success and failures of Henry III's foreign policies, in the Archbishop of Canterbury and Robert Grosseteste's efforts to secure Episcopal rights, and yes, even in the development of the school at

²⁴⁴ Callus, p. 42.

Oxford. For it was on the strength of his character and abilities that these things, indeed the very state of England itself, flourished or floundered.

More than just the things he did accomplish, however, it is important to remember that Adam Marsh was a man with his own aspirations and worldview. His devotion to serving others was merely one aspect of his character. Beneath the façade of the facilitator lay a man deeply troubled by the world around him. The state of the Church and of the country left him anxious and somewhat disorientated. The abuses and neglect of other men left him bewildered. In such a world he feared greatly not only for the salvation of his own soul, but for those of perfect strangers. In response he was driven to a life of spiritual contemplation, in which he sought to find the divine light in all things. Sometimes he was frustrated in his efforts by the demands of others. Sometimes the circumstances of the world made him supremely anxious and weary. Sometimes he was disappointed by those things he took for granted or depended on most. Still, despite these things he continued his search, and worked without reward for what he felt was the betterment of the world at the expense of himself. It is perhaps for these rare qualities, the progenitors of his many accomplishments, that he should best be remembered for.

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