

# The Papal System – VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 1



John King of England sends his submission to Pope Innocent III.

Continued from [The Papal System – VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 2](#)

Systems of religion may teach contradictory opinions about the persons of the Godhead, the character of the Divine government, the nature of the Saviour's sacrifice, and about the freedom of the will; and yet those who receive these diverse opinions may live in perfect harmony with each other. But it is otherwise when the head of one sect claims the scepters and nations as his own, asserts a right to dethrone sovereigns, to act as the vicar of the Almighty in this world, in confirming or overturning at his pleasure its laws, institutions, and chief magistrates. The conviction is universal, over the Protestant world, that the head of the Catholic Church claims this power, would exercise it if he could in every nation, and has employed it in many instances.

This conviction has prompted the enactment of laws excluding Catholics from state offices, and of oaths requiring them to renounce the supremacy of the pontiff in civil affairs; and it has occasionally led to popular outbreaks in Protestant countries against the adherents of the papal Church. It must be confessed that there is a chronic apprehension among all the peoples whose fathers threw off the Roman yoke in the sixteenth century, that *the Bishop of the Eternal City is only awaiting an opportunity to subjugate their souls to his superstition, and their governments to his tyrannical will.* The history of the Bishops of Rome compels the existence of this fear.

## **The Pope gave England to William the Conqueror**

Harold (Anglo-Saxon English King Harold Godwinson A.D. 1022 – 1066), whatever may have been his faults, or the defect of his title to the English crown, was accepted by the nation as its ruler; the land enjoyed peace in all its borders; the hopes of the people, based on the character and ability of the new sovereign, were high. William, Duke of Normandy, born out of wedlock, was a special favorite of Pope Alexander II. The Duke was full of ambition, a man of extraordinary courage, and of great military ability. His passions were

unrestrained, his cruelty was nearly unbounded, and the only rights which he saw or respected were those which an invincible sword defended. Bent upon wearing the English crown, he made all possible warlike preparations. He was encouraged, secretly or openly, by Germany and France. But he needed another ally to sow discord in the British ranks, and give him a title to the throne which the islanders would respect, and he appealed to Pope Alexander.

The Roman pontiff had nearly reached the lofty position of Deity in the estimation of western Europe; never in all human history did a mortal receive such unquestioning homage from so many millions. His word was the voice of the Ancient of Days; his decision was authoritative, as the decree of the Almighty; his favorite was guarded by angels, and attended at every step by the assistance of the very elements; the legions of monks who swarmed throughout Europe upheld his friend against all the world, and Alexander drew his spiritual sword in William's favor; he excommunicated Harold and all his supporters, denounced him as a perjured usurper; he sent William a banner which he had specially blessed, and which was sure to lead to victory, and a ring with one of the hairs of mighty St. Peter in it. And, thus armed, he went forth to slaughter the spiritual children of Alexander in the kingdom of England. William felt that he could have no more exalted sanction; that failure, with such means as he possessed, was impossible; and, from the hour in which he was assured of the pope's approval, he never wavered, not even on the dark and gory day that placed the crown of England at his feet.

On the bloody field of Hastings, when William had vainly made every effort to break the ranks of Harold, when success seemed to many to be impossible, he ordered a pretended retreat, seeing which the English scattered to pursue the flying Normans; that act cost Harold his crown, and England its independence. William quickly reformed his men, who fell with fury upon their pursuers, and, after a desperate struggle, the Duke of Normandy was master of England.

But, from the commencement of the battle, his army was confident of victory from the assurances of the pope—the earthly voice of God. The troops of Harold were sure of defeat from the utterances of the same oracle. It was with the battle-axe of Pope Alexander that William broke the arm and heart of England on the fatal field of Hastings. This faithful son of the Church lived to rob nearly every leading Saxon of his homestead; to lay waste whole counties; to slaughter entire communities with pitiless barbarity; to plant lasting hatreds between the Norman conquerors and their English vassals—hatreds which produced harvests of burned dwellings, infamous oppressions, and sickening murders. William inaugurated in England a reign of iniquity, whose atrocious deeds cursed long centuries.

### **Ireland a Papal gift to England.**

Matthew Paris tells us that Henry II., king of England, sent a solemn embassy to solicit Pope Adrian's permission to invade and conquer Ireland, and to bring into the way of "truth its bestial inhabitants," by extirpating vice among them. This request was gladly granted by his Holiness, who sent Henry the following bull:

"Adrian, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his dearest son in

Christ, the illustrious king of England, health and his apostolical blessing. Laudably and advantageously does your majesty plan to secure a glorious name on earth, and to increase the reward of everlasting felicity in the heavens, whilst as a Catholic prince you strive to extend the boundaries of the Church, to proclaim the truths of Christianity to an uneducated and rude people, and to banish the seeds of vice from the field of the Lord; to secure this object more conveniently, you demand the advice and favor of the Apostolic See. In this project, the higher your aim, and the greater your discretion, so much happier, the Lord preparing the way, we are confident, will be your success in it. You have signified to us, dearest son in Christ, that you wished to invade the island of Ireland, to subdue its inhabitants to the laws of Christ, and to banish from it the seeds of vice; and that you wished to pay annually for every house to blessed Peter one denarius (fifteen cents— 'Peter's pence'); and also to preserve the rights of the churches in that land pure and unbroken. Now, we, regarding your pious and praiseworthy desire with deserved favor, and giving a kind assent to your petition, reckon it agreeable and welcome that, to enlarge the borders of the Church, to restrain vice, to correct morals, to introduce virtue, and to increase the Christian religion, you *should invade that island*, and do whatever may seem to advance the honor of God and the salvation of that land. And let the people of that land receive you and venerate you as their lord, provided that the rights of the churches shall remain pure and unbroken, and that the annual payment of one denarius to blessed Peter from every house be made secure. Truly, it is not to be doubted that all the islands upon which Christ, the Sun of Justice, has shone, and which have received lessons in the Christian faith, are **SUBJECT TO SAINT PETER AND THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH**, as even your own nobles confess. If, therefore, you intend to complete the plan you have conceived in your mind, aim to teach that nation good morals, and act so by yourself, and through those whom you shall deem to be qualified for this work, in faith, conversation, and life, that in that land the Church may be adorned, and that the Christian religion may be planted, and may increase there, and that whatsoever tends to the honor of God and the salvation of souls; may be so ordained that you may be worthy to receive from God the treasures of an eternal reward; and even on earth that you may secure a glorious reputation throughout the ages."

This Bull is given by Giraldus Cambrensis, a Romish ecclesiastic of the twelfth century, as well as by Matthew Paris, with only a few verbal differences from the version of Paris. Giraldus gives five claims which the king of England had upon Ireland, the last and strongest of which was the gift of the pope. "Finally," says he (Giraldus was with the first English invaders of Ireland), "we have the authority of the pope, the prince and primate of all Christendom, who claims a sort of especial right in all islands whatsoever, and that is enough to complete the title, and give it absolute confirmation." Nor was the opinion entertained by Giraldus of the pope's power to give Ireland to the English peculiar to him and his English friends. The papal Bull was solemnly accepted at a synod of Irish bishops held in Waterford, shortly after it was issued; and the entire ecclesiastics of Ireland acknowledged his Holiness as the absolute master of their island.

At another synod, held in Dublin soon after the convention at Waterford, Vivianus, the papal legate, "made a public declaration of the right of the king of England to Ireland, and the confirmation of the pope; and he strictly commanded and enjoined both the clergy and the people, under pain of excommunication, on no rash pretense, to presume to forfeit their allegiance." The synod offered no objection to the decree of the pontiff: it appeared to be conceded by ecclesiastics of all nations, that the Bishop of Rome was master of islands and kingdoms, and could bestow them upon any one acceptable to himself.

**The Bull of Adrian speaks with great contempt of the Irish Church and people.** The Irish had been converted to Christ centuries before, chiefly through the instrumentality of St. Patrick, and yet the pontiff describes Henry's proposed invasion as an effort to extend "the boundaries of the Church," that is, the Roman Church, whose authority was recognized then for the first time in Ireland. Evidently the seeds of vice in the "field of the Lord," which Henry was to pluck up, were the independence of the Church of St. Patrick, and the doctrines or practices in which it differed from the Church of Adrian. Henry's proposition to pay Peter's pence shows that the Irish had been entirely free from papal taxation and jurisdiction down to the hour when English soldiers landed in their country, and gave protection to Romish legates, and supreme authority to the pope over the entire Irish Church.

To us, in the nineteenth century, it looks singular to see a Roman bishop give away an island upon which a standard of the Eternal City, Republican, Imperial, or Papal had never been planted; an island to which he had as good a title as he possessed to the government of the sun, or to the scepter of the Almighty. We are partially inclined to suppose that the tempter who offered Christ all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, ages later presented the same donation to the Roman bishops; and they, unlike their Master, immediately accepted the gift, together with the conditions prescribed by the assumed owner.

Adrian seems to have fully believed that the kings of the world received their scepters by his good-will, and reigned by his pleasure. A Swedish bishop was held in captivity by German knights who had robbed him; Adrian wrote to the Emperor Frederic, demanding his release, and giving as one reason why he should grant his request, that "He had bestowed upon him the imperial crown." The letter excited the wildest indignation in the Emperor's bosom, and in the diet at Besangon, one of the legates who brought the letter, Cardinal Roland of Sienna, on observing the excitement produced by the pope's letter, asked in apparent astonishment: "From whom, then, did the Emperor obtain his government, if not from the pope?" When Frederic was approaching Rome, to be crowned by Adrian, he visited the Emperor's camp, and as he drew near the royal tent, Frederic did not hold his stirrup as his servant, and assist him to dismount. For this affront Adrian refused him the kiss of peace, nor would he be reconciled till the greatest prince in Europe, in the presence of his whole army, attended his holiness as equerry (an officer of honor)—holding his stirrup about the distance of a stone-cast. Such was the opinion of his greatness cherished by the pope, who, as master of kingdoms, continents, and islands, gave Ireland to the English, and began

as the aboriginal Irish suppose

*The worst oppressions ever borne by a nation.*

Without attempting to inquire about the measure of peace and happiness which Roderic O'Connor, King of Connaught, Dermot Macmorrogh, King of Leinster, O'Ruarke, Prince of Breffny, Oniel, Prince of Ulster, and the other princes of Ireland, and their successors, would have given to "The island of saints," we shall take it for granted that they would have made their country free, happy, wealthy—the glory of all lands. Then it follows, if that supposition is true, which is only taken for granted, that at the door of Pope Adrian is to be laid all the oppressions, real or imaginary, endured by the Irish nation for seven hundred years. He, as the vicar of Christ, gave the island to the English, and upon his head should the curses of Irishmen, who feel the government of England a burden and a tyranny, be liberally poured.

Had it not been for Nicholas Brakespeare—Adrian IV.—Ireland, today, the land where the pope's most loyal friends live, might still be ruled by her Roderic O'Connors and Dermot Macmorroghs. A pope destroyed the independence of Ireland.

### **Paul IV. makes Ireland a Kingdom.**

The sovereigns of England for ages were only called "Lords of Ireland." But Paul IV. has just been seated upon the chair of the Fisherman. No mere mortal ever had such extravagant ideas of his power; he can turn this world upside down when he wishes; princes to him are rubbish to be swept from under his sacred feet; he owns all kingdoms; he is master of all things visible, and of many things that cannot be seen. Sarpi tells us that this insolent old man never spoke with ambassadors but he thundered in their ears: "That he was above all princes, that he did not wish any of them to be too familiar with him, that he could change kingdoms, that he was successor of him who had deposed kings and emperors. In the consistory, and publicly at his table, he declared that he would have no prince for his companion—he would have princes under his feet (and he stamped his foot against the ground), as it is fit, and as it is his will who built the Church, and has placed them in that degree."

And as a Catholic, Mary, has ascended her father's throne in England, whose husband is Philip II. of Spain, the most unscrupulous Romanist among the living; as the nation of Henry VIII. is knocking at the palace of Paul for the honor of kissing his toe, the country of Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, of Tyndale and his Bibles; where monasteries and nunneries were thrown down, and the holy drones who tenanted them were scattered to the four winds of heaven to follow useful pursuits; where sacred images were dashed to pieces by the rough hands of unholy mobs; where ribs, skulls, thigh-bones, hands, toes, and pieces of the skin of holy virgins, martyrs, and saints were torn from gold and silver shrines, and were flung into rivers or obscure graves; where relics of the greatest saints of all time were barbarously outraged; where the king, a stupid and vile layman, had thrust himself into Peter's chair, and declared himself, "The head of the Church;" where a parliament of mere laymen had laid sacrilegious hands on the consecrated property of the holy

Church; where men and women of the highest rank and of the greatest sanctity had laid down their lives for the Scarlet Lady; where it was supposed that the Catholic religion was forever destroyed; and where yesterday the papal world saw only causes for despair;— as Paul hears of the approach of ambassadors from that country coming to offer him the English nation, he is in raptures; no other occurrence on earth could give him such joy, or reflect upon him such honor. And as he thinks of some token of regard for the daughter of Henry VIII., he finds it in Ireland. Mary recognizes that country as a kingdom; the pope has never bestowed that dignity upon it. And in his estimation no sovereign has a right to make a kingdom out of a mere lordship; that is an act of flagrant usurpation in the loftiest of our race, unless he wears the triple crown. So to exhibit his semi-divine authority, and to gratify “Bloody Mary,” he erected the country into a kingdom, which Adrian had bartered to Albion for Peter’s Pence, and enforced obedience to the pontiffs; and having crowned it with royal honors, he handed it over in chains to the daughter of Catherine of Arragon; as if Paul had been the owner of all things mundane and celestial, and could exalt or degrade according to his imperious pleasure. The proud chieftains, and wild, warmhearted tribes of Ireland in the sixteenth century, owed little gratitude to the popes.

### **Innocent III. compels King John to surrender the Crown of England to the Bishops of Rome.**

John was destitute of honesty, truthfulness, courage, chastity, respect for human life, or for the good opinion of mankind, He was impulsive, irritable, short-sighted, vindictive, and about equally free from mental powers and moral qualities. Seldom has a baser man occupied a throne. It was his misfortune to be the brother of Richard the Lion-hearted, as noble a king as ever swayed a scepter, as brave a soldier as ever drew a sword. The contrast between the brothers was highly injurious to John.

Innocent III. had a master mind; for keenness of penetration, for adapting means to ends, and for concentration of resources on the right point, Innocent was not surpassed by any living man. Only one of Rome’s two hundred and fifty-three popes, many of whom had talents of a high order, equaled Innocent in ability. The controversy between John and him was like one between an eagle and a hawk. At his coronation, Hubert, Archbishop of Canterbury, put his elevation to the throne to the vote, and after the assembled bishops, nobles, and others, elected John by crying, “God save the king,” he placed the crown on his head with the usual ceremonies. And, on being questioned about his motive for departing from the regular custom in adding the election of the king to the coronation observances, he replied, that “he knew John would one day or other bring the kingdom into great confusion, whereupon he determined that he should owe his elevation to election, and not to hereditary right.”

On the 13th of July, Hubert died, and his vacant see created

*The greatest strife between England and Rome.*

The junior monks of the conventual church of Canterbury elected Reginald, their sub-prior, to fill the vacancy; and as they had not obtained the king’s

consent, they were afraid that John would hinder farther proceedings if the election was published; and, to complete the work, in the middle of the night, they chanted the *Te Deum*, and placed him first upon the altar, and afterwards in the archbishop's chair. The same night, he started for Rome to obtain the ratification of Innocent.

Soon after, at the suggestion of the king, the monks unanimously elected John de Gray, Bishop of Norwich, to the throne of St. Austin. The monks inaugurated him, as they had been accustomed to invest his predecessors with the archbishop's authority. The king immediately gave him possession of all the revenue and property of his see.

Not long after, Innocent rejected Reginald, the sub-prior, and John de Gray, and, under pretense of an election by certain monks of Canterbury, on business in Rome, he appointed Cardinal Stephen Langton, an Englishman, who had been long absent from his native country, Archbishop of Canterbury; and commanded the king and the monks of Canterbury, under great penalties, to receive him as their archbishop. Stephen was a man of superior mind, with a character far above the common herd of ecclesiastics in his day; and he loved his country more than he respected even Pope Innocent himself. He was one of the most active patriots in securing *Magna Charta* in opposition to the pope's wishes, for which Innocent suspended him.

To appease John at this time, Innocent sent him four rings and the following letter:

"Pope Innocent III., to John, king of the English, greeting, etc.:  
Amongst the riches of the earth, which the eye of man desires and longs for as more precious than others, we believe that pure gold and precious stones hold the first place. Although, perhaps, your royal highness may abound in these and other riches, however, as a sign of regard and favor, we send to your highness four gold rings, with divers jewels. We wish you specially to remark in these the shape, number, material, and color, that you pay regard to the signification of them rather than to the gift. The rotundity signifies eternity, which has neither beginning nor end. Therefore, your royal discretion may be led by the form of them to pray for a passage from earthly to heavenly, from temporal to eternal things. The number, four, which is a square number, denotes the firmness of the mind, which is neither depressed in adversity, nor elated in prosperity; which will then be fulfilled when it is based on the four principal virtues, namely, justice, fortitude, prudence, and temperance. In the first place, understand justice, which is to be shown in judgment; in the second, fortitude, which is to be shown in adversity; in the third, prudence, which is to be observed in doubtful circumstances; and, in the fourth, moderation, which is not to be lost in prosper. By the gold, is denoted wisdom; for, as gold excels all metals, so wisdom excels all gifts, as the prophet bears witness: 'The spirit of wisdom shall rest upon him,' etc. There is nothing which it is more necessary for a king to possess. Wherefore, the peaceful king Solomon asked wisdom only of the Lord, that, by those means, he might know how to govern the people entrusted to him. Moreover, the greenness of the emerald denotes faith; the clearness of the sapphire, hope; the

redness of the pomegranate, denotes charity; and the purity of the topaz good works, concerning which the Lord says: 'Let your light shine,' etc. In the emerald, then, you have what to believe; in the sapphire, what to hope for; in the pomegranate, what to love; and in the topaz what to practice; that you ascend from one virtue to another till you see the Lord in Zion."

Innocent thought that these gifts would calm John's anger about Stephen Langton, and that the ingenious conceits about "their shape, number, material, and color," would gratify his whimsical mind. But it was John who ordered a Jew in Bristol to be cruelly tortured to make him give money to the king; then to have "one of his cheek teeth knocked out daily until he paid ten thousand marks of silver;" and the process was continued till the poor son of Israel lost seven teeth, and paid the demand. And as there were other Jews in England with plenty of teeth and money, John could do without the papal rings on account of their value. And he had no genius to appreciate the wisdom of the letter accompanying them.

The king was in a fury about Langton; and immediately ordered the Monks of Canterbury to be driven from their convent, and wrote Innocent a letter full of threats and insults, and absolutely refused to permit Langton to exercise his office in England. The conflict now began by the proclamation of an

*Interdict (ban on Church services).*

The bishops of Ely, London and Winchester were authorized to admonish John, and if that failed, to proclaim an interdict. They were outrageously abused and threatened by John, and they hurled forth the papal thunders. Immediately all church services ceased, except "The viaticum (the Eucharist given to a person who is dying) in cases of extremity, confession, and the baptism of children; the bodies of the dead were carried out of cities and towns, and buried in roads and ditches without prayers or the attendance of priests." We have not the precise form of interdict used by Innocent, but it probably differed little from the one issued by the Council of Limoges against the Limosin, which was:

"Unless they come to terms of peace let all the country of the Limosin be put under a public excommunication, so that no person, except a clergyman, or a poor beggar, or a stranger, or an infant from two years old and under, be permitted burial, in the whole Limosin, or be permitted to be carried to burial in any other bishopric. Let divine service be privately performed in all the churches, and baptism given to those who desire it. About the third hour let the bells ring in the churches, and all pour out their prayers on account of the tribulation and for peace. Let penance and the viaticum be granted in the article of death. Let the altars of all the churches be stripped as in Easter eve, and the crosses and ornaments be taken away, as a token of mourning and sadness to all. Let the altars be adorned at those masses only which any of the priests shall say, the church doors being shut; and when the masses are done, let them be stripped again. Let *no one marry during the time of excommunication*. Let *no one give to another a kiss*, Let no one of the clergy or laity, no inhabitant or traveler eat flesh or other



meat than such as is lawful to eat in Lent, in the whole country of the Limosin. Let no layman or clergyman be trimmed or shaved till the censured princes, the heads of the people, absolutely obey the Holy Council."

### **The Interdict at Work.**

As the interdict came into operation terror spread over the nation as if a great judgment from God had fallen upon it. Every one spoke with a subdued voice, felt as if some unutterable calamity was about to desolate the land, and wore a countenance marked by awful solemnity. Even children spoke in hushed tones and caught the contagion of the general alarm. Nothing could exceed the distress of those whose departed friends could not be placed in consecrated ground near the protecting dust of some glorious saint; the relics of one of whom gave safety to every Anglo-Saxon church, and the dead surrounding it. It is impossible in our age to comprehend the universal horror that prevailed. As the people beheld the images of the saints and their precious relics laid upon the ground, the altars stripped of their decorations, the bells removed from the churches, mass celebrated with closed doors for the priests only, the use of flesh prohibited, the face unshaved, and every expression and form of joy forbidden, they felt as if the day of judgment must be at hand, or some other great day of the wrath of the Almighty. This interdict lasted more than six years.

Perhaps there is not in the history of wickedness an act so impious as the proclamation of an interdict. As if Jesus, who prayed on the cross for his enemies, and poured out his blood for more persecuting Sauls than the one of Tarsus, could suspend the public service of his religion over a whole kingdom, inflicting outrageous wrongs upon the living, and shocking indecencies upon the dead, not to punish the sins of the nation, but through the woes and cries of the people, to compel the king to receive an archbishop whom neither the sovereign nor the nation desired, in defiance of law, and simply at the command of a foreign pontiff! Tyranny and blasphemous audacity never reached a more vigorous growth than in the person of Innocent III.

### **John continues the War.**

He confiscated all the property of the clergy, giving them only a pittance to support them; he seized their corn for the public use; he arrested "the concubines of the priests and clerks, who had to ransom themselves at great expense;" the clergy when traveling were robbed on the highways, and could obtain no justice. The officers of a sheriff on the borders of Wales brought a robber who had murdered a priest to the king, and asked his decision about the murderer; John immediately answered, "He has killed an enemy of mine, release him and let him go." He seized the relatives of the dignified clergy who had fled out of England, and cast them into prison and took possession of their goods.

Through the punishments he inflicted, some of the clergy opened their churches for public worship, and in a measure upheld his cause. While others, either for love of money or justice, did the same thing, and chief among these was Alexander, surnamed the Mason. He proclaimed that: "This universal

scourge was not brought on England by any fault of the king." He showed that the "Pope had no business to meddle with the lay estates of kings, or of any potentates whatever, or with the government of their subjects." The king gave him benefices and his confidence, and he became a man of great note in these troubled times. But the people looked upon him and others of his class as wretched apostates unworthy of a kind word; and when in subsequent days Alexander's enemies deprived him of everything he possessed, the "multitudes regarded him with derision, saying: 'Behold the man who did not make God his helper, but put his trust in the magnitude of his riches, and strengthened himself in his vanity; let him therefore be always before the Lord, that the recollection of him may perish from the earth.'" With these and other reproaches Alexander and the king's clerical friends were everywhere greeted and insulted.

The thought is suggestive, that in a controversy with the pope, in which by law and custom the king of England was right, that NEARLY ALL THE CLERGY, AND THE CONSCIENCES OF NINE-TENTHS OF THE NATION WENT WITH THE PONTIFF. HIS INFLUENCE WAS RESISTLESS.

### **Innocent excommunicates the King.**

The interdict for nearly two years had been blasting the social happiness, the pecuniary prosperity, and the religious hopes of the English people. John had exhibited the greatest contempt for the clergy of all ranks, and instead of any disposition to yield, was increasing the miseries of all the friends of Innocent in his dominions; and the pope promulgated the sentence of excommunication against him. The bishops of Ely, London and Winchester were to proclaim the decree in all the conventual churches in the land, that thus "*the king might be more strictly shunned by every one.*"

But as these worthies regarded flight as the better part of valor, and as the other prelates who remained in England, "through fear of or regard for the king, became like dumb dogs, not daring to bark," the announcement of the pope's curse on John did not receive the prescribed solemn publication. Nevertheless, it was soon known everywhere, and it became the subject of universal comment. And had not John been dreaded for his merciless cruelty, he would have been forsaken as a child of Satan by his entire kingdom. As it was, not a few turned from him in horror. Among these was Geoffrey, Archdeacon of Norwich, an officer of the Exchequer. While attending to his duties, he said to his companions: "It is not safe for beneficed persons to continue allegiance to an excommunicated king," and he retired without asking the king's permission. The tidings quickly reached John, who threw him into prison, in chains; ordered a cap of lead to be fastened on him, and, overcome by the want of food and the weight of the leaden cap, he expired.

No condition could be more deplorable than the state of the nation at this time; to serve the king in any way was to incur the curse of an oppressive pope; to adhere to the pope was to invite imprisonment and death from John. Truly it was not comfortable to be placed between these two millstones in motion. Still John, as an English king, would not submit to the impositions of the Italian priest; and Innocent proceeded to a more high-handed crime by

### *Absolving his subjects from their allegiance.*

In the words of the celebrated monkish historian: "He absolved from all fealty and allegiance to the English king, the princes, and all others, low as well as high, who owed duty to the English crown, plainly and under penalty of excommunication, ordering them strictly to avoid associating with him at the table, in council, or converse." Truly here is a modest place for a servant of Jesus to occupy. He declares broken, the solemn oaths binding a nation to its sovereign—oaths whose sanctity could not be set aside with impunity from God, by any mortal of all time; and he orders John to be isolated; no one must sit with him at table, act as his adviser, or have anything to do with him, on pain of excommunication; that is, on pain of the greatest calamity on earth, and the worst woes of the abyss, And as John perseveres in his rebellion.

### **The pope deposes him from his Crown.**

Says Paris: "The pope being deeply grieved for the desolation of the kingdom of England, by the advice of his cardinals, bishops, and other wise men, definitely decreed that John, King of; England, should be deposed from the throne of that kingdom, and that another, more worthy than he, to be chosen by the pope, should succeed him." Carrying out this decision, Innocent wrote Philip, King of France, ordering him, in remission of . all his sins, to execute the sentence against John, to expel him from the throne of England, and then to take possession of it for himself and his successors forever. What a situation for an independent sovereign to be hurled from his throne, not by force of arms; not by a decision of law; not by the votes of his own subjects to whom only, under God, he was responsible; not by the nations as an enemy to the human race; not by the pope speaking for suffering men unable to resist intolerable oppression, but by the pontiff claiming, in virtue of his office, authority over all kings and commonwealths, and driving John from his throne solely because he refused to receive an archbishop of the pope's selection, contrary to the laws and customs of his kingdom! And what usurpation for the Pope of Rome to select the future King of England! He had just as much right to select wives for all the young men of that nation, or to remove all the landowners, and bestow their estates upon others. Were the pope to depose a President of the United States, and order the King of France to come and expel the occupant of the White House, and seize the sovereignty of the nation, the act would be no more audacious, no more unjustifiable in the light of all just laws and self-evident rights. Peter never pretended to dethrone the pettiest prince on earth, or to remove the lowest officer of any government. And as the "powers that be are ordained of God," it is blasphemous presumption for any servant of Christ to overthrow those powers by Church authority—by the pretense that the Church or any of its members is invested with dominion over the chief magistrates whom God has appointed.

### **Innocent publishes a Crusade against John.**

He sends letters to the different countries, to nobles, knights and warriors, commanding them to go with Philip to remove John from his throne. And as in the efforts to drive the Saracens out of the Holy Land, the crusaders wore a

large cross wrought upon their coats, so the pope orders those who go with Philip to wear the same sacred sign, as they are "To avenge the insult offered to the universal Church;" and by this nations were taught by the highest authority in Christendom, that John was as great an enemy to God and his Church as the worst infidel ever driven by pious warriors from the localities consecrated by the birth, agony, death, and grave of the Son of God. Innocent also promised that all who gave money or personal assistance to overcome the rebellious king, should, like those who went to visit the Lords sepulcher, "remain secure under the protection of the Church, as regarded their property, persons and spiritual interests." Innocent put forth every effort to let loose all Europe on John, to send every man ambitious of military glory, and every zealot anxious for the honor of the Church, and every malefactor hungry to have his iniquities blotted out by participation in a crusade, and his pockets filled by the plunder of ravaged homes. Nor were his efforts vain.

### **Philip is willing to execute the Pope's Sentence.**

He collects an army, regarded in that day as very great; he gathers a fleet of 1700 vessels, of all sizes; and from his personal courage and distinguished ability, there is little doubt but that he could have conquered John, though he led an army of 60,000 strong, encamped at Barham Down.

### **Pandulph makes an insidious Attack upon John.**

He crosses the sea and visits him, tells him the extraordinary preparations which Philip has made, the number of his troops, and the accessions which daily reach his army. He assures him that, as the pope's enemy, when he appeals to the God of battles, the Church's God, he is sure to be defeated; that the banished bishops, clergy, and laity, are coming with Philip to obtain their rights and their property, and to render him the obedience formerly enjoyed by John and his ancestors; that Philip had pledges of assistance and submission from almost all the nobles of England; that if he humbled himself as if he were on his dying bed, and submitted himself completely to the Holy See, the compassionate pontiff might restore to him his kingdom; but that, should he persist in his wickedness, all hope was gone; his enemies would surely triumph!

Terrified at the prospect of losing his soul through the anger of that God whose chief priest, for years, he had resisted; afraid of the French king, whose countless army was on the coast, ready to sail for his dominions, and sure of the probable treachery of his nobles should he lead them into battle, most of whose wives, daughters, or property he had injured, he gave up the contest, and submitted to nearly everything proposed by Pandulph; and, among the exactions of the legate, there was one which required John

*To resign his crown and kingdoms to the Pope.*

On the 15th of May, 1213, in the house of the Knights Templars, near Dover, the English king, in the presence of his nobles, "according to a decree pronounced at Rome," resigned his crown and the kingdoms of England and Ireland into the hands of our lord the pope, through Pandulph, the legate.

He, then, by a formal "Charter," as it is called, agreed:

"To assign and grant to God and his holy apostles, Peter and Paul, and to the Holy Church of Rome, our mother, and to our lord, Pope Innocent and his Catholic successors, the whole kingdom of England, and the whole kingdom of Ireland, with all their rights and appurtenances, in remission of the sins of us and our whole race, as well for those living as for the dead, and henceforth we retain and hold these countries from him and the Church of Rome as vicegerent, and this we declare in the presence of this learned man Pandulph, sub-deacon and familiar of our lord, the pope. . . . And, in token of this lasting bond and grant, we will and determine, that from our own income, and from our special revenues, arising from the aforesaid kingdoms, the Church of Rome shall, for all service and custom which we owe to them, saving always the St. Peter's pence, receive annually a thousand marks sterling money; that is, seven hundred for the kingdom of England, and three hundred for Ireland. . . . And, as we wish to ratify and confirm all that has been above written, we bind ourselves and our successors not to contravene it; and if we or any one of our successors shall dare to oppose this, let him, whoever he be, be deprived of his right in the kingdom. And let this charter of our bond and grant be confirmed forever."

John declared, in the preamble to the charter, that: "He was impelled to make this grant (of his kingdom) by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that the act was performed, not through fear of the interdict, but of his own free will and consent, and by the general advice of his barons. What flagrant falsehoods the sub-deacon Pandulph put in John's charter and made him sign!

When John handed his crown to the legate, and a part of the tribute money along with it, he appeared in the character of an obsequious vassal. Pandulph was seated upon a throne representing Pope Innocent; John fell on his knees before him, and lifting up his joined hands, and putting them within those of Pandulph, *he swore fealty to the pope*. He placed the tribute at Pandulph's feet, who trampled upon the money, as a representation of the subjection of the kingdom. How it must have made Englishmen blush to witness such an exhibition of triumphant tyranny, such a display of priestly arrogance! Viewing the whole trouble of Innocent with John, from his refusal to receive Langton down to the moment when Pandulph held his crown and danced on his tribute money, we are forced to the conviction that Innocent III. was an enemy to every government on earth; that he was one of the most grasping despots that ever tried to crush the independence of a nation; and that, if his successors urge the same claims to authority over States and kingdoms, the nations are only safe while the pontiffs are feeble.

Continued in [Pope Innocent III Abolishes the Magna Carta](#)

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