

Sources of British History

KING JOHN's

Concession of England and Ireland to the Pope

In the matter of the election and installation of Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury, King John, in the words of Pope Innocent III, had by "impious persecution", tried to "enslave" the entire English Church. As a result, the pope laid on England an interdict (1208-14), a sort of religious "strike", wherein no religious service be performed for anyone, guilty or innocent. When this didn't work, the king, himself, was excommunicated. Caving-in under that pressure, John wrote a letter of concession to the pope, hoping to have the interdict and the excommunication lifted (1213). John's concession which, in effect, made England a fiefdom of Rome, worked like a charm. The satisfied pope lifted the yoke he had hung on the people of England and their king.

John, by the grace of God, king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, count of Anjou, to all the faithful of Christ who shall look upon this present charter, greeting.

We wish it to be known to all of you, through this our charter, furnished with our seal, that inasmuch as we had offended in many ways God and our mother the holy church, and in consequence are known to have very much needed the divine mercy, and can not offer anything worthy for making due satisfaction to God and to the church unless we humiliate ourselves and our kingdoms: we, wishing to humiliate ourselves for Him who humiliated Himself for us unto death, the grace of the Holy Spirit inspiring, not induced by force or compelled by fear, but of our own good and spontaneous will and by the common counsel of our barons, do offer and freely concede to God and His holy apostles Peter and Paul and to our mother the holy Roman church, and to our lord pope Innocent and to his Catholic successors, the whole kingdom of England and the whole kingdom Ireland, with all their rights and appurtenances, for the remission of our own sins and of those of our whole race as well for the living as for the dead; and now receiving and holding them, as it were a vassal, from God and the Roman church, in the presence of that prudent man Pandulph, subdeacon and of the household of the lord pope, we perform and swear fealty for them to him our aforesaid lord pope Innocent, and his

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catholic successors and the Roman church, according to the form appended; and in the presence of the lord pope, if we shall be able to come before him, we shall do liege homage to him; binding our successors aid our heirs by our wife forever, in similar manner to perform fealty and show homage to him who shall be chief pontiff at that time, and to the Roman church without demur. As a sign, moreover, of this our own, we will and establish perpetual obligation and concession we will establish that from the proper and especial revenues of our aforesaid kingdoms, for all the service and customs which we ought to render for them, saving in all things the penny of St. Peter, the Roman church shall receive yearly a thousand marks sterling, namely at the feast of St. Michael five hundred marks, and at Easter five hundred marks, seven hundred, namely, for the kingdom of England, and three hundred for the kingdom of Ireland, saving to us and to our heirs our rights, liberties and regalia; all of which things, as they have been described above, we wish to have perpetually valid and firm; and we bind ourselves and our successors not to act counter to them. And if we or any one of our successors shall presume to attempt this, whoever he be, unless being duly warned he come to his kingdom, and this senses, be shall lose his right to the kingdom, and this charter of our obligation and concession shall always remain firm.

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