Innocent, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to all the faithful of Christ who will see this document, greeting and apostolic benediction.¹

Although our well-beloved son in Christ, John illustrious king of the English, grievously offended God and the Church—in consequence of which we excommunicated him and put his kingdom under ecclesiastical interdict—yet, by the merciful inspiration of Him who desireth not the death of a sinner but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live,² the king at length returned to his senses, and humbly made to God and the Church such complete amends that he not only paid compensation for losses and restored property wrongfully seized,³ but also conferred full liberty on the English church⁴; and further, on the relaxation of the two sentences, he yielded his kingdom of England and of Ireland to St Peter and the Roman Church, and received it from us again as fief under an annual payment of one thousand marks, having sworn an oath of fealty to us, as is clearly stated in his privilege furnished with a golden seal;⁵ and desiring still further to please Almighty God, he reverently assumed the badge of the life-giving Cross, intending to go to the relief of the Holy

¹ grounds for an act which must have seemed to be a political necessity and of advantage for the crusade.
² For the circumstances of the publication of the letter in England see Richardson, "The morrow of the Great Charter."
³ cf. no. 55, n. 9 above
⁴ cf. no. 70 above. In the event the monasteries and lower clergy complained that they were not justly recompensed for their losses during the interdict (Ann. mon., ii. 281, Paris, ii. 576).
⁵ cf. no. 76 above
Land—a project for which he was splendidly preparing. But the enemy of the human race, who always hates good impulses, by his cunning wiles stirred up against him the barons of England so that, with a wicked inconsistency, the men who supported him when injuring the Church rebelled against him when he turned from his sin and made amends to the Church. A matter of dispute had arisen between them: several days had been fixed for the parties to discuss a settlement: meanwhile, formal envoys had been sent to us: with them we conferred diligently, and after full deliberation we sent letters by them to the archbishop and the English bishops, charging and commanding them to devote earnest attention and effective effort to restoring a genuine and full agreement between the two sides; by apostolic authority they were to denounce as void any leagues and conspiracies which might have been formed after the outbreak of trouble between the kingdom and the priesthood: they were to prohibit, under sentence of excommunication, any attempt to form such leagues in future: and they were prudently to admonish the magnates and nobles of England, and strongly to enjoin on them, to strive to conciliate the king by manifest proofs of loyalty and submission; and then, if they should decide to make a demand of him, to implore it respectfully and not arrogantly, maintaining his royal honour and rendering the customary services which they and their predecessors paid to him and his


*cf. no. 75 above*
predecessors (since the king ought not to lose these services without a judicial decision), that in this way they might the more easily gain their object. For we in our letters, and equally through the archbishop and bishops, have asked and advised the king, enjoining it on him as he hopes to have his sins remitted, to treat these magnates and nobles kindly and to hear their just petitions graciously, so that they too might recognise with gladness how by divine grace he had had a change of heart, and that thereby they and their heirs should serve him and his heirs readily and loyally; and we also asked him to grant them full safeconduct for the outward and homeward journey and the time between, so that if they could not arrive at agreement the dispute might be decided in his court by their peers according to the laws and customs of the kingdom. But before the envoys bearing this wise and just mandate had reached England, the barons threw over their oath of fealty; and though, even if the king had wrongfully oppressed them, they should not have proceeded against him by constituting themselves both judges and executors of the judgement in their own suit, yet, openly conspiring as vassals against their lord and as knights against their king, they leagued themselves with his acknowledged enemies as well as with others, and dared to make war on him, occupying and devastating his territory and even seizing the city of London, the capital of the kingdom, which had been treacherously surrendered to them. Meantime the aforesaid envoys returned to England and the king offered, in accordance with the terms of our mandate,

letters of 19 March arrived (nos. 74, 75). London fell to the rebels on 17 May 1215.
to grant the barons full justice. This they altogether rejected and began to stretch forth their hands to deeds still worse.\textsuperscript{11} So the king, appealing to our tribunal, offered to grant them justice before us to whom the decision of this suit belonged by reason of our lordship: but this they utterly rejected. Then he offered that four discreet men chosen by him and four more chosen by themselves should, together with us, end the dispute, and he promised that, first in his reforms, he would repeal all abuses introduced into England in his reign: but this also they contemptuously refused. Finally, the king declared to them that, since the lordship of the kingdom belonged to the Roman Church, he neither could nor should, without our special mandate, make any change in it to our prejudice: and so he again appealed to our tribunal, placing under apostolic protection both himself and his kingdom with all his honour and rights. But making no progress by any method, he asked the archbishop and the bishops to execute our mandate, to defend the rights of the Roman Church, and to protect himself in accordance with the form of the privilege granted to Crusaders.\textsuperscript{12} When the archbishop and bishops would not take any action, seeing himself bereft of almost all counsel and help, he did not dare to refuse what the barons had dared to demand.\textsuperscript{13} And so by such violence and fear as might affect the most courageous of men\textsuperscript{14} he was forced to accept an agreement which is not only shameful and demeaning but also illegal and unjust, thereby lessening unduly and impairing his royal rights and dignity.

\textsuperscript{11} This refers to John’s acceptance of Magna Carta at Runnymede, during the third week of June 1215.
\textsuperscript{12} cf. no. 5, n. 4 above
But because the Lord has said to us by the prophet Jeremiah, 'I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to destroy, to build and to plant;'' and also by Isaiah, 'Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens,' we refuse to ignore such shameless presumption, for thereby the Apostolic See would be dishonoured, the king's rights injured, the English nation shamed, and the whole plan for a Crusade seriously endangered; and as this danger would be imminent if concessions, thus extorted from a great prince who has taken the cross, were not cancelled by our authority, even though he himself should prefer them to be upheld, on behalf of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by the authority of SS Peter and Paul His apostles, and by our own authority, acting on the general advice of our brethren, we utterly reject and condemn this settlement, and under threat of excommunication we order that the king should not dare to observe it and that the barons and their associates should not require it to be observed: the charter, with all undertakings and guarantees whether confirming it or resulting from it, we declare to be null, and void of all validity for ever. Wherefore, let no man deem it lawful to infringe this document of our annulment and prohibition, or presume to oppose it. If anyone should presume to do so, let him know that he will incur the anger of Almighty God and of SS Peter and Paul His apostles.

Anagni, the 24th of August, in the eighteenth year of our Pontificate.

14 cf. Isa. 58:6. See no. 8, n. 3 above
Selected Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning England (1198-1216)

edited by
C. R. Cheney
Professor of Medieval History in the University of Manchester
and
W. H. Semple
Halme Professor of Latin in the University of Manchester

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