

THE POPE ANNULS MAGNA CARTA, 1215

BULL OF POPE INNOCENT III ("Etsi karissimus"), condemning and annulling Magna Carta. Dated at Anagni, 24 August 1215; the Pope's leaden *bull* is appended by silk strings.

After reciting the circumstances of King John's quarrel with the Pope, his surrender of his kingdoms to the Church and his dispute with the Barons, the Bull ends as follows:— "... so that by force and by fear, which might have assailed even the most courageous of men, he was impelled to enter into an agreement with them [i.e. Magna Carta], an agreement as unlawful and unjust as it was base and shameful, to the too great prejudice and diminution of his own right and honour.

Since, therefore, it has been said to us by the Lord through His Prophet: I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to build and to plant¹; and also, in another prophecy: Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens²; we, not wishing to close our eyes to such audacious wickedness, whereby the Apostolic See is brought into contempt, the royal prerogative diminished, the English nation outraged, and the whole enterprise of the Crusade ("tocius negotii crucifixi") gravely imperilled (for this surely would straightway ensue, unless by our authority the concessions extorted in this manner from so great a Prince who has taken the Cross were wholly revoked, even though he himself should wish them to remain in force)—we, therefore, in the name of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and by the authority of the Blessed Peter and Paul, His Apostles, and by our own authority, and by the common counsel of our bretheren, do utterly reprobate and condemn this agreement; and under ban of anathema we command that neither the King shall presume to observe it nor the Barons and their accomplices to require its observation; utterly cancelling and making void both the charter itself and any pledges or obligations soever that have been made in any way concerning it, so that neither now nor hereafter shall they be of any validity."

The Bull appears to have been originally preserved in the Treasury of the Exchequer; it afterwards passed, like the earlier Bull exhibited in this case, into the collection of Sir Robert Cotton.

1. Jeremiah i.10
2. Isaiah lviii.6

Cotton MS. Cleopatra E.i, ff.155b-156.