

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN commenced his reign May 27, 1199,¹ and was almost immediately drawn into war with Philip, King of France. Needing money for this enterprise, he levied a tax upon all the plough land in England.² This at once stirred up strife all throughout the country. Henry II. had prohibited that, at least had not done it without consulting his barons; it had not been done by Richard, who sold benefices and civil offices when he wanted money; and now John, having been king for only a few months, was retrograding and adopting William I. tactics. The Archbishop of York was the first to oppose this tax,³ and he was joined by many others, including ecclesiastics of high degree and nearly all the nobles; but the levy went on notwithstanding the

¹ Wendover, 2-180.

² Wendover, 2-187; Worcester, 310.

³ Wendover, 2-193.

opposition, and the tax was paid. It must have been this levy that brought forth the demands of the barons. They demanded of John, early in 1201, shortly after this tax was collected, that he would desist from any such course, and they further demanded of him to recognize their rights, in the form of a charter, promising in it not to tax them again without their consent. This is the first demand made upon John for what we might consider to be the Magna Charta.

John's marriage was also the cause of trouble to him. He had previously had for his wife Hadawisa, daughter of the Earl of Gloucester, whom he divorced on the grounds of her unlawful kinship to him,¹ but in reality so that he might marry Isabella, daughter of the Earl of Angouleme. This Isabella had been espoused to Hugh Brun, Count of le Marche,² and some of the chronicles say married to him. When the count heard of John's marriage to Isabella he became so

¹ Wendover, 2-188; Westminster, 2-96.

² Wendover, 2-188; Westminster, 2-96.

enraged that he at once went to Philip, king of France, and requested of him his permission and his help to attack John's territories in France.¹

This proposition being favorably received, they together formed an army and marched upon Normandy, and for a time were successful in their manœuvres, till at last John met them in battle and defeated them, capturing the Duke of le Marche, Arthur, the Duke of Bretagne and many other nobles and persons of high degree.² The Duke of Bretagne he had put to death, some saying that he himself killed him.³ The French under Philip were determined after this to avenge themselves upon John, and forming another army, marched against John's Norman possessions with such success that they captured and held all of his possessions in Normandy, Poictou, Anjou and Maine.⁴ John now returned to England a defeated Mon-

¹ Wendover, 2-203.

² Wendover, 2-204 ; Westminster, 2-98 ; Worcester, 311.

³ Wendover, 2-206 ; Westminster, 2-99.

⁴ Worcester, 312.

arch, with every vestige of his property in Normandy gone, and he cursed the English nobles for their lack of help and upbraided them for not assisting him in his battles with Philip, king of France.¹ This was in 1203. The costs he had incurred in this war had to be met, and he taxed the English people a seventh of the value of their possessions.² This was not enough to defray his expenses, so he levied another tax and still a third before becoming satisfied.

In 1205 he was arranging an expedition to take to the continent with him for the purpose of recovering his lost possessions there. He wanted to recover Normandy, and, moreover, revenge himself upon Philip. For this purpose he had assembled an army at Portsmouth, and was ready to embark, when he encountered the stubborn opposition of Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, and William Mareschall, Earl of Pembroke.

¹ Wendover, 2-208.

² Wendover, 2-208; Worcester, 311.

This opposition was so strong, so powerful, and so decided, that John was compelled to abandon the enterprise. This was the first direct and outward sign of opposition and hostility manifested toward him. He divined in the Primate's action the influence of the Church, and in that of Pembroke the dissatisfaction of the barons. He had now been king but four years, and in that time had levied as many heavy and excessive taxations. Shortly after he had completely abandoned this foreign enterprise the Archbishop of Canterbury died,¹ and John saw here a chance to renew the campaign, and to win his point. Through his influence, he had John de Grey, Bishop of Norwich,² elected Archbishop of Canterbury, solely because he could control him, and secure his influence with the clergy and nobles, to help him equip his army for France. But, however, the monks had previously elected, though secretly, one Regi-

¹ Wendover, 2-215 ; Westminster, 2-102.

² Wendover, 2-217 ; Westminster, 2-103.

nald,¹ subprior of the convent of Canterbury, for Archbishop, and the rival claimants appealed their cause to Rome. When this question was brought before Innocent III., he quashed the election of both of them,² and compelled the monks sent to him on behalf of the claimants, to elect at once, Cardinal Stephen Langton,³ as Archbishop; and he sent him the pall. John was not consulted nor asked in any way concerning this election. It was done by the Pope of his own desire, and was, no doubt, a very great usurpation of authority, and one he had no right to assume. But he did it nevertheless. While Langton was Cardinal he was, of course, well known to Innocent, and Innocent knew him to be capable, worthy, and efficient, and a model of patriotism and ability. The wisdom of his choice cannot be disputed, and by it Innocent exhibited a full appreciation of the conditions of the church,

¹ Wendover, 2-215; Westminster, 2-102.

² Worcester, 312; Wendover, 2-237; Westminster, 2-106.

³ Wendover, 2-238; Westminster, 2-106; Worcester, 312.

and a knowledge of the character of the man. History confirms the choice in every way as right, and good. Although this was very mortifying and humiliating to John, Langton proved a better friend to him than he deserved, for he was, on more than one occasion, the means of saving to him his throne. John met the election, of course, with great anger. He resisted it, and refused Langton his see.¹ When the Pope learned of this he replied to John that he would lay all England under an interdict² if any resistance were shown Langton, and if he opposed him in the occupation of his office. John replied to this, that he would in turn banish all the clergy from England, and mutilate every Italian³ he could lay his hands on. Innocent, however, was not a man to be cowed by John, nor his threats; and at last the interdict went forth.⁴ He prohibited worship in

¹ Wendover, 2-241.

² Wendover, 2-245.

³ Wendover, 2-246.

⁴ Wendover, 2-246; Westminster, 2-107; Worcester,

all the churches, and prohibited the administration of the sacraments, excepting to the clergy themselves. The bells of the churches were not rung, and the dead were refused Christian burial. Baptism was the only sacrament that the clergy were allowed to perform.¹ This interdict went forth March 23, 1207. To meet this, John confiscated the lands of the clergy,² allowed all sorts of indignities, as well as crimes perpetrated upon them to go unpunished. It is even said he refused to punish those who murdered the priests, on the grounds that they had killed his enemies.³ At last the Pope formally excommunicated John,⁴ but even this did not phase him. He continued as of old. In some ways he held his ground. The Church formally against him, in nearly all the power it could command; with the barons opposed to him in all their strength, it is surprising he held out so long. The

¹Wendover, 2-246.

²Wendover, 2-246; Westminster, 2-108.

³Wendover, 2-247.

⁴Wendover, 2-250; Worcester, 314.

Pope had now but one resource. John he had excommunicated November, 1209, so, according to the laws of the Church, he was no longer a Christian, and a heathen king had no right to rule over a Christian land.

The barons and clergy were during all this time becoming tired of the turmoil. The clergy especially were disgusted. The country was still under the interdict, no churches open, no religious offices being performed at all, saving those of baptism. At last they drew up a strong remonstrance against the acts of John, and sent it to the Pope, praying him to do something, to exert his power still further, to put an end to the strife. So Innocent exerted the last measure of power he could command. He solemnly deposed John¹ in 1213, and absolved all and every one from their oaths of fealty to him. He also exhorted and commanded that all of the church and laity should unite themselves in a body and dethrone John, who was more of "a monster than a man." John for a time met

¹ Wendover, 2-259; Westminster, 2-114.

this with disdain, sailed for France, and destroyed the French ships assembled there, and was laying his plans with the German King Otto to act with him for the invasion of France. While thus occupied, his barons were also engaged in a conspiracy with the Scotch king for the purpose of overthrowing John's authority and power. In this they would have succeeded had not John realized the danger of his position and fortified himself in Nottingham castle.

John was now at war with the church, with his barons, with Wales, with France, and with Scotland, and he awoke at last to the uselessness of trying to fight them all at once. Realizing his condition, he now negotiated with the Pope, promising to receive Langton as Archbishop, acknowledge the Pope's authority, and hold himself as his vassal, and also to repay all the money he had taken from the church, and to return the lands, if the Pope would recognize him as king, and restore the religious houses to their accustomed functions. He also promised the

Pope to grant a charter to the church decreeing that elections should from thence be free and uncontrolled by the crown, if the Pope would use his power and influence to quell the barons. To this the Pope replied by sending Pandulph, his confidential Nuncio, to meet John. They met at Dover May 13, 1213,¹ and there arranged their differences satisfactorily. John resigned his throne to the Pope,² doing him great homage through Pandulph, and then acknowledging that he held his throne as the vassal of the Pope. In turn the interdict was raised,³ John restored to his Christian offices, and Philip was ordered to desist from further warfare.⁴ John then later, on January 15, 1214, issued his charter to the church, in which it is decreed that all elections of ecclesiastical persons shall be free from the influence and control of the crown. (See Part 2 for charter.)

¹ Wendover, 2-263. Westminster, 2-116.

² Wendover, 2-268.

³ Westminster, 2-119; Wendover, 2-297.

⁴ Wendover, 2-271.

With the barons, however, the Pope met a decided opposition. He advised them to renew their allegiance to John and do him homage, but they did not do so. This position in which John now found himself—a vassal—he considered was due and owing entirely and solely to his barons, and it humiliated him. Had they supported him, he would have won his cause against the Pope. It angered him to know he could not count on them for anything under any circumstances, and he determined to revenge himself upon them so soon as he might. But this revenge cost him dearly, for it is one of the important factors which hastened the granting of the Magna Charta. The nobles now more than ever despised their king. They called him the "Pope's man," and twitted him whenever they could. Moreover, seeing how easily John had capitulated, they banded themselves together openly and defiantly against him, determined to redress for themselves those wrongs they had suffered, and to demand and receive reparation for

them in the form of their total abolishment, and the granting of just laws in their stead. John now went with his army to Poitou to meet the French army, which had originally been raised for the purpose of invading England. Philip did not take kindly to the Pope's orders to discontinue any further preparation for invading England. He had spent much money in equipping the army, and he wanted to get it back again, so being prevented from attacking England he determined to attack Flanders.¹ John and his army, together with his ally, the Emperor of Germany, met Philip in battle at Bovines on July 27, 1214, and was badly defeated.² After this defeat John returned to England completely beaten, of sore heart, and with no further thought of ever regaining any of the dominions he had formerly held on the continent.

¹ Wendover, 2-272.

² Wendover, 2-302 ; Westminster, 2-120.