



The curse of Ernulphus

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The Curse of Ernulphus

LITERATURE, from the days of Hammurabi to the present, is littered with curses. Lengthy imprecations are found in the Bible, and in the works of Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, and of countless others. The late Professor Wilbur Owen Sypherd, of the University of Delaware, compiled an anthology of maledictions, the list of contents of which I have been privileged to see through the kindness of the Librarian of that University. It is an impressive list and I should have thought some publisher would find it worth his while to issue this anthology — many far less interesting are constantly appearing.

In the Middle Ages curses abound in the works of Beowulf, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Guillaume de Machaut, and many others, while excommunications and maledictions form a considerable part of ecclesiastical *regesta* of that era. Among the better known of these is 'The Curse of Ernulphus,' so-called because it is found in the *Textus Roffensis*, a manuscript traditionally said to have been written by Ernulf, Bishop of Rochester (1114-24), but now generally believed to have been merely compiled at his request or at least during his time. That learned and beloved prelate was not known to his contemporaries as a man of wrath, and how it happens that he should be remembered today mainly as the author of an anathema that he probably did not write is the subject of this note.

At the height of the Popish Plot, when dozens of pamphlets and broadsides were published every week, Langly Curtis, a bookseller of Ludgate Hill who specialized in inflammatory publications (for some of which he was pilloried and fined), issued a broadsheet entitled 'The Pope's Dreadfull Curse. Being The Form of Excommunication of the Church of *Rome*. Taken out of the Leger-Book of the Church of *Rochester* now in the Custody of the Dean and Chapter there. Writ by *Ernulfus* the Bishop.' The imprint is 'London, Printed and are to be sold by L. C. on *Ludgate-Hill*, 1681,' and at the end is printed 'The Publication of this is to shew what is to be Expected from the Pope, if he come to be Supream Head of the Church in this Nation.'

Only one copy of that broadsheet can now be traced. It is in the British Museum, and is probably the copy from which the text was

(1)

THE
P O P E S
D R E A D F U L
C U R S E.

BEING
 The FORM of an EXCOMMUNICATION
 OF THE
C H U R C H
 OF
R O M E.

Taken out of the Leger-Book of the Church of *Rochester*, now
 in the Custody of the Dean and Chapter there. Writ by
 **Arnulfus* the Bishop.

* This said
 Arnulfus was
 Bishop of Ro-
 chester Anno
 1114, being
 near this pre-
 sent Year
 1627, for
 hundred sixty
 seven Years

BY the Authority of God Almighty the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
 and of the holy Canons, and of the undefiled Virgin *Mary*, the Mo-
 ther and Patroness of our Saviour, and of all the Celestiall Virtues, An-
 gels, Arch-Angels, Thrones, Dominions, Powers, Cherubims and Seraphims, and
 of the holy Patriarchs, Prophets, and of all the Apostles and Evangelists, and of the
 holy Innocents, who in the sight of the Holy Lamb are found worthy to sing
 the new Song, and of the holy Martyrs and holy Confessors, and of the holy
 Virgins, and of all the Saints, and together with all the holy and Elect of
 God: We Excommunicate and Anathematize him or them; Maledictor or
 Maledictors, and from the Thresholds of the holy Church of God Almighty
 We sequester them; that he or they may be tormented, disposed and delivered
 over with *Dathan* and *Abiram*, and with those who lay imbrue the Lord God,
 Depart from us, We know not thy ways. And as Fire is quenched with Water,
 so let the light of him or them be put out for evermore, unless it shall repent
 him or them; and make Satisfaction. Amen.

May

(2)

May the Father who Created Man Curse him or them. May the Son who
 Suffered for us, Curse him or them. May the Holy Ghost who was given to
 us in Baptisme; Curse him or them. May the holy Crook whom Christ for our
 Salvation Triumphant over his Enemy ascended, Curse him or them. May the
 Holy and Eternal Virgin *Mary*-Medice of God, Curse him or them. May *St.*
Michael the Advocate of holy Souls, Curse him or them. May all the Angels
 and Archangels; Principalties and Powers, and all the heavenly Host, Curse him
 or them. May the Laudable Number of the Patriarchs and Prophets, Curse
 him or them. May *St. John* the Chief Disciple and Baptist of Christ, Curse
 him or them. May *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*, and *St. Andrew*, and all other Christs
 Apostles, together with the rest of the Disciples and the 12th Evangelists, who
 by their Preaching converted the Universal World, Curse him or them. May
 the holy and wonderfull Company of Martyrs and Confessors, who by their holy
 Works are found pleasing to God Almighty, Curse him or them. May the ho-
 ly Quire of the holy Virgins who for the Honour of Christ have despised the
 things of the World, Curse him or them. May all the Saints who from the
 beginning of the World to Everlasting Ages are found to be the beloved of God
 Curse him or them. May the Heavens and Earth, and all the holy Things re-
 maining therein, Curse him or them. May him or them be Cursed whereever
 he or they be, whether in their House or in their Field, or in the Highway or
 in the Path, or in the Wood, or in the Water, or in the Church. May him or
 them be Cursed in Living, in Dying, in Eating, in Drinking, in being Hungry,
 in being Thirsty, in Falling, in Sleeping, in Slumbering, in Waking, in Walking,
 in Standing, in Sitting, in Lying, in Working, in Resting, in Pissing, in Shitting,
 in Blood-letting: May he or they be Cursed in all the Faculties of their Body.
 May him or them be Cursed inwardly and outwardly. May he or they be
 Cursed in the hair of his or their head. May he or they be Cursed in his or
 their Brain. May he or they be Cursed in the top of his or their Head, in
 their Temples, in their Forehead, in their Ears, in their Eye-brows, in their
 Cheeks, in their Jaw-bones, in their Nostils, in their fore-Teeth or Grinders,
 in their Lips, in their Throat, in their Shoulders, in their Wrists, in their Arms,
 in their Hands, in their Fingers, in their Breast, in their Heart, and in all the
 interior parts to the very Stomach. In their Reins, in the Groins, in the
 Thighs, in the Genitals, in the Hips, in the Knees, in the Legs, in the Feet,
 in the Joynts, and in the Navle. May he or they be Cursed in all their Joynts,
 from the top of the Head, to the sole of the Foot. May there not be any
 Soundness in him or them.
 May the Son of the Living God with all the Glory of his Majesty, Curse
 him or them; and may Heaven with all the Powers which move therein, rise
 against him or them to Damn him or them, unless it shall repent him or them,
 or that he or they shall make Satisfaction. Amen. Amen. So be it.

THE Publication of this is to show what is to be Expected from the Pope, if
 he come to be Supreme Head of the Church in this Nation.

Reprinted for Joseph Howes Bookseller, in Castle Street, Dublin, 1682.

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uirginū atq; omniū simul scōꝝ &
electoꝝ dei. Excommunicamus & ana-
thematisamus. hunc furem. uel
hunc malefactorem. N. & a limini-
bus scē dei ecclie sequestramus. ut
æternis suppliciis cruciandus man-

TEXTUS ROFFENSIS, FOL. 98r

spectu agni soli digni inventi sunt canticum
cantare novum, & sanctorum Martyrum, &
sanctorum Confessorum, & sanctarum Virgi-
num, atque omnium simul sanctorum & electo-
rum Dei, Excommunicamus & anathematiza-
mus hunc furem, vel hunc malefactorem, N.

Textus Roffensis, ED. HILARNE, P. 55

num, atque omnium simul sanctorum et
electorum Dei, — Excommunicamus, et
anathematizamus hunc furem, vel hunc
malefactorem, N. N. et a liminibus sanctæ
Dei ecclesiæ sequestramus et æternis

Tristram Shandy, VOL. III, LONDON, 1761, P. 40

printed in *The Harleian Miscellany*, VI (London, 1745), 493-494. Recently, among the books bequeathed to Harvard by Lee M. Friedman, there was found a copy of another edition, with the imprint 'Reprinted for Joseph Howes Bookseller in Castle-street, Dublin. 1681' (see Plate I). The *Gentleman's Magazine* (September, 1745, p. 490) reprinted the text from *The Harleian Miscellany* without acknowledgment, and it is possible that other magazines or newspapers likewise copied it. In the winter of 1760-61, when Laurence Sterne was writing the third volume of *Tristram Shandy* and came to the episode where Dr Slop cuts his thumb when untying his bag of instruments and curses his servant Obadiah for having tied it in such a way, he evidently remembered having read 'The Curse of Ernulphus' and determined to introduce it into his book.

It is obviously not a matter of any importance whether Sterne obtained the text from *The Harleian Miscellany* or the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but the evidence appears to point to the latter, for the 1681 broadsheet editions and *The Harleian Miscellany* spell the bishop's name 'Ernulfus,' whereas the *Gentleman's Magazine* and Sterne spell it 'Ernulphus.' Moreover, *The Harleian Miscellany* describes the original London edition, giving the imprint, as 'Folio, containing two Pages,' whereas the *Gentleman's Magazine* does not date or describe it at all. If Sterne had used *The Harleian Miscellany* he would not have needed to say that Mr Shandy had 'procured' a copy — presumably a manuscript copy — 'out of the leger-book of the church of *Rochester*.' This he had done out of veneration for 'that gentleman, who, in distrust of his own discretion in this point, sat down and composed (that is at his leisure) fit forms of swearing suitable to all cases,' which 'he kept . . . ever by him on the chimney piece, within his reach, ready for use.' (*Tristram Shandy*, III, London, 1761, 34-35.)

That Sterne should have remembered this piece for fifteen years is not particularly remarkable, since when it appeared in both the miscellany and the magazine Sterne was evidently employed by his uncle, the Archdeacon, in hunting out Jacobites and writing squibs against them. His violent anti-Roman feelings, which caused him to caricature Dr Burton as the Catholic Dr Slop, are well known.¹ The 1681 statement concerning the reason for printing this piece, quoted above, was repeated in both the 1745 reprints.

¹ See Wilbur L. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn., 1929), pp. 79 and 86-88.

Sterne printed the English text, with a number of slight alterations to heighten the effect and even more interpolations to fit it to the story, and also included the original Latin with a footnote that reads (III, 36): 'As the genuineness of the consultation of the *Sorbonne* upon the question of baptism [which appears in *Tristram Shandy*, I, York, 1760, 134-139], was doubted by some, and denied by others, — 'twas thought proper to print the original of this excommunication; for the copy of which Mr. *Shandy* returns thanks to the chapter clerk of the dean and chapter of *Rockester*.' This Latin text he obtained from Thomas Hearne's edition of the *Textus Roffensis*, Oxford, 1720, pp. 55-58, and not, as Professor Cross has stated,² from *The Harleian Miscellany*, which does not include it. He copied it with considerable care, as may be seen by the reproductions given in Plate II, the first being from the facsimile of the *Textus Roffensis*, Part I, as edited by Peter Sawyer (*Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*, VII; Copenhagen, 1957), fol. 98r; the second from *Textus Roffensis*, ed. Hearne (Oxford, 1720), p. 55; and the third from the first edition of *Tristram Shandy*, III (London, 1761), 40.

WILLIAM A. JACKSON

² *Laurence Sterne*, p. 270. Neither *The Harleian Miscellany* nor Hearne's *Textus Roffensis* is included in the sale catalogue of Sterne's library (see *A Facsimile Reproduction of a Unique Catalogue of Laurence Sterne's Library with a Preface by Charles Whibley*, London, 1930), but the Hearne was available to him, in a large-paper copy, at the Minster Library in York. The 'unique' copy of the Sterne catalogue is now in Lord Rothschild's library; another is in the remarkable Sterne collection of J. C. T. Oates.

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