
KING JAMES I

1566–1625

James Stuart (the sixth king of that name in Scotland, the first in England) had an itch to be writing as well as governing. He wrote a good deal of Scots verse, a denunciation of tobacco, and an essay upholding belief in witches, besides a treatise on government. *The True Law of Free Monarchies* was composed just five years before he became heir to the English throne, by the death of his cousin Elizabeth Tudor. James's point in this treatise is clear and simple; he proposes that the king can do absolutely anything he wants, and nobody can criticize him. Naturally, this elegant argument is framed primarily in analogies and metaphors; naturally also, James slips, now and again, from regular English into a locution from his native Scots.

From The True Law of Free Monarchies

[THE NATURAL NECESSITY OF ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE]

* * *

And the agreement of the law of nature in this our ground with the laws and constitutions of God and man already alleged will be two similitudes easily appear. The king towards his people is rightly compared to a father of children, and to a head of a body composed of divers members. For as fathers the good princes and magistrates of the people of God acknowledged themselves to their subjects. And for all other well-ruled commonwealths, the style of *Pater patriae* (father of his country) was ever and is commonly used to kings. And the proper office of a king towards his subjects agrees very well with the office of the head towards the body and all members thereof. For from the head, being the seat of judgment, proceed eth the care and foresight of guiding and preventing all evil that may come to the body or any part thereof. The head cares for the body, so doth the king for his people. As the discourse and direction flows from the head, and the execution according thereunto belongs to the rest of the members, every one according to their office: so is it betwixt a wise prince and his people. As the judgment coming from the head may not only employ the members, every one in their own office, as long as they are able for it; but likewise in case any of them affected with any infirmity must care and provide for their remedy, in case it be curable, and if otherwise gar¹ cut them off for fear of infecting the rest: even so is it betwixt the prince and his people. And as there is ever hope of curing any diseased member by the direction of the head, as long as it is whole; but by the contrary, if it be troubled, all the members are partakers of that pain, so is it betwixt the prince and his people.

And now first of the father's part (whose natural love to his children I described in the first part of this my discourse, speaking of the duty that kings owe to their subjects), consider, I pray you, what duty his children owe to him, and whether upon any pretext whatever it will not be thought monstrous and

1. Have someone (a Scots locution).

unnatural for his sons to rise up against him, to control him at their appetite, and when they think good to slay him, or to cut him off, and adopt to themselves any other they please in his room. Or can any pretense of wickedness or rigor on his part be a just excuse for his children to put hand into him? And although we see by the course of nature that love useth to descend more than to ascend, in case it were true that the father hated and wronged the children never so much, will any man endued with the least sponk² of reason think it lawful for them to meet him with the line? Yea, suppose the father were furiously following his sons with a drawn sword, is it lawful for them to turn and strike again, or make any resistance but by flight? I think surely if there were no more but the example of brute beasts and unreasonable creatures, it may serve well enough to qualify and prove this my argument. We read often the piety that the storks have to their old and decayed parents: and generally we know that there are many sorts of beasts and fowls that with violence and many bloody strokes will beat and banish their young ones from them, how soon they perceive them to be able to fend themselves; but we never read nor heard of any resistance on their part, except among the vipers; which proves such persons as ought to be reasonable creatures, and yet unnaturally follow this example, to be endued with their viperous nature.

And for the similitude of the head and the body, it may very well fall out that the head will be forced to gar cut off some rotten member (as I have already said) to keep the rest of the body in integrity: but what state the body can be in, if the head for any infirmity that can fall to it be cut off, I leave it to the reader's judgment.

So as (to conclude this part) if the children may upon any pretext that can be imagined lawfully rise up against their father, cut him off, and choose any other whom they please in his room; and if the body for the weal of it may for an infirmity that may be in the head strike it off, then I cannot deny that the people may rebel, control and displace, or cut off their king, at their own pleasure, and upon respects moving them. * * *

2. Spunk, spark.