

JAMES I (r.1603-1625)

Accession speech to Parliament, 19 March 1603: Extracts on peace, the Union of the English and Scottish kingdoms and kingship.

On peace

I resolve to call this Parliament ... That you who are here presently assembled to represent the body of this whole Kingdom, and of all sorts of people within the same, may with your own ears hear, and that I out of mine own mouth may deliver unto you the assurance of my due thankfulness for your joyful and general applause to the declaring and receiving of me in this seat (which God by my birthright and lineal descent had in the fullness of time provided for me,) and that, immediately after it pleased God to call your late Sovereign of famous memory, full of days, but fuller of immortal trophies of honour, out of this transitory life ...

It is the blessings which God has in my person bestowed upon you all, wherein I protest I do more glory at the same for your weal, than for any particular respect of mine own reputation or advantage therein ... The first then of these blessings, which God has jointly with my person sent unto you, is outward peace, That is, peace abroad with all foreign neighbours: for I thank God I may justly say, that never since I was a King I either received wrong of any other Christian Prince or State, or did wrong to any. I have ever, I praise God, yet kept peace and amity with all ... for by peace abroad with their neighbours the towns flourish, the merchants become rich, the trade does increase, and the people of all sorts of the land enjoy free liberty to exercise themselves in their general vocations without peril or disturbance ... In the word of a King I promise unto you, That I shall never give the first occasion of the breach thereof, neither shall I ever be moved for any particular or private passion of mind to interrupt your public peace, except I be forced thereunto, either for reparation of the honour of the Kingdom, or else by necessity for the weal and preservation of the same, in which case, a secure and honourable war must be preferred to an unsecure and dishonourable Peace ...

On the Union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland

Although outward peace be a great blessing, yet is it far inferior to peace within, as civil wars are more cruel and unnatural than wars abroad. And therefore the second great blessing that God has with my person sent unto you, is peace within, and that in a double form. First, by my descent, lineally out of the loins of Henry VII, is reunited and confirmed in me the union of the two princely roses of the two houses of Lancaster and York, whereof that King of happy memory was the first uniter, as he was also the first ground-layer of the other peace ...

But the union of these two princely houses is nothing comparable to the union of two ancient and famous kingdoms, which is the other inward peace annexed to my person ... Has not God first united these two kingdoms, both in language, religion, and similitude of manners? Yes, has he not made us all in one island, compassed with one sea, and of itself by nature so indivisible, as

II
HISTORIC ROYAL SPEECHES AND WRITINGS

almost those that were borderers themselves on the late borders, cannot distinguish nor know or discern their own limits? These two Countries being separated neither by sea, nor great river, mountain, nor other strength of nature ...

And now in the end and fullness of time untied, the right and title of both in my person, alike lineally descended of both the Crowns, whereby it is now become like a little world within itself, being entrenched and fortified round about with a natural, and yet admirable strong pond or ditch, whereby all the former fears of this nation are now quite cut off: The other part of the island being ever before now, not only the place of landing to all strangers that were to make invasion here, but likewise moved by the enemies of this State, by untimely incursions, to make enforced diversion from their conquests, for defending themselves at home, and keeping sure their back door, as then it was called, which was the greatest hindrance and let that ever my predecessors of the nation had in disturbing them from their many famous and glorious conquests abroad. What God has conjoined then, let no man separate ...

On kingship

I do acknowledge, that the special and greatest point of difference that is between a rightful king and an usurping tyrant is in this: That whereas the proud and ambitious tyrant does think his kingdom and people are only ordained for satisfaction of his desires and unreasonable appetites; The righteous and just king does by the contrary acknowledge himself to be ordained for the procuring of the wealth and prosperity of his people, and that his greatest and principal worldly felicity must consist in their prosperity. If you be rich I cannot be poor: if you be happy I cannot but be fortunate: and I protest that your welfare shall ever be my greatest care and contentment: and that I am a servant it is most true, that as I am Head and Governor of all the people in my Dominion who are my natural vassals and subjects, considering them in numbers and distinct ranks; So if we will take the whole people as one body and mass, then as the head is ordained for the body, and not the body for the head; so must a righteous king know himself to be ordained for his people, and not his people for him.

Speech in Parliament, 1605

Extracts on the Gunpowder Plot and the nature of Parliament:

On the Gunpowder Plot

In this [plot], which did so lately fall out, and which was a destruction prepared not for me alone, but for you all that are here present, and wherein no rank, age, nor sex should have been spared; this was not a crying sin of blood ... it may well be called a roaring, nay a thundering sin of fire and brimstone, from the which God has so miraculously delivered us all ...

... The horrible and fearful cruelty of their device, which was not only for the destruction of my person ... but of the whole body of the State in general; wherein should neither have been spared, or distinction made of young or of old, of great nor of small, of man nor of woman; the whole nobility, the whole

III
HISTORIC ROYAL SPEECHES AND WRITINGS

reverend clergy, bishops and most part of the good preachers, the most part of knights and gentry ... The whole judges of the land, with the most of the lawyers and the whole clerks: And as the wretch himself that is in the Tower does confess, it was purposely devised by them, and concluded to be done in this House; that where the cruel laws (as they say) were made against their religion, both place and persons should all be destroyed and blown up at once.

As it may very well be possible that the zeal of your hearts shall make some of you in your speeches rashly to blame such as may be innocent of this attempt; but upon the other part I wish you to consider, That I would sorry that any being innocent of this practice, either domestic or foreign, should receive blame or harm for the same. For although it cannot be denied, That it was the only blind superstition of their errors in religion, that led them to this desperate devise; yet does it not follow, that all professing that Romish religion were guilty of the same ...

On the nature of Parliament

As to the nature of this high court of Parliament, It is nothing else but the King's great Council, which the King does assemble either upon occasion of interpreting, or abrogating old laws, or making of new, according as ill manners shall deserve, or for the public punishment of notorious evildoers, or the praise and reward of the virtuous and well deservers ...

As for the thing itself, it is composed of a head and a body: the head is the King, the body are the members of the Parliament. This body again is subdivided into two parts; the Upper and Lower House: the Upper compounded partly of nobility, temporal men, who are heritable Councillors to the high court of Parliament by the honour of their creation and lands: and partly of bishops, spiritual men, who are likewise by the virtue of their place and dignity Councillors ... of this court. The other House is composed of knights for the shire; and gentry, and burgesses for the towns. But because the number would be infinite for all the gentlemen and burgesses to be present at every Parliament, Therefore a certain number is selected and chosen out of that great body, serving only for that Parliament, where their persons are the representation of that body.

Now the matters whereof they are to treat ought therefore to be general, and rather of such matters as cannot well be performed without the assembling of that general body ... the life and strength of the law consist not in heaping up infinite and confused numbers of laws, but in the right interpretation and good execution of good and wholesome laws. If this be so then, neither is this a place on the one side for every rash and harebrained fellow to propose new laws of his own invention ... so wary should men be of proposing any bitter or seditious laws, which can produce nothing but grudges and discontentment between the Prince and his people: nor yet is it on the other side a convenient place for private men under the colour of general laws, to propose nothing but their own particular gain, either to the hurt of their private neighbours, or to the hurt of the whole State in general ...

You must remember, that you are here assembled by your lawful King to give him your best advice, in the matters proposed by him unto you ... wherein you are gravely to deliberate, and upon your consciences plainly to determine how far those things propounded do agree with the weal, both of your King and of your country, whose weals cannot be separated ... I never shall propose anything unto you, which shall not as well tend to the weal public, as to any benefit for me ... so it is on your part your duties to propose anything that you can after mature deliberation judge to be needful, either for these ends already spoken of, or otherwise for the discovery of any latent evil in the kingdom, which peradventure may not have come to the King's ear. If this then ought to be your grave manner of proceeding in this place, men should be ashamed to make show of the quickness of their wits here, either in taunting, scoffing, or detracting the Prince or State in any point, or yet in breaking jests upon their fellows, for which the ... alehouses are fitter places, than this honourable and high court of Parliament.

Extract from a speech to Parliament, 21 March 1609

The divine right of kings

The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth ... Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth. For if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king. God has power to create, or destroy, make, or unmake at his pleasure, to give life, or send death, to judge all, and to be judged nor accountable to none: to raise low things, and to make high things low at his pleasure, and to God are both soul and body due. And the like power have Kings; they make and unmake their subjects: they have power of raising, and casting down: of life, and of death: judges over all their subjects, and in all causes, and yet accountable to none but God only.

Now in these our times we are to distinguish between the state of kings in their first original, and between the state of kings and monarchs, that do at this time govern in civil kingdoms ... In the first original of kings, whereof some had their beginning by conquest, and some by election of the people, their wills at that time served for law; Yet how soon kingdoms began to be settled in civility and policy, then did kings set down their minds by laws ... And I am sure to go to my grave with that reputation and comfort, that never king was in all his time more careful to have his laws duly observed, and himself to govern thereafter, than I.

I conclude then this point touching the power of kings, with this axiom of divinity, that as to dispute what God may do, is blasphemy ... so is it sedition in subjects, to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power: But just kings will ever be willing to declare what they will do, if they will not incur the curse of God. I will not be content that my power be disputed upon: but I shall ever be willing to make the reason appear of all my doings, and rule my actions according to my laws ... Therefore all kings that are not tyrants, or perjured, will be glad to bound themselves within the limits of their laws; and they that persuade them the contrary, are vipers, and pests, both against them and the Commonwealth.

Opening address at the Hampton Court Conference, January 1604

It is no novel device, but according to the example of all Christian princes, for Kings to take the first course for the establishing of the Church both in doctrine and policy. To this the very heathen related in their proverb a Jove principium. Particularly in this land, King Henry VIII towards to the end of his reign altered much, King Edward VI more, Queen Mary reversed all, and lastly Queen Elizabeth (of famous memory) settled religion as it now standeth. Herein I am happier than they, because they were fain to alter all things they found established, whereas I see yet no such cause to change as confirm what I find settled already.

For blessed be God's gracious goodness, who hath brought me into the Promised Land where religion is purely professed, where I sit among grave, learned and revered men, not as before, elsewhere, a King without state, without honour, where beardless boys would brave us to the face.

... I assure you we have not called this assembly for any innovation, for we acknowledge the government ecclesiastical as it now is, to have been approved by manifold blessings from God himself, both for the increase of the Gospel, and with a most happy and glorious peace. Yet because nothing can be so absolutely ordered, but something may be added thereunto, and corruption in any state (as in the body of man) will insensibly grow, either through time or persons, and because we have received many complaints, since our first entrance into this kingdom, of many disorders, and much disobedience to the laws, with a great falling away to popery; our purpose therefore is, like a good physician, to examine and try the complaints, and fully to remove the occasions thereof, if scandalous; cure them, if dangerous; and take knowledge of them, if but frivolous, thereby to cast a sop into Cerberus's mouth that he bark no more ...