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Charles L. Hamilton
University of Mississippi

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In comparing William Drummond of Hawthornden with Montrose, David Masson implies that the two Scots held similar ideas concerning the origins of political obligation. Drummond is described as a theoretical Montrose—a scholarly counterpart of the incredible Scottish paladin.[1] On the surface, there is little justification for Masson's view. Drummond was an adherent of the intellectually fashionable doctrine of the divine right of kings. Montrose, as John Buchan reminds us, believed in the existence of higher laws which limited the exercise of political power.[2] To Montrose the constitution of a country placed the sovereign power in the hands of one agent—in England and Scotland the king—who could be legally resisted if this was necessary to prevent the growth of tyranny. Thus Montrose fought with distinction for the Scottish Covenanters in the Bishops' Wars (1639-40) against Charles I. He became a royalist only when, in his opinion, the extreme Covenanters began to attack the legal powers of the King in Scotland in order to supplant the more apparent than real absolutism of the Stuarts with what promised to be an extremely efficient dictatorship of the Marquis of Argyll aided by the disciplinary machinery of the Scottish Kirk.

Montrose's views on politics, therefore, bound him to no form of government, whereas Drummond's theories compelled him to argue that monarchy was instituted by God and that the duty of the subject was complete obedience to the divinely appointed king.[3] Yet Drummond shied away from equating divine right with royal absolutism and, by his hesitancy, is less at odds with Montrose than might appear.

One factor which violated the logical simplicity of Drummond's political theory was his own sense of justice. During the meeting of the Scottish Parliament of 1633, a group of those who opposed Charles I's religious policy drew up a petition or supplication which they intended to present to the King. Despite the fact that the petition was never formally submitted to Charles, the crown instituted legal proceedings against one of the men associated with the protestation, John Elphinstone, Lord Balmerino, and he was duly tried and convicted of treason. Although he was spared the death penalty and ultimately pardoned, Balmerino was imprisoned for a time and his treatment by the King attracted considerable notice in Scotland, for his stand against the growing Arminian element in the Church of Scotland was relatively popular. Just prior to Balmerino's trial, Drummond wrote a paper dealing with the affair.[4] He argued that subjects had the right to petition the King, even on matters in which they disagreed with the sovereign. Furthermore, Drummond implied that some of the King's policies in Scotland—or those administered in his name—were actually oppressive and that the King would do well to heed those who were simply trying to tell him of his duty. It was at this time that Drummond made his pointed suggestion to Charles that he should read George Buchanan's *De Jure Regni apud Scotos,* a work in which the famous Renaissance Latinist had argued that political authority was derived from the consent of the governed.

An even more forceful argument for limiting the king's power, so Drummond argued, was expediency. In the Balmerino affair he warned Charles against making martyrs of every one who talked or wrote against his regime. The same idea, that on occasions the prudent king places self-imposed restrictions on his legally unlimited powers, appears in *Irene,* Drummond's most famous political work. Written in response to a proclamation of the King issued on September 22, 1638, in which Charles agreed to many of the Covenanters' demands in Scotland, *Irene* praised the King's action, for Drummond believed it would bring peace. Again, toward the end of the work,

Drummond urged the King to show mercy to those who had openly defied royal authority in Scotland. After all, some of the royal policies were unwise and some of the actions of the King's servants were censurable. In these circumstances a wise prince would curb his powers and show mercy in order to regain the love of his subjects and to avoid civil strife.[5]

Conversely, Drummond used expediency as an argument for encouraging subjects to obey their prince. If opposition to a monarch brought on civil war, who gained? In *Irene,* Drummond reminded his readers of the tragic state of Germany.[6] On another occasion, when discussing the struggle between the King and the Covenanters in Scotland over religious questions, he asked whether episcopacy, which lay at the heart of Charles' policy, was to be dreaded more than the civil war which the opposition of the Covenanters was certain to bring.[7] Again in *Irene,* Drummond warned the opponents of the King in Scotland that their struggle against Charles would breed social anarchy.[8] Keeping in mind the conservative Covenanting leaders, he stated that to challenge the prince's authority would encourage servants to question their masters, wives their husbands, and children their parents. It was not only unjust, but foolhardy, for the Scottish nobility, whose position the monarchy helped to sustain, to question the authority of the King.

In his now classical discussion of the divine right of kings, John Neville Figgis argued that the divine right theory was often used to counter the claims of other institutions to absolute obedience, in particular to oppose the claims of the clergy—either Protestant or Roman Catholic—to supremacy over the monarchy.[9] This seems to be true of Drummond. During the years in which he wrote his most important works on political theory, Drummond lived in a country in which the clergy successfully exercised a great deal of power for political and moral coercion. Politicians who crossed swords with the Kirk and its political allies, as Montrose did, brought down on themselves the fury of the preachers and the official excommunication of the

Church. An example of the Kirk's interference in political affairs occurred in January, 1643, when the Commissioners of the General Assembly, an executive body which acted in the name of the Church from one General Assembly to the next, condemned a petition drawn up by the Duke of Hamilton urging Scotland to come to the aid of Charles I, then embroiled in civil war in England. Hamilton and his adherents claimed that Scotland had sworn to uphold Charles in the National Covenant of 1638. In answer to Hamilton, the Kirk commissioners issued a petition which attacked Hamilton's action and which indicated that the loyalty of Hamilton and his associates to the Covenant was doubtful. Furthermore, the Commissioners required every minister to read their petition from the pulpit. Even some of the clergy protested against the Commissioners' action, stating that they had no warrant for compelling uniformity on political matters.[10] For Drummond the action of the Commissioners was a supreme act of clerical arrogance, and in *Skiamachia* he reviled the Scottish clergy, comparing their actions with those of the Inquisition in Spain.[11] Masson, in commenting on Drummond's outbust, writes that he had become "universally and indiscriminately, a clergy-hater."[12]

If Drummond's fierce anti-clericalism was the basis for his theory of divine right of kings, then he is not really inconsistent in limiting the sovereign's limitless power. To counter the claims of priest or presbyter to complete obedience, Drummond exalted the king, but as the prince would often undermine his position by exercising his full powers, the Laird of Hawthornden advised him to act with prudence toward his subjects, listening to those who respectfully opposed him and tempering justice with clemency in dealing with those who actively rebelled against him.

FOOTNOTES

[1]*Drummond of Hawthornden* (London, 1873), p. 346.

[2]See Buchan's *Montrose* (London, n.d.), pp. 137-140 and p. 140n.

[3]For an exposition of this idea, see *Irene* in *The Works of William Drummond*

of Hawthornden (Edinburgh, 1711), pp. 163ff.

[4]*An Apologetical Letter* (March 2, 1635) in *Works,* p. 133f.

[5]His plea to Charles to show clemency is contained in the final section of *Irene, Works,* pp. 172-173. Masson refers to this as the doctrine of "unenforced command"; *op. cit.,* p. 285. Drummond's admiration for kings who restrain the exercise of their power appears in his discussion of James I of Scotland's lenient policy toward those who rebelled against him; *The History of the Lives and Reigns of the Five James's, Kings of Scotland . . . , Works,* p. 5.

[6]*Works,* p. 165.

[7]*Queries of State, Works,* p. 177.

[8]*Works,* p. 166.

[9]John Neville Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (2d ed.; Cambridge, 1934), p. 282. Figgis argued that the essential characteristic of the divine right theory was not absolutism, although this was implied, but the "assertion of the inherent right of the civil as against the ecclesiastical authority. James II tried or was thought to be trying to use the absolutist theory in order to restore the very power, that of the Pope, against which . . . [the divine right theory] had been forged."

[10]For example, see the letter of the Presbytery of Stirling to Robert Douglas, a minister in Edinburgh and a leading Commissioner of the General Assembly, Wodrow MSS., folio vol. XXV, no. 11, Library of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.

[11]*Skiamachia, Works,* pp. 191-205. Drummond inquired: "Have we rejected the High Commission to get over us men more rigid, supercilious and severe, than the Spanish Inquisitions themselves?"

[12]*Op. cit.,* p. 374. In 1648, Robert Baillie, one of the leading Covenanting divines, was also to question the desirability of the Kirk intervening in civil affairs. "I am more and more in the mind, that it were for the good of the world, that Churchmen did meddle with Ecclesiastic affairs only; that were they never so able otherwise, they are unhappy statesmen; that as Erastian Caesaro-Papism is hurtful to the Church, so an Episcopal Papa-Caesarism is unfortunate for the State"; *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie,* ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1842), III, 38.