

**Basilikon Doron**  
**or**  
**His Majesty's Instructions**  
**to his dearest son,**  
**Henry the Prince**  
**Written by King James I**  
Edition of Edinburgh, 1599.

The Dedication of the Book  
Sonnet

Lo here (my son) a mirror view and fair  
Which showeth the shadow of a worthy King.  
Lo here a Book, a pattern doth you bring  
Which ye should press to follow more and more  
This trusty friend, the truth will never spare,  
But give a good advice unto you here:  
How it should be your chief and princely care,  
To follow virtue; vice for to forbear.  
And in this Book your lesson will ye learn,  
For guiding of your people great and small.  
Then (as ye ought) give an attentive care,  
And think how ye these precepts practice shall.  
Your father bids you study here and read  
How to become a perfect King indeed.

The Argument of the Book  
Sonnet

God gives not Kings the style of God's in vain,  
For on His throne His scepter do they sway:  
So Kings should fear and serve their God again.  
If then ye would enjoy a happy reign,  
Observe the statutes of your Heavenly King;  
And from His laws make all your laws to spring:  
Since His lieutenant here ye should remain.  
Reward the just, be steadfast, true and plain:  
Repress the proud, maintaining always the right,  
Walk always so, as ever in His sight  
Who guards the godly, plaguing the profane,  
And so ye should in princely virtues shine,  
Remembering right your mighty King Divine.

## To Henry my Dearest Son and Natural Successor

To whom can so rightly appertain his book of the Instruction of a Prince in all the points of his calling, as well general (as a Christian towards God) as particular (as a King towards his people?) to whom (I say can it so justly appertain, as unto you my dearest son? Since I, the author thereof, as your natural father, must be careful for your godly and virtuous education as my eldest son, and the first fruits of God's blessing towards me in my posterity: And as a King) must faithfully provide for your training up in all the points of a King's office (since ye are my natural and lawful successor therein) that being rightly informed hereby of the weight of your burden ye may in time begin to consider, that being born to be a King, ye are rather born to ONUS, than HONOS: not excelling all your people so far in rank and honour, as in daily care and hazardous painstaking, for the dutiful administration of that great office that God hath laid upon your shoulders: laying so, a just symmetry and proportion, betwixt the height of your honourable place, and the heavy weight of your great charge: and consequently in case of failure (which God forbid) of the sadness of your fall, according to the proportion of that height.

I have therefore (for the greater ease of your memory, and that ye may at the first, cast up any part that ye have to do with) divided this whole book in three parts. The first teacheth you your duty towards God as a Christian: The next your duty in your office as a King: and the third teacheth you how to behave yourself in indifferent things, which of themselves are neither right nor wrong, but according as they are rightly or wrongly used: and yet will serve (according to your behavior therein) to augment or impair your fame and authority at the hands of your people. Receive and welcome this book then, as a faithful preceptor and counsellour unto you: which (because my affairs will not permit me ever to be present with you). I ordain to be a resident faithful admonisher to you. And because the hour of death is uncertain to me (as unto all flesh) I leave it as my Testament, and latter Will unto you: charging you in the presence of God, and by the fatherly authority I have over you, that ye keep it ever with you, as carefully as Alexander did the Iliades of Homer. Ye will find it a just and impartial Counsellour, neither flattering you in any vice, nor importuning you at unmet times: It will not come uncalled, nor speak unspoken at: and yet conferring with it when ye are quiet, ye shall say with SCIPIO, that *Nunquam minus solus, quam cum solus.*

To conclude, then, I charge you (as ever ye think to deserve my fatherly blessing) to follow and put in practice (as far as lyeth in you) the precepts hereafter following: and if ye follow the contrary course, I take the great God to record, that this book shall one day be a witness betwixt me and you, and shall procure to be ratified in heaven, the curse that in that case here I give you; for I protest before that great God, I had rather be not a father and childless, nor be father of wicked children. But (hoping, yea, even promising unto myself, that God who in His great blessing sent you unto me, shall in the same blessing, as He hath given me a son, not repenting Him of His mercy shown unto me), I end this preface with my earnest prayer to God, to work effectually unto you, the fruits of that blessing which here from my heart, I bestow upon you.

Finis.

## ANENT A KING'S CHRISTIAN DUTY TOWARDS GOD.

As he cannot be thought worthy to rule and command others, that cannot rule and control his own proper affections and unreasonable appetites; so can he not be thought worthy to govern a Christian people, knowing and fearing God, that in his own person and heart feareth not, and loveth not the Divine Majesty. Neither can anything in his government succeed well with him (devise and labour as he try) as coming from a filthy spring, if his person unsanctified (Psalm 127:1): for (as DAVID sayeth): In vain watcheth thou the cittie, or buildest thou the house, if the Lord by His blessing grant not success thereunto; and as PAUL sayeth, CEPHAS may plant, and APOLLO may water, but it is God only that may give the increase.

Therefore (my son), first of all things, learn to know and love that God, to whom ye have a double obligation; first, for that He made you a man; and next, that He made you a little god, to sit on His Throne and rule over other men. Remember that as in dignity He hath erected you above others, so ought ye in thankfulness towards Him go as far beyond all others. A moat in another's eye, is a beam into yours; a blemish in another, is a leprous bile into you; and a venial sin (as the Papists call it) in another, is a great crime unto you. Think not, therefore, that the highness of your dignity diminisheth your faults (much less giveth you a license to sin) but by the contrary, your fault shall be aggravated according to the height of your dignity, any sin that ye commit not being a single sin procuring but the fall of one; but being an exemplary sin, and therefore draweth with it the whole multitude to be guilty of the same. Remember then, that this glistering worldly glory of Kings is given them by God, to teach them so to glister and shine before their people in all works of sanctification and righteousness, that their persons, as bright lamps of godliness and virtue, may (going in and out before their people), give light to all their steps. Remember also, that by the right knowledge, and fear of God (which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10) as SOLOMON sayeth, ye shall know all the things necessary for the discharge of your duty, both as a Christian and as a King, seeing in Him (as in a mirror) the course of all earthly things, whereof He is the spring and only mover.

Now, the only way to bring you to this knowledge, is diligently to read His Word, and earnestly to pray for the right understanding thereof: (John 5:39). Search the Scriptures, (sayeth Christ) for they will bear testimony of Me: And, (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17), the whole Scriptures (sayeth PAUL) are profitable to teach, to improve, to correct and to instruct in righteousness, that the man of God may be absolute, being made perfect unto all good works. I join to this, the careful hearing of the doctrine with attendance and reverence: For (Rom. 10: 17), faith cometh by hearing (sayeth PAUL). But above all, beware ye throw not the Word to your appetite, (as over-many do) making it like a bell to sound as ye please to interpret: but by the contrary, frame all your affections to follow precisely the rules there set down.

The whole Scripture containeth but two things: a command, and a prohibition; to do such things, and abstain from the contrary. Obey in both; neither think it enough to

abstain from evil and do no good: nor think not that if ye do many good things it may serve you for a cloak to mix evil turns therewith. And as in their two points, the whole Scripture consisteth, so, in two degrees standeth the whole service of God by man: Interior, or upward; Exterior, or downward: the first, by prayer in faith towards God; the next, by works flowing therefrom before the world, which is nothing else but the exercise of religion towards God, and of equity towards your neighbor.

As for the particular points of Religion, I need not to dilate them; I am no hypocrite, follow your father's footsteps and your own education therein. I thank God, I was never ashamed to give account of my profession, howsoever the malicious lying tongues of some have traduced me: and if my conscience had not resolved me, that all my religion was grounded upon the plain Words of Scripture, I had never outwardly avowed it, for pleasure or awe of the vain pride of some seditious preachers. And as for the points of equity towards your neighbor (because that will fall in properly upon the second part concerning the King's office) I leave it to its own room.

For the first part then of man's service to his God, (which is Religion) that is, the worship of God according to His revealed will, it is wholly grounded upon the Scripture (as I have already said) quickened by faith, and conserved by conscience.

For the Scripture, I have already spoken of it in general: but that ye may the more readily make choice of any part thereof for your instruction or comfort, remember only this method. The whole scripture is dited by God's Spirit, thereby (as by His lively Word) to instruct and rule the whole Church militant till the end of the world. It is composed of two parts, the Old and New Testament. The ground of the former is the Law, which showeth our sin and containeth justice. The ground of the other is Christ, who pardoning sin, containeth grace. The sum of the Law is the Ten Commands, more largely dilated in the Law, interpreted by the Prophets: and by the histories are the examples shown of obedience or disobedience thereto, and what praemium or poena was accordingly given by God. But because no man was able to keep the Law, nor any part thereof, it pleased God of His infinite wisdom and goodness, to incarnate His only son in our nature, for satisfaction of His justice in His suffering for us: that since we could not be saved by doing, we might (at least) be saved by believing. The ground therefore of the Law of Grace, is contained in the four histories of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. (S. Matt; S. Mark; S. Luke; S. John).

The larger interpretation of this Law, is contained in the Epistles of the Apostles: and the practice in the faithful or unfaithful, together with their reward or punishment according thereto, is contained in the Acts of the Apostles.

Would ye then know your sin by the Law? Read the books of MOSES containing it: Would ye have a commentary thereupon? Read the Prophets? Would ye see how good men are rewarded, and wicked punished? Look the histories of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, the Judges, Job and Esther, but especially the books of the KINGS, and Chronicles, wherewith ye ought to be familiarly acquainted: for there will ye see yourself (as in a mirror) either in the catalogues of the good or evil Kings.

Would you know the life and death of Christ? Look the Evangelists. Would ye be more particularly trained up in His school? Meditate upon the Epistles of the Apostles; and would ye be acquainted with the practices of the doctrine in the persons of the Primitive Church? Cast up the Apostles' Acts. As to the Apocrapha books, I omit them because I am no Papist (as I said before) and indeed some of them are as like the ditement of the Spirit of God, as an egg is to an oyster.

But when ye read the Scripture, read it with a sanctified and chaste ear: admire reverently such obscure place as ye understand not, blaming only your own incapacity; read with delight the plain places; and study carefully to understand those that are somewhat difficult; press on to be a good textuare, for the Scripture is ever the best interpreter of itself...

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