

JAMIE THE SAXT'S A COUNTERBLASTE TO TOBACCO*

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SUMMARY

King James VI of Scotland (Jamie the Saxt) became James I of England in 1603. This led to what is now known as the United Kingdom: indeed the flag, the Union Jack, is named after him. He was probably the best educated king to sit on a European throne, although he often lacked sagacity. He authorised a new translation of the Bible, now known as the King James Bible. He is also remembered for his abhorrence of smoking tobacco, which he ably expressed in *A Counterblaste to Tobacco* in 1604.

INTRODUCTION

Jamie the Saxt (1566-1625) (Figure 1), King James VI of Scotland and James I of England, was the last King of Scotland, although not the last to be crowned there. Charles I (1600-1649), his son, was crowned at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, in 1633. James's grandson, Charles II (1630-1685) was crowned at Scone, Perthshire in 1651.¹ James was the son of the ill-fated Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-1587) and her second husband Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley (c. 1545-1567), who was her cousin. Mary is generally treated kindly by historians, perhaps because she was beheaded on orders from Queen Elizabeth I of England.² It is almost certain, however, that she was involved in the murder of Lord Darnley so that she could marry James Hepburn, fourth Earl of Bothwell (c. 1535-1578). Mary left Scotland for England after her army's defeat at the Battle of Langside, Glasgow (Figure 2) in 1568, when James was 13 months old. James had no memory of his mother, since they were never to meet after Mary's flight to England.

James was educated for eight years from the age of four by the famous historian and scholar George Buchanan (1506-1582) (Figure 3), who was one of the finest European writers of Latin and one of the founders of modern constitutional liberty³ with his publication in 1579 of *Dialogus de Jure Regni Apud Scotos*.⁴ James was systematically overdriven at his lessons. Being a quick learner, he was able at the age of eight to translate a chapter of the Bible from Latin into French, and from French into English *extempore*.³ James was arguably the best educated prince of his day, and remained interested in learning and theology during his adult life. He was responsible for a new translation of the Bible in 1606, known today as the Authorised or King James Bible (Figure 4). He wrote his first poem at the age of 15, and several of his poems are still included in anthologies of Scottish verse.⁵⁻⁷



FIGURE 1

Jamie the Saxt. Portrait by Dutch artist Paul van Somer or Someren (1576-1621), now in the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.¹

James not only composed poetry, but at the age of 18 published his views on the topic in *Reulis and Cautelis to be Observit and Eschewit in Scottis Poesie*.⁸ He gathered around him a group of poets, known as the Castalian band, 'the brethir to the sister nine' (the brethren to the Muses).⁹ The trade mark of their poetry was the abab/bcbc/cdcd/ee rhyme scheme, which is now known as the Spensarian stanza. Their use antedated by at least half a dozen years that by the English poet, Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599), of *Faerie Queen* fame. One of the Castalians, Robert Ayton (1570-1638), may have been the originator of *Auld Lang Syne*. His poem began:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never thought upon.
The flames of love extinguished,
And freely past and gone?
Is thy kind heart now grown so cold
In that loving breast of thine,
That thou canst never once reflect
On auld-lang-syne?

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FIGURE 2

Monument at Langside, Glasgow, where the army of Mary, Queen of Scots was defeated in 1568 by an army of Scottish Protestant Reformers. Mary then sought refuge in England.

The poem was set to music, and so as Lindsay⁹ has suggested, Robert Burns (1759-1796) has an ancestral link with the Castilians both in verse and music.

James feared and hated his teacher, George Buchanan, who took every opportunity to remind his pupil that his mother was an adulteress and murderess. Buchanan had documented this in a 1571 publication *Detectio Mariae Reginae Sotorum* (*Ane Detection of the Doings of Marie Quene of Scottes*).³ Several of William Shakespeare's plays, for example *Macbeth*, were first presented before James, and one cannot help feeling that Caliban's riposte to Prospero in *The Tempest* – 'You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse' was in James's mind when he wrote *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilikon Doron* (The Kingly Gift) (1599).³ The first describes the theory, and the second the practice of monarchial government. In both, King James propounds his ideas on the divine right of kings, which were opposite to the beliefs of his tutor.

KING JAMES'S EMPIRE

James had a *furor imperiorum*, establishing plantations in the Highlands and islands of Scotland and Ulster with lowland Scottish farmers, and overseas in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Virginia (Jamestown is named after him), Bermuda (the island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*), Guiana, the East Indies and India.^{10,11} British imperialism was not an English monopoly! James took a particular interest in the colony in Virginia, sending instructions on growing fruits, making wine and breeding silk worms.^{10,11} He did not, however, give instructions for growing tobacco, since this was not introduced into Virginia until 1617. James disliked tobacco smoking, and declared his views in *A Counterblaste to Tobacco* (Figure 5) in 1604, undoubtedly his most lively publication.

The text of James's *Counterblaste* is not taken from the earlier 1604 edition, but from the 1616 edition, which contains later authorial alterations.⁸

THE COUNTERBLASTE

James found it incredible that his 'cuntrey-men' should 'imitate the barbarous and bestly manners of the wilde, godless, and slavish Indians, especially in so vile... a custome' as smoking tobacco. It was held that tobacco had healing powers, and so it was known as *herba panacea*, *herba santa*, and *herba sancta Indorum*.¹² Indeed, the French ambassador to Portugal, Jean Nicot (1530-1600), who gave his name to the tobacco plant's appellation, *Nicotiana*, and its natural alkaloid, nicotine, believed that application of its leaves would cure a cancerous growth.¹² James, even as king of England, remained a true Scot (if not one of the better examples of the race!) and denounced the argument for the healing powers of tobacco on the basis of the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy. He demolishes the argument that 'it is alledged to be found trew by prooffe, that by the taking of tobacco divers and very many doe finde themselves cured of divers diseases as on the other part, no man ever received harme thereby' by noting:

In this argument there is first a great mistaking and next a monstrous absurditie, for is it not a very great mistaking, to take *non causam pro causa*, as they say in the *Logickes*? Because peradventure, when a sicke man hath had his disease at the height, hee hath at that instant taken tobacco, and afterward his disease taking the naturall course of declining, and consequently the patient of recovering his health, O then the tobacco forsooth, was the worker of that miracle.



FIGURE 3

George Buchanan, scholar and historian, was responsible for the education of wee Jamie the Saxt. Buchanan was the first eminent Scot to be buried in Greyfriars Churchyard, Edinburgh.

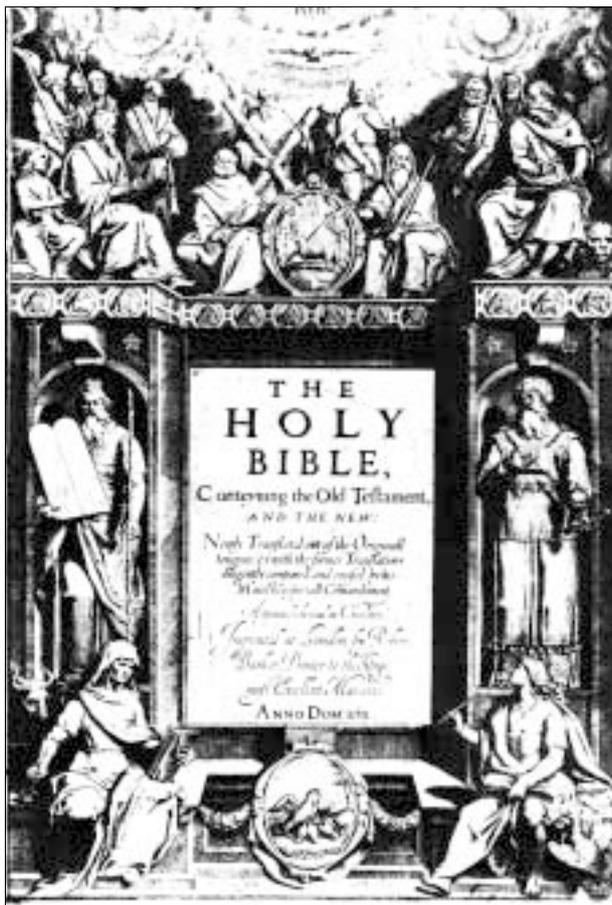


FIGURE 4

The title page of a 1611 edition of the Authorised version of the Bible, often referred to as the King James Bible, and arguably the best translation.

It would be difficult to find a better example of this fallacy in any modern textbook of clinical epidemiology. James was sceptical of mediciners, as they were called at the time, and their medicines, and also of the traditional practice of touching to cure scrofula (cervical tuberculous adenitis), known as the 'king's evil'.¹⁰ In *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, he comments on iatrogenic disease, and notes that there are no medicines without side effects: 'there is almost no sort either of nourishment or medicine, that hath not something in it disagreeable to some part of mans bodie.' His Scottish sense of thrift (which he himself did not use!) prompted a comment on the cost of 'this stinking smoke', observing that some of the gentry were 'bestowing three, some foure hundred pounds a yeere upon this precious stinke', which he was 'sure might be bestowed upon many farre better uses.' Modern restaurateurs would appreciate his comments on smoking at meals:

And for the vanities committed in this filthy custome, is it not both great vanitie and uncleannesse, that at the table, a place of respect, of cleannesse, of modestie, men should not be ashamed, to sit tossing of tobacco pipes and puffing of the smoke of tobacco one to another, making the filthy smoke and stinke thereof, to exhale athwart the dishes and infect the aire, when very often, men that abhorre it are at their repast?

James's own table manners were none too elegant if we are to believe the comments of the Englishman, Sir

Anthony Welden (?-1649). The King's tongue was described as being 'too large for his mouth, which made him speak full in the mouth, and made him drink very uncomely, as if eating his drink, which came out into the cup of each side of his mouth'.¹⁰ His skin was described as 'soft as taffeta sarsnet (a soft silk material now used chiefly for linings), which felt so, because he never washed his hands, only rubbed his fingers' ends slightly with the wet end of a napkin'. James was not popular with his English subjects,¹³ and Sir Anthony's description has to be taken with a pinch of salt. James's macroglossia may have been a criticism of his speaking broad Scots (Lallans), which he was to do all his life.^{10,11}

James also waxes eloquent on the 'great iniquitie, and against all humanitie' of secondary smoke: 'the husband shall not be ashamed, to reduce therby his delicate, wholesom and cleane complexioned wife, to that extremity, that either she must also corrupt her sweet breath therwith, or els resolve to live in a perpetual stinking torment'. He notes the effects of peer pressure in making 'divers men very sound both in judgement and complexion' take up the habit, 'because they were ashamed to seeme singular'. This would apply particularly to today's teenagers who are susceptible to peer pressure.

The anti-smoking society would delight in James's peroration: 'A custome loathsom to the eye, hatefull to the nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the lungs, and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stigian smoake of the pit that is bottomlesse.'

It is surprising that James does not single out Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552-1618) for disapprobation, as he was largely responsible for introducing smoking to England, and encouraged Queen Elizabeth I to smoke.

James's tutor, George Buchanan, also attacked tobacco in one of his *Miscellaneous Liber* (Miscellaneous Poems) entitled *De Nicotiana Falso Nomine Medicaea Appellata* (On tobacco, wrongly called the 'herbe médicée'):¹⁴

*Doctus ab Hesperijs rediens Nicotius oris
Nicotianam rettulit,
nempe saluferam cunctis languoribus herbam,
prodesse cupidus patriae.
at Medice Catharina, χροθμοα luesque suorum,
Medea saeculi sui,
ambitione ardens, Medicaeae nomine plantam
Nicotianam adulterat;
utque bonis cives prius exuit, exuere herbae
honore vult Nicotium.
at vos auxilium membris qui quaeritis aegris,
abominandi nominis
a planta cohibete manus, os daudite, et aures
a peste taetra ocludite;
nectar enim virus fiet, panacea venenum,
Medicaea si vocabitur.'*

(The learned Nicot, returning from western shores, brought back tobacco (*Nicotiana*), doubtless a plant to cure all illnesses, anxious as he was to be of service to his country. But Catherine de Médicis, the dregs and plague of her people, the Medea of her generation, burning with ambition, defiles the tobacco plant with the name of 'herbe médicée'. And as previously she stripped her citizens of their goods, she wishes to deprive Nicot of the honour of his plant. But you who seek help for sick limbs, keep your hands from a plant of ill-omened name, close your mouths, and shut your ears from the foul plague. For nectar will become venom and panacea poison if it is named after Médicis.)

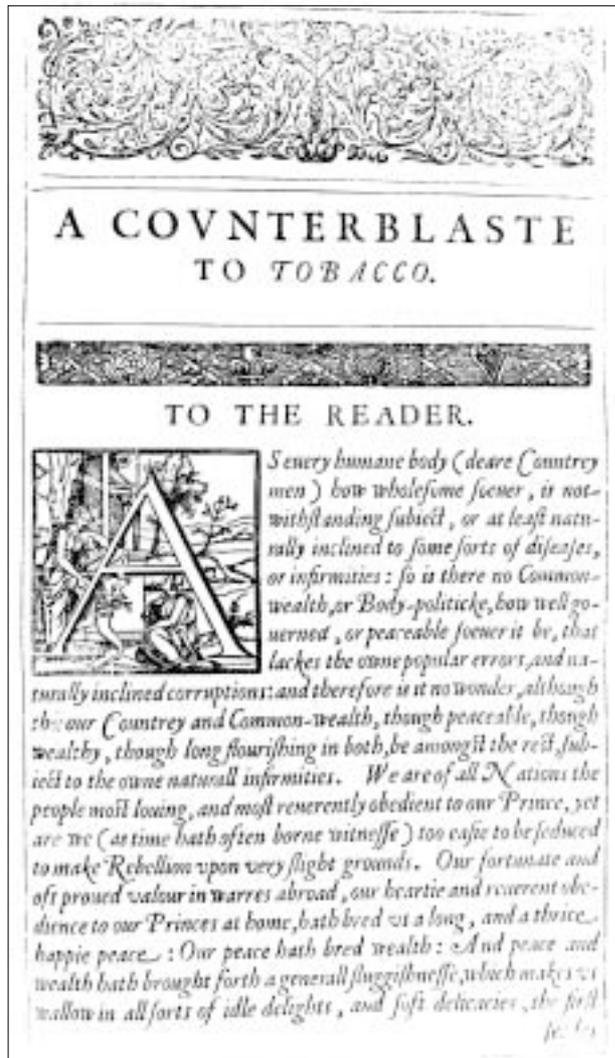


FIGURE 5
The title page of *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*.

Was James influenced in his abhorrence of tobacco by his tutor? And was Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) who considered Buchanan to be 'the only man of genius his country ever produced', according to his biographer James Boswell (1740-1795),¹⁵ also influenced? In his *Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides*, Boswell quotes the doctor, 'to be sure, it is a shocking thing, blowing smoke out of our mouths into other people's mouths, eyes, and noses, and having the same thing done to us'.¹⁶

GLASGOW'S TRADE IN TOBACCO

Most governments depend on revenue from tobacco taxes, and many cultural and sporting bodies rely on financial support from tobacco companies. Medical graduates of the University of Glasgow can only feel humility (a genetic impossibility for a Scot), because the city of Glasgow first experienced affluence as a result of importing tobacco from Virginia. Tobias Smollett (1721-1771) describes in his novel *Humphry Clinker* how one of the Glasgow *nouveaux riches* known as the Tobacco Lords, John Glassford (1715-1783), owned 25 ships and traded over half a million pounds sterling per year. In 1769, 51.8% of the United Kingdom trade in

tobacco came through the Clyde ports of Dumbarton, Greenock, Port Glasgow, and Glasgow.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ Most Virginians in the heyday of the tobacco trade received their news of Britain from Glasgow, and *The Scots Magazine*, established in 1739, and still the longest-running magazine, had regular sections on plantation news and British North America. The more leisurely Virginian colonists disliked the Scots, whom they found too 'strictly business' in their transactions.¹⁹ What most Glaswegians forget is that the Tobacco Lords were also the biggest slave traders in Britain!²⁰ The American War of Independence in 1776 ended Glasgow's lucrative trade in tobacco. Tobacco continued, however, to serve Glasgow well: the Mitchell Library, the memorial stone of which was laid by Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) in 1907, was funded by a bequest from Stephan Mitchell (1789-1874), a tobacco manufacturer who was unconnected with any of the Tobacco Lords.²¹

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