**Sir Robert Filmer, Bart.
*PATRIARCHA,
OR THE NATURAL POWER OF KINGS (1680)***

 **Excerpts from the Original Electronic Text at the web site of**[**The Constitution Society**](http://www.constitution.org/)**.**

**Filmer argues here against the idea that "Mankind is naturally endowed . . . with freedom from all subjection." To develop that idea and to argue that governments are created by the consent of the government was both incorrect and "dangerous," he thought -- such ideas "contradict the doctrine and history of the Holy Scriptures, the constant practice of all ancient monarchies, and the very principles of the law of nature." -smv**

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**THAT THE FIRST KINGS WERE FATHERS OF FAMILIES**

**Sect. 4.** I see not then how the children of Adam, or of any man else, can be free from subjection to their parents. And this subjection of children being the fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself; it follows that civil power not only in general is by divine institution, but even the assignment of it specifically to the eldest parents, which quite takes away that new and common distinction which refers only power universal and absolute to God, but power respective in regard of the special form of government to the choice of the people.

This lordship which Adam by command had over the whole world, and by right descending from him the patriarchs did enjoy, was as large and ample as the absolutest dominion of any monarch which hath been since the creation. For dominion of life and death we find that Judah, the father, pronounced sentence of death against Thamar, his daughter-in-law, for playing the harlot. "Bring her forth," saith he, "that she may be burnt." Touching war, we see that Abraham commanded an army of three hundred and eighteen soldiers of his own family. And Esau met his brother Jacob with four hundred men at arms. For matter of peace, Abraham made a league with Abimelech, and ratified the articles with an oath. These acts of judging in capital crimes, of making war, and concluding peace, are the chiefest marks of "sovereignty" that are found in any monarch.

**Sect. 5.** Not only until the Flood, but after it, this patriarchal power did continue, as the very name patriarch doth in part prove. The three sons of Noah had the whole world divided amongst them by their father; for of them was the whole world overspread, according to the benediction given to him and his sons: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth." . . .

**Sect. 8:** It may seem absurd to maintain that kings now are the fathers of their people, since experience shows the contrary. It is true, all kings be not the natural parents of their subjects, yet they all either are, or are to be reputed, the next heirs to those first progenitors who were at first the natural parents of the whole people, and in their right succeed to the exercise of supreme jurisdiction; and such heirs are not only lords of their own children, but also of their brethren, and all others that were subject to their fathers. . . .

To confirm this natural right of regal power, we find in the Decalogue that the law which enjoins obedience to kings is delivered in the terms of "Honour thy father," as if all power were originally in the father. If obedience to parents be immediately due by a natural law, and subjection to princes but by the mediation of a human ordinance, what reason is there that the laws of nature should give place to the laws of men, as we see the power of the father over his child gives place and is subordinate to the power of the magistrate? If we compare the natural rights of a father with those of a king, we find them all one, without any difference at all but only in the latitude or extent of them: as the father over one family, so the king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct, and defend the whole commonwealth. His war, his peace, his courts of justice, and all his acts of sovereignty, tend only to preserve and distribute to every subordinate and inferior father, and to their children, their rights and privileges, so that all the duties of a king are summed up in an universal fatherly care of his people. . . .

**IT IS UNNATURAL FOR THE PEOPLE TO GOVERN OR CHOOSE GOVERNORS**

**Sect. 4.** . . . The world for a long time knew no other sort of government but only monarchy. The best order, the greatest strength, the most stability, and easiest government are to be found all in monarchy, and in no other form of government. The new platforms of commonweals were first hatched in a corner of the world, amongst a few cities of Greece, which have been imitated by very few other places. Those very cities were first, for many years, governed by kings, until wantonness, ambition, or faction of the people, made them attempt new kinds of regimen; all which mutations proved most bloody and miserable to the authors of them -- happy in nothing but that they continued but a small time. . . .

**POSITIVE LAWS DO NOT INFRINGE THE NATURAL AND FATHERLY POWER OF KINGS**

**Sect. 1.**. . . The father of a family governs by no other law than by his own will, not by the laws and wills of his sons or servants. There is no nation that allows children any action or remedy for being unjustly governed; and yet, for all this, every father is bound by the law of nature to do his best for the preservation of his family. But much more is a king always tied by the same law of nature to keep this general ground, that the safety of the kingdom be his chief law; he must remember that the profit of every man in particular, and of all together in general, is not always one and the same; and that the public is to be preferred before the private; and that the force of laws must not be so great as natural equity itself, which cannot fully be comprised in any laws whatsoever, but is to be left to the religious achievement of those who know how to manage the affairs of state, and wisely to balance the particular profit with the counterpoise of the public, according to the infinite variety of times, places, persons. A proof unanswerable for the superiority of princes above laws is this, that there were kings long before there were any laws.