

KING'S FLIGHT TO THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Henry Ireton (1611–1651), Commissary-General

to Colonel Robert Hammond (1621–1654), Governor of the Isle of Wight (1647–1648)

During the Civil Wars, Robert Hammond served for several years as a regimental commander for the New Model Army. After elements of the army in June 1647 issued the Agreement of the People, Hammond retired from active military service. Thomas, Lord Fairfax of Cameron, appointed him Governor of the Isle of Wight, an appointment confirmed by Parliament on 6 September 1647.

King Charles I, fearing the army would not protect him from the Levellers, conspired with John Ashburnham and fled Hampton Court on 11 November 1647. The King made his way to the Isle of Wight, believing Hammond a sympathetic and honest Parliamentarian. Hammond, torn between his oaths and duties to King and Parliament, sought advice from London.

Windsor, 21 November 1647

That you have not had more frequent letters from us since the trouble that has fallen upon you, you would think it excusable if you knew the burden and distractions which ever since we have otherwise undergone; though now, through the goodness of God, we are at more ease and quiet. And though you have had no scribbling from my hand, yet it has not been wanting in that care that has been taken for you, or that little that has been written to you.

For present matter of advice, first in the business concerning Mr. Ashburnham, etc., I fully concur with the general's letter that it is fit they be sent up, as 'tis ordered. Next, concerning admission of chaplains and other persons to the King, etc. according to former civilities, I cannot think them safe to be allowed in that place, or in the condition you are in. And I think, as we never had obligation to it (but did it freely), so now much less.

For the pretence of the King's keeping himself within the protection of the army by coming into your hands, both reason and all the circumstances I have heard make me believe, and the King's own declaration, left behind upon his table, does plainly discover, that he in his going away had other intentions; and his surrendering himself to you was besides his first purpose. And I cannot believe but it was a second counsel, and that, tho' appearingly a choice, yet really upon some emergent necessity for the avoiding of a worse when he someway found himself stopped and unable to get clear away, according to his first intention.

Now for your better securing the King and making sure the island to prevent any danger to the Kingdom which a confluence or appearance of ill-affected persons there might occasion, I advise you by no means to trust so wholly to the affections of islanders, but take in soldiers, whom you may have more surely at command; for which purpose we have ordered some to you, and shall fend more. In the meantime I pray you neglect not to send for those ordered from Southampton. And we shall take care those you take into the island this occasion shall be paid while they stay there, whatever others are.

We are earnest with Harrison¹ to come over to you for assistance in the way of advice; and I hope he will come.

Dear Robin, I must tell you God has wonderfully appeared to justify and bear witness to that little measure of integrity and truth which He has given to his servants. And I am confident He will appear with us still, until He bring us off the stage without reproach or scandal to His name. To His direction and good pleasure I commit you in the great charge and burden He has brought upon you, even in that place, where you had, I believe, promised yourself nothing but ease and quiet. And in Him I remain yours most affectionately.

The Lieutenant-General² is at London or Putney, and on scout I know not where. I have opened your letters to

¹ Major-General Thomas Harrison (1606–1660), Member of Parliament for Wendover (1646–1653)

² Lieutenant-General Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658)

them, and read and shall deliver them when they come.

Letters Between Col. Robert Hammond, Governor of the Isle of Wight, and the Committee of Lords and Commons at Derby House...
(London: Robert Horsfield, 1764):19–22.