

ESCAPE OF CHARLES I

William Lilly (1602–1681), Astrologer

May–September 1648

His Majesty being in Carisbrooke Castle in the Isle of Wight, the Kentishmen in great numbers rose in arms and joined with the Lord Goring. A considerable number of the best ships revolted from the Parliament. The citizens of London were forward to rise against the Parliament.

His Majesty laid his design to escape out of prison by sawing the iron bars of his chamber window. A small ship was provided and anchored not far from the castle to bring him into Sussex. Horses were provided ready to carry him through Sussex into Kent, so that he might be at the head of the army in Kent and from thence to march immediately to London, where thousands then would have armed for him.

The Lady Whorewood came to me, acquainted me herewith. I got G. Farmer (who was a most ingenious locksmith, and dwelt in Bow Lane) to make a saw to cut the iron bars in sunder—I mean to saw them—and aqua fortis¹ besides. His Majesty in a small time did his work; the bars gave liberty for him to go out. He was out with his body till he came to his breast; but then, his heart failing, he proceeded no farther. When this was discovered, as soon after it was, he was narrowly looked after and no opportunity after that could be devised to enlarge him.

About September the Parliament sent their commissioners with propositions unto him into the Isle of Wight, the Lord William Saye² being one. The Lady Whorewood came again unto me from him, or by his consent, to be directed. After perusal of my figure, I told her the commissioners would be there such a day; I elected a day and hour when to receive the commissioners and propositions and, as soon as the propositions were read, to sign them and make haste with all speed to come up with the commissioners to London. The army being then far distant from London, and the city enraged stoutly against them, he promised he would do so.

That night the commissioners came, and old Saye and His Majesty had private conference till one in the morning. The King acquainted Saye with his intention, who clearly dissuaded him from signing the propositions, telling him they were not fit for him to sign; that he had many friends in the House of Lords, and some in the House of Commons; that he would procure more, and then they would frame more easy propositions.

This flattery of this unfortunate lord occasioned His Majesty to wave the advice I and some others that wished his prosperity had given, in expectation of that which afterwards could never be gained. The army having some notice hereof from one of the commissioners, who had an eye upon old Saye, hasted unto London and made the citizens very quiet. And besides, the Parliament and army kept a better correspondency afterwards with each other.

William Lilly, *William Lilly's History of His Life and Times* (London: Charles Baldwin, 1822):141–145.

¹ nitric acid (HNO₃)

² William Fiennes (1582–1662), Viscount Saye and Sele