A book about Staughton June 2019

*In 1644, Valentine Walton, regicide, was governor of the important port of King's Lynn. Although East Anglia generally favoured the Parliamentarians, there were many Royalist factions, nowhere more so than in King's Lynn itself, where Sir Hamon l'Estrange enjoyed considerable support. With his feckless son, Sir Roger, Sir Hamon devised a plan to re-take King's Lynn for Royalist forces. It did not go well.*

Despite his considerable financial setbacks, Sir Hamon l'Estrange did not give up hope of Royalist forces regaining King's Lynn, and in December 1644 he entrusted his highly-indebted, feckless son Sir Roger with a bold plot to secure the town for the king. Sir Roger approached the king with his plan. He must have been extremely persuasive because the far-fetched plot won the approval of Charles I. The *“trusty and well-beloved Roger le Strange,”* delighted by the commission from the king and anticipating the heady rewards that might follow the triumphant recapture of this important port, proceeded to put his plan into action. There was a slight but crucial flaw in this ambitious plan: l'Estrange had given insufficient thought to the necessary resources he might require for the enterprise, namely men and money.

His first act was to persuade an old sea-dog friend of his, a wizened sea captain by name Thomas Leman, to take part, assuring him of a generous reward: *“in case the work succeeded it should be worth to him a thousand pounds.”* Captain Leman, suitably impressed, promised to bring with him on the morrow an accomplice *“to assist in the design.”*  L'Estrange’s judgement of men was as lacking as his forward planning. Captain Leman promptly trotted off to the governor of King’s Lynn, Colonel Walton, who decided he would string the hapless L'Estrange along, and catch all involved in the dastardly plot. He ordered Leman to take with him one of Walton’s corporals, Hagger by name now cunningly transformed into a helpless wretch *“a poor man, living in Fishers End, in Lynn, and kept an alehouse, and was £40 the worse for the Roundheads."* L'Estrange quickly swallowed this improbable story, and showing Leman and Hagger the king’s letter of authority, and swearing them to secrecy, he offered Hagger £100 and a cannonier’s place if all went according to plan. Adding credibility to his role, Hagger indicated how the town should be taken. All that was needed, he went on, was for Mr L'Estrange to provide a militia of two hundred men to ensure success. Another tiny flaw now began to gnaw at Mr le Strange, as he was forced to acknowledge *"he knew not where to get the men.”*

Meanwhile, Colonel Walton was putting his plan in place to capture the miscreants. In the courtyard below the room where the plot was being hatched there was a sudden disturbance. Half a dozen *“poor old seamen”* suddenly erupted on the scene clamouring to be given alms. L'Estrange fished out 2d from his pocket and told them to clear off. The *poor old seamen* were of course Walton's trained soldiers, who promptly seized L'Estrange. The latter, displaying a hitherto unsuspected presence of mind, quickly passed the king’s letter over to Captain Leman, a man whom he knew he could trust implicitly. Walton's men carried out a thorough search and found Leman apparently in flagrante delicto with the king's letter about his person. He was swiftly hauled up before Colonel Walton and fortunately for him, immediately released 'having acted by order of the Governor.' L'Estrange, inevitably, was brought to trial where the verdict was hardly in doubt, but with the influence of his father, he escaped the inevitable death penalty.

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