

**THE KING'S  
STRATAGEM AND  
OTHER STORIES**

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The King's Stratagem and Other Stories by Stanley J. Weyman

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**STANLEY J. WEYMAN**

**THE KING'S  
STRATAGEM AND  
OTHER STORIES**





**"HE WAS ALONE WITH HIS TRIUMPH."**

THE  
KING'S STRATAGEM

*AND OTHER STORIES*

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN

*Author of "A Gentleman of France," "Under the Red Robe,"  
"My Lady Rotka," etc., etc.*

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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
THE KING'S STRATAGEM, . . . . .	I
THE BODY-BIRDS OF COURT, . . . . .	26
IN CUPID'S TOILS, . . . . .	62
THE DRIFT OF FATE, . . . . .	111
A BLORE MANOR EPISODE, . . . . .	146
THE FATAL LETTER, . . . . .	191

1914

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30


31

32



## THE KING'S STRATAGEM.

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N the days when Henry IV. of France was King of Navarre only, and in that little kingdom of hills and woods which occupies the southwest corner of the larger country, was with difficulty supporting the Huguenot cause against the French court and the Catholic League—in the days when every isolated castle, from the Garonne to the Pyrenees, was a bone of contention between the young king and the crafty queen-mother, Catherine de Medicis, a conference between these notable personages took place in the picturesque town of La Réole.

La Réole still rises gray, time-worn, and half-ruined on a lofty cliff above the broad green waters of the Garonne, forty odd miles from Bordeaux. But it is a small place now. In the days of which we are speaking, however, it was impor

tant, strongly fortified, and guarded by a castle which looked down on a thousand red-tiled roofs, rising in terraces from the river. As the meeting-place of the two sovereigns it was for the time as gay as Paris itself, Catherine having brought with her a bevy of fair maids of honor, in the effect of whose charms she perhaps put as much trust as in her own diplomacy. But the peaceful appearance of the town was delusive, for even while every other house in it rang with music and silvery laughter, each party was ready to fly to arms without warning, if it saw that any advantage was to be gained thereby.

On an evening shortly before the end of the conference two men sat at play in a room, the deep-embrasured window of which looked down from a considerable height upon the river. The hour was late, and the town silent. Outside, the moonlight fell bright and pure on sleeping fields and long, straight lines of poplars. Within the room a silver lamp suspended from the ceiling threw light upon the table, leaving the farther parts of the room in shadow. The walls were hung with

faded tapestry. On the low bedstead in one corner lay a handsome cloak, a sword, and one of the clumsy pistols of the period. Across a chair lay another cloak and sword, and on the window seat, beside a pair of saddlebags, were strewn half a dozen such trifles as soldiers carried from camp to camp—a silver comfit-box, a jeweled dagger, a mask, and velvet cap.

The faces of the players, as they bent over the dice, were in shadow. One—a slight, dark man of middle height, with a weak chin, and a mouth as weak, but shaded by a dark mustache—seemed, from the occasional oaths which he let drop, to be losing heavily. Yet his opponent, a stouter and darker man, with a sword-cut across his left temple, and that swaggering air which has at all times marked the professional soldier, showed no signs of triumph or elation. On the contrary, though he kept silence, or spoke only a formal word or two, there was a gleam of anxiety and suppressed excitement in his eyes, and more than once he looked keenly at his companion, as if to judge of his feelings or learn whether the time had come for some experiment which