



HISTORY SHAPERS

THE STORY OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH

MARGARET DUNCAN KELLY



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THE STORY OF SIR WALTER RALEIGH

by

MARGARET DUNCAN



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PLEASE NOTE

In this series, you will read about historical figures who displayed courage, bravery, self-sacrifice, and many other admirable traits. Their stories remind us that many people in history took bold actions and made tough choices. Yet, even those who achieved great things sometimes held ideas or pursued goals that were not beneficial to everyone. History is full of complex individuals—parts of their lives inspire us to be brave and stand up for what is right, while other parts remind us to consider the unintended consequences of our actions.

As you explore these biographies, we invite you to reflect on the qualities that enabled these figures to achieve greatness and the lessons we can learn from their mistakes. Maybe you too can become a History Shaper—someone who learns from the past and helps to make our world a better place for everyone.

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THE DEVON SAILORS AND THEIR STRANGE STORIES

More than three hundred years ago, a great queen, named Elizabeth, ruled over England, but the people loved her so much that they called her “Good Queen Bess.”

At this time England did not own any lands beyond the seas. The Spaniards said that all the land beyond the Atlantic Ocean belonged to Spain, because the Spanish sailors had been the first to discover America. Every year they sent many ships to this New World to bring back to Spain the rich treasures they found there. This made the English sailors very jealous. They, too, wanted to sail across the sea, and to bring back gold and silver.

The bravest English sailors lived on the coast of Devonshire, in the south-west corner of England. These men of Devon hated the Spaniards more than any people in the whole world. If the Spaniards caught any English sailors in what they called the Spanish seas, they flung them, loaded with irons, into dark dungeons, and sometimes they tortured them. But this cruel treatment did not stop the Devonshire seamen from sailing to the New World. It only made them more anxious to go and beat the

Spaniards. They knew they were better seamen, and they thought they were better fighters, than the Spaniards. They used to say that one west-countryman could fight five Spaniards any day.

So they set sail for the Spanish seas, and boldly attacked the great treasure-ships. Sometimes they landed on the shores of the New World, and traded with the Indians who lived there. The Spaniards were very cruel to the poor Indians, so the Indians were glad to help an enemy of Spain. Sometimes the English "sea-dogs," as they were called, even attacked the Spanish ports, and seized the treasure as it was lying on the beach, ready to be shipped off to Spain.

The King of Spain was very angry, and asked Queen Elizabeth to punish these English sailors. He called them pirates, as indeed they were. But the English said that they were not pirates, because the treasure did not really belong to the Spaniards, since they had robbed it from the poor Indians by cruelty and torture. They said it was a good deed to punish the Spaniards for their wickedness. As for Good Queen Bess, she was proud of her brave sailors, and wore in her crown some of the jewels they brought back.

At this time, when so many Devon men were risking their lives for glory and for gold, there lived in a beautiful Devonshire manor-house a boy called Walter Raleigh. He was a tall, strong boy, with dark hair and bright brown eyes. He could box, and fence, and ride, and swim, and he knew how to manage a boat. He was clever, too, at school,

and very fond of reading. But he loved best of all to listen to the wonderful stories of the sailors who had roamed in all parts of the world. All his spare time was spent on the shore, watching the ships and talking to the sailors.

Sometimes a sailor had a ghastly tale to tell. He had been captured by the Spaniards, and had been racked and tortured in Spanish dungeons. He could show his scars, and could tell, too, the wild adventures by which he had at last escaped.

Sometimes another sailor, with his fingers sparkling with jewels, and a Spanish dagger by his side, would tell how a little English ship had captured a great Spanish galleon, laden with gold and silver and jewels. He would show his velvet hat, in which a bird with glittering green and gold feathers was fastened with a golden clasp, and would talk of the strange country where such birds lived.

Often the sailors talked of a wondrous city, where even the roofs of the houses were made of gold. They had not seen this city, but next voyage they hoped they would. As they talked of it, their eyes sparkled, and one of them leaping up, shouted out—

"Oh, who will join, jolly mariners all?
And who will join, says he, O!
To fill his pockets with the good red gold,
By sailing on the sea, O!"

Walter listened with beating heart. He longed to say that he would join. He longed to explore that marvelous New World. He longed to see that wondrous city. But

most of all he longed to fight the cruel Spaniards, who tortured the brave English sailors and the poor Indian people. He knew that he was still too young to sail away to the Spanish seas. He had still much to learn.

But he resolved that when he was a man he too would fight Spain, and win glory for England.

As he turned from the beach to go home through the beautiful Devonshire lanes, he could hear the sailors singing—

"Westward ho! with a rum-below,
And hurra for the Spanish main, O!"

RALEIGH'S FIRST ADVENTURES

When Walter Raleigh was about fourteen, he had to say good-bye to his sailor friends. His father said that it was time for him to go to a great college in Oxford, where he would learn to be a clever man.

In those days there were no railways, so travellers had to ride or drive, which made the journey much longer. It took about three days to ride from Devonshire to Oxford, which is an inland place a great distance from the sea.

At first Walter felt very far away from his Devonshire home. He missed the sea, and he missed the boating and fishing. There is a river at Oxford, but that could not make up for the sea. He even envied the sailor lads who had gone to sea instead of to college. But he worked hard; and as he was very clever, everything he did was well done. He learnt Greek and Latin, which are very difficult. He learnt how to make fine speeches and how to write beautiful poetry. Everybody admired him, he was so handsome and brave, and soon he had many friends.

At this time, while the English people were so happy under Good Queen Bess, the people in France, which is just across the English Channel, were very miserable. The French people were fighting with each other, which is the

most dreadful kind of war. Some of the Frenchmen came to England to ask the English to join their side.

When Raleigh heard of this, he threw down his books, and rode away with a hundred other Oxford men to fight in France. Raleigh was very young when he went to France—only seventeen. He stayed there for five years, fighting all the time up and down France. He learnt to be a strong soldier, always ready for the enemy, never taken by surprise. He was swift to strike, and swifter still to defend himself. He learnt how to command his men, and how to find out the enemy's weakest place.

When Raleigh came back from France he had his wish at last, and went to sea, but the book which he wrote telling of his adventures is lost.

All this time he had not forgotten his longing to fight the Spaniards. His chance came at last, though not in the way he had expected. There was no need to sail away to the New World, or even to Spain.

Many, many years before the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the English had crossed the Irish Sea and had conquered Ireland. But the Irish people were very brave. They were always fighting to drive the English out of their country, and now they had asked the Spaniards to help them.

News came to England that the Spaniards had landed in the south of Ireland, and were building a fort there. More soldiers were needed to put down the Irish rebels and drive out the Spaniards. This was Raleigh's chance. He

was made a captain, and sailed to Ireland with a hundred soldiers, most of them brave Devonshire men.

On the sand-hills of a bay on the Irish coast the golden flag of Spain was flying above the fort, which held 800 of the enemy, both Spaniards and Irishmen.

Outside the sheltered bay the great waves of the Atlantic Ocean were dashing against the black rocks. But louder than the roaring sea sounded the cannons of the fort. They were thundering at the battery or little fort which the English had made among the sand-hills. Raleigh was in this battery, and his guns flashed back their answer to the Spanish fort.

“Down with that rag!” cried Raleigh. The gunners fired once more, and the soldiers bent their long-bows at the hated Spanish flag which was floating proudly over the fort.

The flagstaff was struck! Down went the great flag of Spain. The hurrahs of the English soldiers were echoed by the sailors. For in the bay lay the English ships. The Spaniards were besieged both by sea and land. They knew that if they did not capture the English battery soon, all hope would be lost.

So on a dark stormy night 200 men stole silently from the fort. They were going to surprise the English. They carried scaling-ladders with which to climb the walls of the battery. But in the darkness and the rain the way over the sand-hills was hard to find. Some of the Spaniards walked into the sea, and only just saved themselves from

drowning! Some of them lost their way in the sand-hills, and had to wait until it was light enough to find their way back to the fort.

The men who did reach the English battery found the English ready for them. After a short fight the Spaniards had to fly for their lives. The next day a white flag was hoisted over the fort where the yellow one had been before. The white flag meant the fort had surrendered. The Spaniards were beaten, and could help the Irish no more.

But Raleigh's work in Ireland was not yet finished. The Irish were still fighting, and Raleigh had to stay in Ireland for two or three years longer.

There was in the south of Ireland a strong castle, which belonged to an Irish rebel lord. To this castle many of the Irish rebels used to fly in times of danger, knowing that the lord of the castle would give them refuge.

So Raleigh decided to try and capture the castle. He set out with only six men. They had a long distance to ride, along rough and lonely roads. On the way they had to cross a ford, which is a shallow place in a river. The men were very tired, for they had been on horseback for many hours. They were not riding together like soldiers, but were straggling behind Raleigh, some of them half asleep.

Suddenly, just as Raleigh was crossing the ford, there was a wild yell, and Irish rebels seemed to start up from every side. Raleigh was surrounded.

Then began a desperate fight, hand to hand. Raleigh, striking right and left, forced his way at last through

the enemy. But looking back, he saw that one of his men was in great danger; his horse had thrown him into the river. He was struggling to get out; but in another minute the rebels would have cut him down. Quick as lightning Raleigh rode back to rescue his friend, who was a Devon man. Immediately the rebels turned on Raleigh. His horse was shot under him, and his enemies, with a shout of triumph, called to him to yield! But he stood with his pistol in one hand and a stout stick in the other, and held them all at bay, one man against twenty, until his friend was safe. Then, fighting his way through the wild Irish rebels, he himself escaped. He found that all his men were safe, and they marched quickly on to the castle; but all they found was a mass of smoking ruins. The Irish had burnt the castle rather than let the English capture it.

The story of his daring deed spread far and wide, even to the palace of the great Queen Elizabeth, who heard how one of her soldiers, far away on a desolate Irish bog, had fought for England single-handed against fearful odds.

Raleigh had many other desperate fights with the Irish. He had shown himself to be so gallant a soldier that he was often chosen to do the most difficult and dangerous deeds.

One evening he was told to take prisoner an Irish lord who had been pretending to be on the English side, but was really helping the rebels. This man, whose name was Lord Roche, lived in a castle with the strange name of Bally-in-Hash. It was one of the strongest castles in

Ireland. Raleigh knew that it would be very hard to capture. But the very evening he received his orders he set out with only ninety men, promising that if he came back alive he would bring Lord Roche with him.

Lord Roche, who had spies all over the country, heard that Raleigh was on the way to Castle Bally-in-Hash, and sent 800 men to fight him on the road. But Raleigh went a different way, and so escaped.

In the early morning he came to the little town which was near the castle. Here he found 500 of the townspeople ready to fight him. But they were not real soldiers, and Raleigh, by pretending he had more men coming behind him, soon made them run away.

Then, leaving most of his men in the town, he hurried to the castle with only six soldiers. The other men were to follow.

“I wish to speak to Lord Roche,” said Raleigh to the guard at the castle gate.

“You cannot enter the castle with more than two followers,” said the guard.

“Very well,” said Raleigh, going boldly through the great iron gate with only two men behind him.

He was taken to Lord Roche, who was sitting at breakfast with his wife in the castle hail. While Raleigh was talking to Lord Roche, the two soldiers, who had been left in the courtyard, managed to open the gate and let in all the other soldiers, who had now come up.

“My lord,” said Raleigh, “you are my prisoner.”

“Your prisoner!” cried Lord Roche. “You dare to say that to me in my own castle!”

Raleigh silently pointed through the open door to the courtyard, which was full of English soldiers armed at all points. Lord Roche saw that he really was a prisoner in his own castle.

When the night came Raleigh began the long march back with his prisoner. Again and again the rebels attacked him and tried to save Lord Roche. Again and again they were beaten off by Raleigh and his men. The night was wild and wet, and the way was steep and rough. But Raleigh kept his word. He brought his prisoner safely back.

For these brave deeds Raleigh was given broad lands in Ireland by the Queen.

But he was tired of Ireland. He wanted to go to London to see the great Queen and her lords and ladies. So he left his lands in Ireland, and sailed away to seek his fortune in London.

RALEIGH AND THE QUEEN

On the banks of the great river Thames stood the palace of the Queen. The sun was sparkling on the river and on the pure white marble steps which led up from the water-side to the Queen's landing-place. At the steps lay the royal boat, gay with glistening white sails, and with the banner of England waving above it. The way from the palace-gate to the river-side was guarded by soldiers in scarlet coats with shining spears in their hands. These were the Queen's soldiers of the Guard. They were the tallest, strongest, and finest men in England. They were waiting for the Queen to come forth.

The palace gate was flung open. First came the gentlemen of the Queen's household. Then came the great Queen herself, followed by the lords and ladies of her Court. She looked a queen indeed as she passed, tall and stately, through the soldiers of the guard. She wore a dress of lovely satin embroidered with pearls. The bright jewels in her crown blazed in the sunlight. Round her neck was a ruff of costly lace; diamonds sparkled in her ears and on her breast.

Behind the soldiers crowded the people, who had come just to catch a glimpse of their Good Queen Bess as she

passed from the palace to her boat. They had given a great cheer when she first came forth, but now they were watching the brilliant procession in silence.

In the very front of the crowd stood a tall, handsome young man. His bright eyes were fixed eagerly on the Queen, as she came slowly towards him, smiling at the people as she passed.

The young man was Walter Raleigh, who was looking at last on the Queen whom he had served so well in Ireland.

As the Queen drew near the place where Raleigh stood she glanced at the ground and seemed to pause. Raleigh's quick eye saw that the ground at that place was muddy. Pushing past the guard, he flung from his shoulders his rich velvet cloak and spread it over the muddy spot. As he did so he bowed low before the Queen, his plumed hat in his hand, and the sun shining on his wavy dark hair. Looking up, he found the Queen was smiling graciously and thanking him for his courtesy. Then, stepping gently on the cloak, she passed on and went on board her boat.

Raleigh still stood where the Queen had left him. His face was glowing and his eyes were sparkling. Never would he forget this day when Elizabeth herself had first spoken to him.

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by a gentleman, who touched his arm where the muddy cloak was hanging.

"Sir," he said, "her Majesty has sent me to a gentleman who bears a muddy cloak. Will you please follow me?"

Raleigh, feeling as if he were in a dream, followed the royal messenger to the Queen's boat. The Queen was sitting with her ladies beneath a silken awning or shade to shield her from the sun.

"Sir," said the Queen, "we thank you for the offer of so fair a footcloth. What reward shall we give you?"

"I wish for no reward," answered Raleigh; "that your Majesty's foot should have touched my cloak is reward enough for me."

The Queen smiled. "What is your name?" she asked, "and where is your home?"

"Raleigh is my name, most gracious Queen, and my home is in Devonshire."

"Raleigh?" repeated the Queen; "we have heard that name before. Did you not risk your life to rescue your friend from the wild Irish rebels at a lonely ford beset with foes? Did you not fight and win, one man against twenty? We do not easily forget the daring deed of so gallant a subject."

"It was nothing," murmured Raleigh, with a blush; "no deed could be too dangerous in the service of your Majesty."

"You speak as bravely as you act," said Elizabeth, smiling again; "here is something to remind you always of this day." She gave him as she spoke a diamond ring; and Raleigh, kneeling before her, kissed her hand as he received it.

And that is the story that is told of how Raleigh first

met Queen Elizabeth. From that day his fortune was made. The Queen never forgot her Squire of the Cloak, as she loved to call him. She even made him one of the gentlemen of her household.

The great lords and gentlemen, who lived near the Queen and were called her courtiers, were very jealous, because the Queen liked Raleigh so much.

One of these lords was called the Viceroy of Ireland, because he ruled Ireland for the Queen. He was very angry that Raleigh, who had only been a captain, should be given so much honour. So he said bitter things about Raleigh and tried to turn the Queen against him.

The Queen and the lords met together to judge between the Viceroy and his captain. First the Viceroy told his story. Then Raleigh answered him. He spoke so well that even the men who did not like him were forced to listen. All eyes were fixed on him. As for the Queen, she listened to every word he said as he stood there and told his story with flashing eyes and glowing words. She asked him many questions, and he could always give an answer. And when the lords saw how the Queen listened to Raleigh, it nettled them all.

So Raleigh was given more honour than ever. But sometimes he was afraid that all this good fortune would pass like a dream. He longed to become a great man and help the Queen to rule England; but he feared that in trying to gain more honour he might lose what he already had.

We are told that one day as he was thinking such

thoughts as these, he took from his finger the diamond ring the Queen had given him. He was standing at the window of a summer-house in the Queen's garden looking over the river, and he wrote with the diamond these words on the window-pane—

"Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall."

The Queen, who was walking in the garden with one of her ladies, saw Raleigh writing on the window. "We must read what my Squire of the Cloak has written," she said. "He wrote with the ring we gave to him; perchance what he wrote is for our eyes." Going to the summer-house which Raleigh had now left, she read the line. "He fears to fall," she said; "he fears to lose our favour? We will tell him that the man who wishes to be great must never fear."

So taking one of her diamonds she wrote on the window-pane just under Raleigh's line—

"If thy heart fail thee, then climb not at all!"

When Raleigh saw these words and heard that the Queen had written them herself, he felt both proud and happy. He knew she meant he was not to lose heart, but to go on striving to become a great man.

The Queen gave Raleigh many services to do for her. Every service was done so well that he was rewarded with lands and money. Every day he gained more honour and power.

One day he was called to the Queen's presence. She was seated on her throne in the great hall of her palace. The walls were covered with rich tapestry, which was silken cloth most beautifully embroidered in gold and silver and coloured threads by the hands of fair ladies. The hall was brilliantly lighted with torches of wax, for in those days they had no gas. The torch-light shone on the glittering armour, which hung round the hall.

But more brightly even than the polished armour sparkled the gay dresses and the jewels of the lords and ladies who were standing round the hall. It was a splendid sight.

As Raleigh entered, all eyes were turned on him. He was dressed in white satin, with a short close-fitting coat of rich brown velvet, embroidered with silver and pearls. His sword-belt also was of brown velvet. At his side he wore a jewelled dagger. In his hand he carried his velvet hat, with a long black feather fastened with a blood-red ruby pin. Even his shoes were sparkling with diamonds.

Kneeling before the Queen, Raleigh awaited her pleasure. She lifted a gleaming sword from her side.

"Walter Raleigh!" she said in a loud clear voice that all might hear, "In the name of God and Saint George, we dub thee Knight! Be Faithful, Brave, and Fortunate." As she spoke she struck Raleigh's shoulders gently with the blunt edge of the sword, and then exclaimed, "Arise, Sir Walter Raleigh!"

So Raleigh was made a knight, and every one thought how noble a knight he seemed.

It was a gay life at the Court of Queen Elizabeth. The Queen liked all her courtiers to wear fine clothes, and to be always gallant and merry.

She took great delight in music and poetry. So the young courtiers would sing sweet songs to please her, and make many a verse of poetry in praise of their maiden Queen. Some of these verses are so beautiful that they will never be forgotten. When Raleigh found that the Queen loved poetry, he was glad. He wrote several poems which gave the Queen much pleasure. Some of these poems are lost, but those which were kept show that Raleigh could write as well as he could fight.

In the evenings the Queen loved to have acting and dancing and "pleasing shows." Sometimes even in the daytime she would walk in her gardens dressed in fancy dress, followed by her pages dressed as wood-land fairies. Often they would dance on the lawn, where the grass was kept as smooth as soft green velvet. Sometimes the Queen and her courtiers would meet together to watch the young knights show their courage and skill in arms at a tournament or mock-fight. The place where they fought was called the lists. The knights fought on horse-back armed with blunted lances. They would gallop into the lists in shining armour with plumes of their chosen colour nodding on their helmets. Then when the signal was given they would charge each other at full tilt, and the knight who was unhorsed had to own himself vanquished.

At these tournaments Raleigh bore himself gallantly, and sometimes carried off the victor's prize.

The Queen made him Captain of the Guard, and so it was his duty often to be near her. He wore sometimes the uniform of the Guard, which was the colour of a golden orange, and was trimmed with fur. Sometimes he wore a suit of silver armour richly studded with diamonds, rubies, and pearls.

But all this splendour did not make Raleigh lazy. All day long he had to be at Court, but often in the evening he would read and study until the birds sang in the morning. He sat with his books in a little turret-room looking into and over the river Thames. This was his favourite room in the beautiful river-side house the Queen had given him.

In the autumn Raleigh used to ride away from the gay and brilliant Court back to his old home in Devonshire. The Queen had made him a judge over the Cornish and Devon miners. The judgment-seat was a very strange one. It was a great granite stone on a wild windy moor, far away from any house or cottage. Here the rough miners would gather round their judge and tell him their wrongs and their troubles. Raleigh listened patiently, and judged so wisely that the miners loved him always. Long afterwards, when he was in great trouble and many of his friends deserted him, he found these poor men still faithful.

So Raleigh had become one of the greatest men in England.

But sometimes in the midst of his busy Court life he