

She profited by the fact that she lived away from the bustle of the court, since she used her leisure for study. Before she was seventeen she was a proficient scholar, being able to speak with fluency a number of foreign languages, and having acquired a large store of historic and literary information that was presently to help in making her one of the best-educated women in the history of English queens.

Queen Mary, while reigning, was jealous of this younger sister. At one time she even sought to get rid of her. She did have her imprisoned in the Tower of London, on the pretext of having found her involved in a plot to dethrone the queen. The evidence, however, was slight, and, after a short time, Elizabeth was released. She then retired to an estate at Woodstock, and once more read French and Spanish and dreamed probably of a day when she might inherit the kingdom.

Elizabeth was born in 1533. She was twenty-five years of age when she became queen. Though she was Protestant in her religion, she did not practice the kind of intolerance of which her sister Mary had been guilty. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth loved music and dancing; she was interested in literature and art; and she did not like war and the horrors that war brings. She was wise in a political sense, and very skilful as a diplomat. Under Elizabeth's guidance, England was raised to a pinnacle of prosperity such as she had never before known, and at no point in her history had there been such a wealth of real literature produced.

Elizabeth gathered around her a number of remarkable men. Among her close friends were Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and the Earl of Leicester. She had many suitors, both at home and abroad, but she never married. There were times when she seemed to favor now this one or again that one; but though she half-promised to marry at different times, she finally dismissed all her admirers as possible husbands and remained single to her death.

Her love of progress did make her desire to reach out and learn new things. She permitted and encouraged the men of her court to go on exploring expeditions. The famous sea voyages of Drake were made while she was queen. Walter Raleigh sent out expeditions to establish the colony of Virginia. It was Raleigh who planted the potato found in America, in the garden on his Irish estate, and it was he who introduced the smoking of the tobacco leaf at court.

There is a pretty story told of Raleigh's first meeting with the queen. The young man had just come from the country to London. Elizabeth was making a state call. As she stepped from her carriage she found herself on the edge of a muddy spot in the road.