

How Sir Francis Drake Sailed Round the World

by James Anthony Froude

The ships which the Spaniards used on the Pacific were usually built on the spot. But Magellan was known to have gone by the Horn, and where a Portuguese could go an Englishman could go. Drake proposed to try. The vessels in which he was preparing to tempt fortune seem preposterously small. The "Pelican," or "Golden Hind," which belonged to Drake himself, was but 120 tons, at best no larger than a modern racing yawl, though perhaps no racing yawl was ever better equipped for the work which she had to do. The next, the "Elizabeth" of London, was said to be eighty tons; a small pinnace of twelve tons, in which we should hardly risk a summer cruise round the Land's End, with two sloops or frigates of fifty and thirty tons, made the rest. The "Elizabeth" was commanded by Captain Winter, a queen's officer, and perhaps a son of the old admiral.

We may credit Drake with knowing what he was about. He and his comrades were carrying their lives in their hands. If they were taken they would be inevitably hanged. Their safety depended on speed of sailing, and specially on the power of working fast to windward, which the heavy square-rigged ships could not do. The crews all told were one hundred and sixty men and boys.

On November 15th, 1577, the "Pelican" and her consorts sailed out of Plymouth Sound. The elements frowned on their start. On the second day they were caught in a winter gale. The "Pelican" sprung her mainmast, and they put back to refit and repair. Before the middle of December all was again in order. The weather mended, and with a fair wind and smooth water they made a fast run down the coast to the Cape de Verde Islands. There taking up the northeast Trades, they struck across the Atlantic. They passed the mouth of the Plate River, finding to their astonishment fresh water at the ship's side in fifty-four fathoms. On June 20th they reached Port St. Julian on the coast of Patagonia.

It was now midwinter, the stormiest season of the year, and they remained for six weeks in Port St. Julian. They burnt the twelve-ton pinnace, as too small for the work they had now before them, and there remained only the "Pelican," the "Elizabeth," and the "Marigold." In cold, wild weather they weighed at last, and on August 20th made the opening of Magellan's Straits. The passage is seventy miles long, tortuous and dangerous. They had no charts. Icy mountains overhung them on either side; heavy snow fell below. They brought up occasionally at an island to rest the men, and let them kill a few seals and penguins to give them fresh food. Everything they saw was new, wild, and wonderful.

Having to feel their way, they were three weeks in getting through. They had counted on reaching the Pacific that the worst of their work was over, and that they could run north at once into warmer and calmer latitudes. The peaceful ocean, when they entered it, proved the stormiest they had ever sailed on. A fierce westerly gale drove them six hundred miles to the southeast outside the Horn. The "Marigold" went down in the tremendous encounter. Captain Winter in the "Elizabeth" made his way back into Magellan's Straits. There he lay for three weeks, lighting fires nightly to show Drake where he was; but no Drake appeared. They had agreed, if separated, to meet on the coast in the latitude of Valparaiso; but Winter was chicken-hearted, and sore, we are told, "against the mariners' will," when the three weeks were out, he sailed away for England, where he reported that all the ships were lost but the "Pelican," and that the "Pelican" was probably lost too.

Drake had believed better of Winter, and had not expected to be so deserted. He had himself taken refuge among the islands which form the Cape, waiting for the spring and milder weather. He

used the time in making surveys, and observing the habits of the native Patagonians. The days lengthened, and the sea smoothed at last. He then sailed for Valparaiso, hoping to meet Winter there, as he had arranged. At Valparaiso there was no Winter, but there was in the port instead a great galleon just come in from Peru. The galleon's crew took him for a Spaniard, hoisted their colors, and beat their drums. The "Pelican" shot alongside. The English sailors in high spirits leaped on board. No life was taken; Drake never hurt man if he could help it. The crew jumped overboard, and swam ashore. The prize was examined. Four hundred pounds' weight of gold was found in her, besides other plunder.

Drake went on next to Tarapaca, where silver from the Andes mines was shipped for Panama. At Tarapaca there was the same unconsciousness of danger. The silver bars lay piled on the quay, the muleteers who had brought them were sleeping peacefully in the sunshine at their side. The muleteers were left to their slumbers. The bars were lifted into the English boats. A train of mules or llamas came in at that moment with a second load as rich as the first. This, too, went into the "Pelican's" hold. The bullion taken at Tarapaca was worth nearly half a million ducats.

Still there was no news of Winter. Drake began to realize that he was now entirely alone, and had only himself and his own crew to depend on. There was nothing to do but to go through with it, danger adding to the interest. Arica was the next point visited. Half a hundred blocks of silver were picked up at Arica. After Arica came Lima, the chief depot of all, where the grandest haul was looked for. At Lima, alas! they were just too late. Twelve great hulks lay anchored there. The sails were unbent, the men were ashore. They contained nothing but some chests of reels and a few bales of silk and linen. But a thirteenth, called the "Cacafuego," had sailed a few days before for the Isthmus with the whole produce of the Lima mines for the season. Her ballast was silver, her cargo gold and emeralds and rubies.

Drake deliberately cut the cables of the ships in the roads, that they might drive ashore and be unable to follow him. The "Pelican" spread her wings, and sped away in pursuit. He would know the "Cacafuego," so he learned at Lima, by the peculiar cut of her sails. The first man who caught sight of her was promised a gold chain for his reward. A sail was seen on the second day. It was not the chase, but it was worth stopping for. Eighty pounds' weight of gold was found, and a great gold crucifix, set with emeralds said to be as large as pigeons' eggs.

We learn from the Spanish accounts that the Viceroy of Lima, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment, dispatched ships in pursuit. They came up with the last plundered vessel, heard terrible tales of the rovers' strength, and went back for a larger force. The "Pelican" meanwhile went along upon her course for eight hundred miles. At length, off Quito, and close under the shore, the "Cacafuego's" peculiar sails were sighted, and the gold chain was claimed. There she was, going lazily along a few miles ahead. Care was needed in approaching her. If she guessed the "Pelican's" character she would run in upon the land, and they would lose her. It was afternoon. The sun was still above the horizon, and Drake meant to wait till night, when the breeze would be off the shore, as in the tropics it always is.

The "Pelican" sailed two feet to the "Cacafuego's" one. Drake filled his empty wine skins with water and trailed them astern to stop his way. The chase supposed that she was followed by some heavily-loaded trader, and, wishing for company on a lonely voyage, she slackened sail, and waited for him to come up. At length the sun went down into the ocean, the rosy light faded from off the snows of the Andes; and when both ships had become invisible from the shore, the skins were hauled in, the night wind rose, and the water began to ripple under the "Pelican's" bows. The "Cacafuego" was swiftly overtaken, and when within a cable's length a voice hailed her to put her head into the wind. The

Spanish commander, not understanding so strange an order, held on his course. A broadside brought down his mainyard, and a flight of arrows rattled on his deck. He was himself wounded. In a few minutes he was a prisoner, and the ship and her precious freight were in the corsair's power. The wreck was cut away; the ship was cleared; a prize crew was put on board. Both vessels turned their heads to the sea. At daybreak no land was to be seen, and the examination of the prize began. The full value was never acknowledged. The invoice, if there was one, was destroyed. The accurate figures were known only to Drake and Queen Elizabeth. A published schedule acknowledged to twenty tons of silver bullion, thirteen chests of silver coins, and a hundredweight of gold, but there were gold nuggets beside in indefinite quantity, and "a great store" of pearls, emeralds, and diamonds.

Drake, we are told, was greatly satisfied. He thought it prudent to stay in the neighborhood no longer than necessary. He went north with all sail set, taking his prize along with him. The master, San Juan de Anton, was removed on board the "Pelican," to have his wound attended to. He remained as Drake's guest for a week, and sent in a report of what he observed to the Spanish government. One at least of Drake's party spoke excellent Spanish. This person took San Juan over the ship. She showed signs, San Juan said, of rough service, but was still in fine condition, with ample arms, spare rope, mattocks, carpenters' tools of all descriptions. There were eighty-five men on board all told, fifty of them men of war, the rest young fellows, ship boys, and the like. Drake himself was treated with great reverence; a sentinel stood always at his cabin door. He dined alone with music.

The "Pelican" met with many other adventures, and at last sailed for home. Sweeping in fine clear weather round the Cape of Good Hope, she touched once for water at Sierra Leone, and finally sailed in triumph into Plymouth Harbor.

English sympathy with an extraordinary exploit is always irresistible. Shouts of applause rang through the country; and Elizabeth, every bit of her an English-woman, felt with her subjects. She sent for Drake to London, made him tell his story over and over again, and was never weary of listening to him.

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