

Queen Elizabeth I Against the Spanish Armada

One of the most powerful women who ever lived was Queen Elizabeth I of England. Elizabeth (1533-1603) was the daughter of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, and was known as the Virgin Queen or Good Queen Bess. She was 25 years old when she became Queen and ruled England for 44 years until age 69.

In the 1500s there was a major rivalry on the seas between the ships of Britain and Spain over control of trade in the New World. King Philip II of Spain decided to settle the question once and for all by invading and conquering England itself. Philip assembled a huge fleet of warships known as the Spanish Armada and in 1588 sailed into the English Channel.

Below are the words Elizabeth spoke when she visited her troops in the field as they prepared for this battle. During the nine-day battle, the smaller, more maneuverable British ships met the Spanish Armada and inflicted terrible losses. Spanish ships that sailed away encountered foul weather and only a few ever returned to Spain. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Britain became the dominant world power and remained so for centuries.

My loving people, we have been persuaded by some, that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit ourselves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you, I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear; I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects. And therefore I am come amongst you at this time, not as for my recreation or sport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all; to lay down, for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honor and my blood, even the dust. I know I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too; and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realms: to which, rather than any dishonor should grow by me, I myself will take up arms; I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, by your forwardness, that you have deserved rewards and crowns; and we do assure you, on the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean my lieutenant general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble and worthy subject; not doubting by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and by your valor in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over the enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

Queen Elizabeth I – 1588

310 words