

Robert Bruce

"IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY, AND TRY AGAIN."

Don't give up too easily; persistence pays off in the end. The proverb has been traced back to 'Teacher's Manual' (1840) by American educator Thomas H. Palmer and 'The Children of the New Forest' (1847) by English novelist Frederick Maryat (1792-1848).

Originally this was a maxim used to encourage American schoolchildren to do their homework. Palmer (1782-1861) wrote in his 'Teacher's Manual': 'Tis a lesson you should heed, try, try again. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'

I could be wrong but I remember reading that it was first attributed to Robert the Bruce. Hiding from the English after some battle or other and on the verge of jacking it all in, he spied a spider. The spider was trying to spin a web or climb up a wall or something and despite continual knockbacks kept trying. This inspired "The Bruce" to renew his battle – and he was ultimately very successful.



Very true – this saying does come from King Robert 1st of Scotland, known as Robert the Bruce. Here is his story --- then follows some historical and biographical notes.

The kingdom of Scotland owes much to the insignificant eensie weensie spider!



Robert Bruce and the Spider

After the Scottish defeat at the battle of Falkirk, and then the terrible news of Wallace's execution, Robert the Bruce is said to have been inspired to continue the struggle against the English by the persistence of a spider trying to weave its web.

Bruce was hiding out from English pursuers in a cave. He was exhausted from the never ending struggle, and in despair. Maybe he should flee to France and live out his life in comfort. His eye fell on a spider spinning its web. It kept trying to swing across the ceiling, over and over again, until at last it reached the other side and anchored the first strand of the web.

"Try, try, and try again". Bruce adopted the same motto and spent the next eight years fighting the English occupiers of Scotland until they were at last driven out.

On the lonely island of Rachrin, off the Irish coast, stood a mean and miserable hut. The chilly winter wind rattled the wooden door, demanding to be let in, sending icy fingers in through cracks and knotholes in the flimsy wooden walls. Inside, a man, his cloak wrapped close about him, lay on a straw pallet set against the wall opposite the door. A fire smoked in the centre of the rough earthen floor, and the remains of a frugal meal lay on a small wooden table.

This man was Robert Bruce, crowned king of Scotland, and made an outlaw in his own country by Edward I, King of England. Edward I, better known as Edward Longshanks, because of his long legs, had defeated Robert and harried him and hunted him, forcing him at last to leave the lochs and craggy mountains of his

native land. He had left behind his queen in Kildrummie, his only remaining castle, in the charge of his brave and valiant younger brother Nigel. But alas, Kildrummie had been taken by the English, his brother executed, and his queen held captive.

Robert was close to despair: "Was the freedom of Scotland worth the great price that he was paying? Was it worth the lives of all those slain in battle, worth the misery of their wives and orphaned children? And what of all the men that he himself had killed, one at least not in the heat of battle, but in cold blood?"

Perhaps, thought Robert, he should give up his fight for freedom and go instead to the Holy Land, to fight beside the brave knights against the enemies of Christendom. Perhaps that would make up for the killing and the deaths that his ambitions and dreams had brought about. Yet, how could he abandon Scotland, while there was still a hope, a chance, however slender, of success?

The wind howled louder; the fire had died down. Robert lay still and silent on his mean straw bed, oblivious of the cold and discomfort of his surroundings, troubled and disturbed by his thoughts. Suddenly his eye was caught by a spider - the creature was hanging by a long silvery thread from one of the wooden beams above his head, and trying to swing itself to another beam. The spider tried again and again, failing every time.

Six times, counted Robert, the spider tried and failed. 'Six times,' thought Robert to himself, 'have I fought against the English and failed.'



Robert looked at the spider more intently. 'Now if this spider fails again on the seventh attempt, I too shall give up the fight for Scotland. But if it succeeds, I shall try again.' The spider, as though aware of Robert's thought, swung itself again with all its tiny strength - and finally, on the seventh attempt, it succeeded. It swung on to the beam it had been trying to reach, and fastened its thread, thus stretching the first line of the web it was trying to weave.

Robert Bruce smiled, and sat up. He threw off his despair and grief, and determined to set out for Scotland again and continue his fight against the English. He fought against the English for the next eight years, defeating them and finally driving them out of Scotland in 1314, at the Battle of Bannockburn.

BRUCE AND THE SPIDER

by: Bernard Barton (1784-1849)

FOR Scotland's and for freedom's right
The Bruce his part has played;--
In five successive fields of fight
Been conquered and dismayed:
Once more against the English host
His band he led, and once more lost
The meed for which he fought;
And now from battle, faint and worn,
The homeless fugitive, forlorn,
A hut's lone shelter sought.

And cheerless was that resting-place
For him who claimed a throne;--
His canopy, devoid of grace,
The rude, rough beams alone;
The heather couch his only bed--
Yet well I ween had slumber fled
From couch of eider down!
Through darksome night till dawn of day,
Absorbed in wakeful thought he lay
Of Scotland and her crown.

The sun rose brightly, and its gleam
Fell on that hapless bed,
And tinged with light each shapeless beam
Which roofed the lowly shed;
When, looking up with wistful eye,
The Bruce beheld a spider try
His filmy thread to fling
From beam to beam of that rude cot--
And well the insect's toilsome lot
Taught Scotland's future king.

Six times the gossamery thread
The wary spider threw;--
In vain the filmy line was sped,
For powerless or untrue
Each aim appeared, and back recoiled
The patient insect, six times foiled,
And yet unconquered still;
And soon the Bruce, with eager eye,
Saw him prepare once more to try
His courage, strength, and skill.

One effort more, his seventh and last!--
The hero hailed the sign!--
And on the wished-for beam hung fast
That slender silken line!
Slight as it was, his spirit caught
The more than omen; for his thought
The lesson well could trace,
Which even "he who runs may read,"
That Perseverance gains its meed,
And Patience wins the race.

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THIS SPIDER'S PERSISTENCE IS
REMARKABLE -- THAT'S WEB 9.0

Robert I, the Bruce (1274-1329)

Robert Bruce is surely the greatest of all the great Scottish heroes, yet the Hollywood movie Braveheart gave heroics to his compatriot William Wallace, making Bruce out to be nothing more than a self-serving opportunist.

However, it was the patience and cunning of Bruce that Scotland needed, not the impetuosity of Wallace, especially facing such formidable enemies as the English, first under Edward I and then under his son and heir Edward II. Bruce bided his time; he first had to establish his authority as King of Scotland. By the time of Bannockburn, he was ready.

Earl of Carrick, Robert Bruce was born at Turnberry Castle, Ayrshire, in 1274, of both Norman and Celtic ancestry. Two years before his birth, Edward Plantagenet had become King Edward I of England. The ruthlessness of Edward, who earned the title "the Hammer of the Scots" brought forth the greatness of Bruce whose astonishing victory at Bannockburn in 1314 over the much larger and better-equipped forces of Edward II ensured Scottish freedom from control by the hated English.

This struggle for control of Scotland began when Alexander III died in 1286, leaving as heir his grandchild Margaret, the infant daughter of the King of Norway. English King Edward, with his eye on the complete subjugation of his northern neighbors, suggested that Margaret should marry his son, a desire consummated at a treaty signed and sealed at Birgham. Under the terms, Scotland was to remain a separate and independent kingdom, -- "separate, distinct and free in itself without subjection from the realm of England" --though Edward wished to keep English garrisons in a number of Scottish castles. On her way to Scotland, somewhere in the Orkneys, the young Norwegian princess died, unable to enjoy the consignment of sweetmeats and raisins sent by the English King. The succession was now open to many claimants, the strongest of whom were John Balliol and Robert Bruce.

John Balliol was supported by King Edward, who believed him to be the weaker and more compliant of the two Scottish claimants. Balliol was an English baron belonging to a house with an established tradition of loyalty to the English crown. At a meeting of 104 auditors, with Edward as judge, the decision went in favor of Balliol, who was duly declared to be the rightful king in November 1292. The English king's plans for a peaceful relationship with his northern neighbor now took a different turn. In exchange for his support, Edward demanded that he should have feudal superiority over Scotland, including homage from Balliol, judicial authority over the Scottish king in any disputes brought against him by his own subjects and defrayment of costs for the defence of England as well as active support in the war against France.

Even the weak Balliol could not stomach these outrageous demands. Showing a hitherto unknown courage, in front of the English king he declared that he was the King of Scotland and should answer only to his own people, refusing to supply military service to Edward. The impetuous man then concluded a treaty with France prior to planning an invasion of England.

Edward was ready. He went north to receive homage from a great number of Scottish nobles, as their feudal lord, among them none other than 21 year-old Robert Bruce, who owned estates in England. Balliol immediately punished this treachery by seizing Bruce's lands in Scotland and giving them to his brother-in-law, John Comyn. Yet within a few months, the Scottish king was to disappear from the scene. His army was defeated by Edward at Dunbar in April 1296. Soon after at Brechin, on 10 July, he surrendered his Scottish throne to the English king, who took into his possession the stone of Scone, "the coronation stone" of the Scottish kings. At a parliament, which he summoned at Berwick, the English king received homage and the oath of fealty from over 2,000 Scots. He seemed secure in Scotland.

Flushed with this success, Edward had gone too far. The rising tide of nationalist fervor in the face of the arrival of the English armies north of the border created the need for new Scottish leaders. Following a brawl with English soldiers in the market place at Lanark, a young Scottish knight, William Wallace, after killing an English sheriff found himself at the head of a fast-spreading movement of national resistance. At Stirling Bridge, a Scottish force led by Wallace won an astonishing victory when it completely annihilated a large, lavishly equipped English army under the command of Surrey, Edward I's viceroy.

Yet Wallace's great victory, successful because the English cavalry were unable to maneuver on the marshy ground and their supporting troops had been trapped on a narrow bridge, proved to be a Pyrrhic one. Bringing a large army north in 1298 and goading Wallace to forgo his successful guerrilla campaign into fighting a second pitched battle, the English king's forces were more successful. At Falkirk, they crushed the over-confident Scottish followers of Wallace.

Falkirk was a grievous loss for Wallace who never again found himself in command of a large body of troops. After hiding out for a number of years, he was finally captured in 1305 and brought to London to die a traitor's death similar to that meted out a few years earlier by King Edward to Prince Dafydd ap Gruffudd, Welsh leader of yet another fight for independence from England. With the execution of Wallace, it was time for Robert Bruce, whose heritage as Earl of Carrick made him much more than "a mere Anglo-Norman fish out of water, grassed on a Celtic riverbank" to free himself from his fealty to Edward and to lead the fight for Scotland.

At a meeting in Greyfriar's Kirk at Dumfries between the two surviving claimants for the Scottish throne, the perfidious, but crafty Bruce murdered John Comyn,

thus earning the enmity of the many powerful supporters of the Comyn family, but also excommunication from the Church. On March 27, 1306 he declared himself King of Scots. Edward's reply was predictable; he sent a large army north, defeated Bruce at the Battle of Methven, executed many of his supporters and forced the Scottish king into becoming a hunted outlaw.

Once again the indefatigable Scottish leader bided his time. After a year of demoralization and widespread English terror let loose in Scotland, during which two of his brothers were killed, Bruce came out of hiding. Aided mightily by his chief lieutenant, Sir James Douglas, "the Black Douglas" he won a first victory on Palm Sunday 1307. From all over Scotland, the clans answered the call and Bruce's forces gathered in strength to fight the English invaders, winning many encounters against cavalry with his spearmen.

The aging Edward decided to come to Scotland at the head of a large army to punish the Scots' impudence; but the now weak and sick king was ineffectual as a military leader. He could only wish that after his death his bones were to be carried at the head of his army until Scotland had been crushed. It was left to his son Edward II to try to carry out his father's dying wish. He was no man for the task.

Faced by too many problems at home and completely lacking the ruthlessness and resourcefulness of his father, the young Edward had no wish to get embroiled in the affairs of Scotland. Bruce was left alone to consolidate his gains and to punish those who opposed him. A series of successful campaigns against the Comyns and their allies left him in control of most of Scotland. In 1309 he was recognized as sole ruler by the French King and despite his earlier excommunication, even received the support of the Scottish Church. Thus emboldened, in 1311 Bruce drove out the English garrisons in all their Scottish strongholds except Stirling and invaded northern England. King Edward bestirred himself from his dalliances at Court to respond and took a large army north.

On Mid-Summer's Day, the 24th of June 1314 one of the most momentous battles in British history occurred. The armies of Robert Bruce heavily outnumbered by their English rivals, but employing tactics that prevented the English army from effectively employing its strength, won a decisive victory at Bannockburn. Scotland was wrenched from English control, its armies free to invade and harass northern England. Such was Bruce's military successes that he was able to invade Ireland, where his brother Edward had been crowned King by the exuberant Irish. A second expedition carried out by Edward II north of the border was driven back. Edward was forced to seek peace.

Robert Bruce followed up his outstanding military success by equally successful diplomatic overtures. After an appeal from the Scottish nobility even Bruce's excommunication was lifted by the new Pope at Rome. In May 1328 a peace treaty was signed at Northampton by the weary, helpless English king that

recognized Scotland as an independent kingdom and Robert Bruce as king. The Declaration of Independence signed at Arbroath was the culmination of Bruce's career. All his dreams fulfilled, he died one year later. One who for years had been an Anglo-Norman vassal of the King of England had made himself into a truly national Scottish hero.

Under the Declaration, if Robert Bruce were to prove weak enough to acknowledge Edward as overlord, then he would be dismissed in favor of someone else. English kings still continued to call themselves rulers of Scotland, just as they called themselves rulers of France for centuries after being booted out of the continent, but Scotland remained fully independent until 1603 (when James Stuart succeeded Elizabeth I).

If Robert Bruce had done no more than defy the power of King Edward, restore the Scottish monarchy and win at Bannockburn, he would still be listed among the giants, but he did more. His view of his nation was truly international. Under the rule of the one who was later to be known as "Good King Robert," Scotland had become the first nation state in Europe, the first to have territorial unity under a single king. Contained in the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320 was a letter to the Pope, who had excommunicated everyone in Scotland unless they swore allegiance to Edward II (such were the ways of medieval popes).

In the letter, signed by representatives from all classes of Scots society, it was stated that since ancient times the Scots had been free to choose their own kings, a freedom that was a gift from God. And so it was, but a gift that had needed a Robert Bruce to deliver.

King Robert the Bruce I was born at Lochmaben Castle in 1274. He was Knight and Overlord of Annandale. In 1306 he was crowned King of Scotland and henceforth tried to free Scotland from the English enemy.

After being defeated at a battle, Bruce escaped and found a hideout in a cave. Hiding in a cave for three months, Bruce was at the lowest point of his life. He thought about leaving the country and never coming back.

While waiting, he watched a spider building a web in the cave's entrance. The spider fell down time after time, but finally he succeeded with his web. So Bruce decided also to retry his fight and told his men: "**If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again**".

GENEALOGY OF ROBERT BRUCE AND JOHN BALLIOL

ROBERT THE BRUCE was the grandson of the Robert Bruce who tried to get the throne after the death of Alexander 111. He was descended from the great King David 1, since he was the great-grandson of Isabel, the daughter of the Earl of Huntingdon who in turn was the grandson of David 1. See below for more details of the line of succession.

JOHN BALLIOL, who had the unflattering nickname "Toom Tabard" meaning empty coat, ruled for less than 4 years (1292 -1296). Regarded as a 'useless king', he was the great-grandson of David, Earl of Huntingdon, who in turn was the grandson of King David 1 of Scotland (1124 - 1153). He tried to stand up to the English, but he was not able to unite his people, so the war was easily won by England. Scottish nobles owned lands in both Scotland and England, and were divided in their loyalties to such an extent that now they fought on one side, now on the other. His reign ended in disgrace when he submitted himself as a vassal to a representative of Edward 1 of England. Dressed in only a shirt and underpants he handed over a white wand signifying the surrender of the kingdom of Scotland to the English King. After three years in an English prison, he was allowed to travel to France. In his baggage was found the royal crown and seal of Scotland, as well as money and gold cups.

After John Balliol's disgraceful submission and loss of his crown in 1296, Robert Bruce asked Edward to make him king, as he was next in succession. But Edward turned to him sharply and said "Do you think I have nothing to do but to conquer kingdoms for you?" To show that Scotland was no longer to be an independent kingdom, Edward removed the Stone of Destiny, on which the Scottish kings were crowned, be taken to England, and all the papers and documents that might prove Scotland's independence. Last, he made those who had land in Scotland sign their names in a list to show that they recognised him as their king. If they refused their lands were confiscated. This list of names is called "The Ragman's Roll" and still exists. It has about 2000 names, including Robert Bruce. Edward thought he had subdued Scotland. But he was mistaken, for he had not been back in England long when William Wallace stepped into the arena to fight for Scotland.

The Stuart Kings were descended from King Robert the Bruce directly, and so too are the present Royal Family, who are descended from the daughter of King James V1 of Scotland (James 1 of England).

Here is a list of Kings (and one Queen) of Scotland in the period leading up to King Robert the Bruce:

- Duncan 1 (1034 - 1040)
- Macbeth (1040 - 1057)
- Malcolm 11, (Canmore), son of Duncan 1 (1057 - 1093)
- Donald Bane, second son of Duncan 1 (1093 - 1094)
- Duncan 11, son of Malcolm Canmore, (1094 -1094)
- Donald Bane, second reign (1094 - 1097)
- Edgar, son of Malcolm Canmore, (1097 - 1107)
- Alexander 1, brother of Edgar and son of Malcolm Canmore (1107 - 1124)
- David 1, brother of Edgar and Alexander and son of Malcolm Canmore(1124 - 1153)
- Malcolm 1V, grandson of Davd 1 (1153 - 1165)
- William the Lion, brother of Malcolm 1V (1165 - 1214)
- Alexander 11, son of William the Lion (1214 - 1249)
- Alexander 111, son Alexander 11 (1249 - 1286)
- Margaret, Maid of Norway (1286 - 1290)
- First Interregnum, English occupation of Scotland (1290 - 1292)
- John Balliol, descendant of David 1 (1292 - 1296)
- Second Interregnum, English occupation of Scotland (1296 - 1306)
- Robert 1, the Bruce, descendant of David 1 (1306 - 1329)



Bruce is remembered for finishing the 30 year War of Independence, by finally driving the English out of Scotland. In 1314, a huge English army lead by Edward II, the son of Longshanks and husband of Princess Isabella in *Braveheart*, headed for Stirling. Edward was no better a general than he was a king. Weak would be the kindest description. Bruce had learned much of Wallace's military skills, had a month to prepare his army, and therefore, at Bannockburn, the English army was routed. Scotland was free at last.