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Sir Edwin Landseer - A Member Of The Royal Humane Society

(Originally Published 1918)

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Questions to arouse interest. Where is this dog? Why do you think so? Does he seem to be looking across the water, or toward the land? What kind of dog is he? How do you know he is lying in the sunshine? What does the length of the shadows tell us about the time of day? What could this dog do if there should be a severe storm on the water? Can you see anything in the picture that makes you think there may be a storm coming? Where do the sea gulls go before a storm? Why would you not be afraid of this dog? What do you suppose the iron ring is used for? Do you like this picture? why?

Original Picture : National Gallery of British Art, London, England.

Artist: Sir Edwin Landseer (lând'ser).
Birthplace : London, England.

Dates : Born, 1802; died, 1873.

The story of the picture. One day when the artist, Sir Edwin Landseer, was visiting in the fine home of his friend, Mr. Newman Smith, a great Newfoundland dog came into the room carrying a basket of flowers in his mouth. Sir Edwin Landseer thought he had never seen so large and fine a dog, and when the dog came up to him and offered him the basket of flowers, as his owner told him to do, he was delighted. Being very fond of animals, Landseer always thought of painting them, so he suggested that he paint a picture of this dog. Mr. Newman Smith must have been surprised, for every one knew Sir Edwin Landseer had "so many animals to paint that he kept a long waiting list, and it was usually many weeks before he could commence a picture. But the artist could not forget the kind, intelligent eyes of this hand-some, trusty, powerful dog, and in a few days he sent for him. So Paul Pry—for that was the dog's name, was taken to Sir Edwin Landseer's studio.

The way to the artist's house led through a beautiful park, called Regent's Park, and then along the road called "St. John's Wood Road." The house was small but behind it was the garden, and at the end of the garden was what had once been an

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old barn. This barn had been made over until, with its many windows and fine view of the country all round, it had become an ideal place for a studio.

Paul Pry remembered Landseer at once, as anyone could see by the way he went up to him, wagging his tail and offering his paw. He did exactly as he was told, and seemed to understand perfectly everything that was said. He was a beautiful animal, and Landseer could not help thinking how strong such dogs are and what wonderful things they can be trained to do. Perhaps the first thing he thought of was how they save people from drowning, for they are very strong swimmers and can save lives when men are unable to do anything.

Sir Edwin Landseer painted a picture of another dog that looked enough like this one to be Paul Pry himself. He called the picture "Saved," because the dog has just saved a little child from drowning.

In that picture the dog is seen lying on the shore, too exhausted to do anything more than wait for help. He has strained every nerve and risked his own life to bring the child to land.

Sir Edwin called Paul Pry and told him to jump up on a big table where he could see him better. Then as he painted, he seemed to see the dog lying on the edge of a pier or wharf, waiting to go to the rescue if some one should need him.

So in this picture we see Paul Pry lying on the stone wharf while the water comes lapping gently against the iron mooring ring to which boats are fastened. It must be at the highest point of the tide, for we are sure the water never rises high enough to cover that iron ring entirely.

Just now the sun is shining brightly. We can tell this by the shadow of the dog's great dark head on the white coat of his body. The length and direction of the shadows tell us that the sun must be high in the sky. If it were low in the horizon the shadows would be longer. We can be sure of this by watching our own shadows as we go home from school. The few sea gulls circling near the shore call our attention to the sky, where the clouds are just beginning to gather, as if a storm might be approaching. Perhaps the good dog has already scented the storm, and is quietly waiting to see if there is any work for him to do. His ears, slightly lifted, show us that he is attentive and watching.

It must be a quiet, warm day or Paul Pry would not look so comfortable lying on such an exposed end of the pier. Perhaps the air is sultry, as it often is before a storm, for the dog's tongue hangs out and you can almost hear him pant.

This brave old dog, so ready and willing to risk his life to save other lives, might have been called "A Distinguished Member of the Life-Saving Crew," but Sir Edwin Landseer knew his dog would be as brave on land as on the sea, so he used the

name "Royal Humane Society," which may include both.

When the painting was finished it was placed on exhibition and hundreds of people came to see it. The owner of the dog, Mr. Newman Smith, was very proud indeed.

Questions to help the pupil understand the picture. Where did Sir Edwin Landseer first see this dog? What did the dog do that pleased the artist very much? Who suggested that he paint this picture? why? Why was Mr. Smith surprised? What was the dog's name? Where did Paul Pry go to have his picture painted? Tell about Sir Edwin Landseer's studio. How did Paul Pry behave? Where was he lying when the artist painted his picture? Where did Sir Edwin Landseer imagine the dog to be? What do you suppose made him think of that? How do these dogs save people from drowning? What makes you think there will be a storm? What makes you think the air is sultry? What time of day is it? Why did the artist call the picture "A Member of the Royal Humane Society"?

To the Teacher : Encourage the children to talk about their own pet dogs, and to draw pictures of them, using charcoal and manila paper. The drawings will probably not be worth much in themselves, but the practice will make the children more observant, and will tend to make their later drawings better.

The story of the artist. Sir Edwin Landseer learned how to draw from his father, and when he was but five years old he could draw remark-ably well. Edwin had three sisters and two brothers who liked to draw, too. The family lived out in the country and nearly every day at breakfast the father would ask his boys, "What shall we draw to-day?" They would take turns in choosing, and sometimes they would vote on it. Then out across the fields the father and his boys would tramp until they came to where the donkeys, sheep, goats, and cows were grazing. Each would choose the subject he wished to draw, and the four would sit down on the grass and begin to sketch. Edwin's first choice was a cow and his father helped him draw it. After this Edwin came to these fields every day and his father called them "Edwin's studio."

At this time Edwin had three dogs of his own which he called Brutus, Vixen, and Boxer. They were always with him and were so intelligent that they seemed almost able to speak. In the back yard the children had several pens for pet rabbits and they kept pigeons in the attic of their house. Once Mr. Landseer decided to move. He selected a house, and thought all was settled, when he discovered that the landlord would not rent the house to him because he kept so many dogs and other pets.

When Edwin was only thirteen years old two of his pictures were exhibited at the Royal Academy. One was a painting of a mule and the other was of a dog and puppies.

Edwin painted always from real life, not caring to make copies from the work of others. All the sketches he made when he was a little boy were kept very carefully by the father, and now if you go to England you may see them in South Kensington Museum in London.

We read of how the father and his sons made many visits to the Zoological Gardens, where they could watch and make sketches of lions, bears, and other wild animals. One day they saw a strange sight in one of the store windows in London—it was a Newfoundland dog caring for a lion. The lion had been caught in Africa when it was very little, and had been cared for by this great Newfoundland dog.

They had never been separated, and now, although the lion was much larger than the dog, they were still the best of friends. Sometimes the dog would punish the lion if it did not behave, and the great beast would whimper just as though it could not help itself. All three boys made many sketches of this strange pair, and could hardly be persuaded to leave the window.

Edwin, we are told, was a bright, gentle little boy with blue eyes and light curly hair. When he was fourteen years old he became a pupil at the Royal Academy. The keeper there was an old man. He grew very fond of Edwin. He would look all around and if he could not find him, would say, "Where is my curly-headed dog boy?"

He was only sixteen years old when he exhibited his wonderful picture called "Fighting Dogs Getting Wind." A very rich man whose praise meant a great deal at that time bought this picture, and Edwin's success was assured.

It was about this time, too, that he painted an old white horse in the stable of another wealthy man. After the picture was finished and ready to be delivered, it suddenly disappeared. Search was made for it everywhere but it was not found until twenty-four years afterwards. A servant had stolen it and hidden it in a hayloft. He was afraid to sell it, or even to keep it in his home, for every one would have recognized the great artist's work.

It was Sir Edwin Landseer's opinion that animals understand, feel, and reason just like people, and so he painted them as happy, sad, gay, dignified, frivolous, rich, poor, and in all ways just like human beings. This appealed to the people very much and he became very popular indeed. Every one knew of Landseer and each wanted a certain one of his pictures of dogs because the dog in it looked so much like a dog they knew.

For many years Sir Edwin Landseer lived and painted in his father's house in a poor little room without even a carpet. The only furniture, we are told, consisted of three cheap chairs and an easel. But as his fame grew he had more orders than he could fill, and before long he was able to move into a fine studio near Regent's Park. It was here that he painted the famous picture of Paul Pry. He was not a very good business man and he left all his affairs to his father, who sold his pictures for him and kept his accounts.

This story is told of Sir Edwin Landseer. At an evening party, at which Landseer was present, some one made the remark that no one had ever been found who could draw two things at the same time. Landseer quickly replied, " Oh, I can do that; lend me two pencils and I will show you." In a very few minutes he drew with one hand the head of a horse, at the same time drawing a deer's head with the other. Both were so good that they might well have been drawn one at a time and with much more effort.

Although Landseer painted so many wild animals, birds, and hunting scenes, he did not care to hunt or shoot. His pencil was his weapon. Sometimes he would hire a guide to take him into the wildest places in search of game. To the great surprise of his guide, instead of shooting when a great deer came bounding toward him, he would quickly make a drawing of it in his sketch book. A beautiful live deer was much more interesting to him than a dead one. He said, " To shoot a bird is to lose it."

Edwin's brother Thomas made engravings of nearly all of Edwin's paintings, and so

although we cannot afford to buy one of the paintings, we can easily have one of the prints from the engravings.

No English painter has ever been more appreciated and loved in his own country than Sir Edwin Landseer.

Questions about the artist. Who painted this picture? When did he first begin to draw? How many brothers and sisters did he have? How many of them liked to draw? Where did they live? What question did the father ask at the breakfast table? How did they decide? Where did they go? What animal did Edwin choose first? Who helped him? Where was "Edwin's studio"? Tell about the pets these children had. Where did they keep them? Why did the owner refuse to rent Mr. Landseer a house? When Edwin was thirteen years old, which of his pictures were . exhibited? What became of the sketches he made when he was a boy? Tell about the Newfoundland dog and the lion. What did the keeper at the Royal Academy call Edwin? What did Sir Edwin Landseer think animals could do that made them seem like people? Tell about the picture of the old white horse. Tell how Sir Edwin Landseer went hunting. Why did he not shoot? Tell about the drawings he made with both hands. How did people like Sir E Landseer and his paintings?

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