

Edward the VII.

Reprinted from the DAILY MAIL,

by kind permission of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

AFTER NINE YEARS.

AN IMPRESSION.

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Strange is the working of the drama of life! It was not three weeks ago that I passed Buckingham Palace. No first shadow had come upon our hearts as to the King's health. He was within, a hale and hard-working man. The royal banner was floating from the roof. As I passed a team of horses came forth harnessed to an empty drag. An outrider sat on each, and I knew that they were brought out that they might be used to the sound of crowds, and bear him safely as he rides in state, amid his people. Now, for the last time, he passes in austere and dreadful dignity through hushed and crowded London, and for this were his horses trained; but who, of all men who viewed them, could have harboured so black a thought upon that sunlit day, with the royal banner mast-headed against the sky?

I cast my mind back nine years ago—a little more than nine—when I stood amid the crowd and saw the great Queen pass down upon that last dreary journey. The little coffin, small as that of a child, lay upon a gun-carriage. He rode behind it. I marked him well. His face was sad and resolute, his eyes far away, as one who sees a long vista of duty and steels himself to his task. I had good hopes for England as I saw that kind, grave face, and the gentle strength of his bearing. The great Queen lay upon the gun-carriage, but her spirit, her essence, all that she gave to her people and that her people craved, might still be with us. So I hoped and prayed.

The Steadfast King.

Nine years have passed, and what could England have asked for more? Had we, as in older days, to raise our chief upon our bucklers, and all the wide world from which to make our choice, is it not thus that we should have chosen? Where was the wiser man? Where was the kinder? Where was he who was more truly the servant of all, and therefore the master of himself? Duty was with him like his shadow from the day he rode through mourning London till the hour when in one last sentence he left an inspiration to his people. "I will work to the end." I cannot think of any nobler dying words, of any more manful purpose than that. The gentle, steadfast spirit stood clear cut in the light of one heroic phrase.

What have the nine years given us? What have we not reaped where the King sowed? Think how we stood. Was there one nation in all Europe who looked upon us with a kindly eye? Had we not become in our proud aloofness a common vent for the spleen of each? There was not a single cloud, but many, and all might bank into one black menace. Now, if our sky is not cloudless, yet see the change which one short reign has wrought. Friendly shores face us. Our Eastern danger has thinned away. New bonds have been formed. Old bonds have been strengthened. This is the harvest of nine years.

The Progress of Empire.

In the Empire, too, what years of progress! Australia united as one nation; South Africa also, with the old flag flying unchallenged from Capetown to the Zambesi, Boer and Briton content beneath its folds. Ireland, too—surely there are the first gleams of a sunburst over Ireland. Has any decade done more to heal the wounds of centuries and soothe the enduring hatred of the Celt? Everywhere in the White Empire there has been advance, and everywhere his hand and his counsels are seen.

And now the short, strenuous epic is over. Once more the gun-carriage of ill omen passes down amid the sorrowing people. Behind it follow as of yore the kings and the sons of kings with all of power and

pomp and majesty that the world can show. Even as I saw him ride behind his mother, so now I see his son ride behind him. And again I feel that there is good hope for England, hope that we may have lived under three reigns and yet under the one spirit. The King passes, but the tradition of duty, of moderation, of wisdom, is the kingly essence which remains and will not pass from among us.

The Last Journey.

Who shall hope to describe that cortège? What mere roll-call of regiments, of monarchs, or of nations can conjure it up? The senses were stunned by its majesty, its colour, its variety. Small details linger in the mind. One carries away the memory of the three veterans riding abreast—Roberts like a white falcon, giant Kitchener, and the rugged Wood. Alas that Wolseley could not have made a fourth to render the group complete! The dog, too—the little white dog—who could forget him as he trots behind his master's coffin? And the troop of Kings who escorted their dead peer, ~~with the noble Kaiser riding at their head. England has lost something of her old kindliness if she does not take him back into her heart to-day.~~ There is Spain, ascetic and eager; Portugal, a sun-burned boy; Belgium, a kindly faced man. There is hope for the Congo at last if that man has his way. Then, too, one remembers the strong profile of the great American, set like granite, as he leans back in his carriage. And to me the strongest impression of all that exquisite Queen-mother, the sweet womanliness, the gentle grace, a picture framed for an instant in a carriage window and never to be forgotten. These are high lights which stand clear in my mind after the broad river of scarlet and gold has flowed full-tide between its banks of pale faces, and the King has passed to his place.

A New Era.

Now it is over. Statesmen and warriors, leaders and princes, with glint of gold and flash of steel, the greatest muster upon earth, all are gone and remain but a memory. The people surge forth from their close ranks, and the hushed hum of London rises once more. For a few hours the great complex machine has stood at rest—for as many weeks it has been running

heavily and slowly in all its countless gears. Each turns again to his own proper business. The great dead has been honoured. The world is now for the living. All its manifold activities will roar into action. The strife of parties will break forth. It is good that it should be so, for only through battle can Life's high issues be attained. It is in the fighting as well as in the object fought for that the virtue lies. To strive is to live; to rest is to decay. But in the hour of darkness, in the hour of weariness and despondency, that hour that comes to every man, he will lift up his heart and turn anew to his task when there comes to his memory those last words, "I will work to the end."

So may the spirit of the great King still linger to uphold his people.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.