

Our Island Story Continued (The Last 100 Plus Years)



By Rachel Bubb

Preface

Growing up I had always wondered how people in the UK learned their history since they have such a long history. In the states we only have a few hundred years, but they have a few thousand years! I thought it would be boring and confusing, learning about the king's names and when they ruled. When my youngest son was born five years ago I had to be on bed rest part of the time and so I thought I'd look into homeschooling. I knew I wanted to homeschool but I never dreamed there were so many ways people educate their children at home nowadays! This was back in 2017. I learned about Charlotte Mason's philosophy of education and wanted to use it to teach my own kids. It's through learning about Charlotte Mason's philosophy and the books she used that I was introduced to *Our Island Story* and loved it! My kids were toddlers at the time and I read it because I was curious to see how this book was written and why it made British history so interesting. After reading a few chapters I learned why: it was told through stories and not just dates and people's names. Sadly, the book only goes up to 1900 and a lot has happened since then! So I have tried to fill in the last 120 plus years (all the way up to May 2023). I love the writing style and have tried to write in an interesting way like H.E. Marshall did. I thoroughly enjoyed writing this book and doing the research for it. I hope it'll be a great resource and help for you and your family as well.

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I. The Turn of the Century

This book is a continuation of Our Island Story. (If you haven't read it yet, I highly recommend it- it's one of the best books on England's history). We'll pick up right where it ended: the death and funeral of Queen Victoria. When she died, it ended the Victorian Age, a time when the "sun never set on the British Empire." This phrase was often said during her reign because the British Empire had colonies all over the world. If it was night in one place in the British

Empire, it was daytime somewhere else in the British Empire.



The British Empire was perhaps at its biggest and best during Queen Victoria's lifetime. Queen Victoria lived to be 81 years old and died just at the turn of the century, in 1901. It took about two weeks to get her funeral organized. First, her casket had to be taken from the Isle of Wight where she died to London via a ship and then by train. Then her casket was put on a gun carriage and pulled by horses. Thousands of people lined the streets to say goodbye to their beloved queen.

Along the way they had to stop because the horses that were pulling the gun carriage that bore her casket were being stubborn and acting up. Horses sometimes have a mind of their own. A host of soldiers were more than happy to help and so they tied ropes to the carriage so the soldiers could pull it the rest of the way. This became a new tradition. Even in 2022 when Queen Elizabeth II died, her casket was pulled by soldiers holding ropes instead of horses. After

the funeral, Queen Victoria was buried in the vault next to Prince Albert at her request.

The country mourned a long time for their great queen. In one of the last pages of Our Island Story, the author wrote: “At the close of a dull winter’s day, the sad toll of muffled bells rang out the message to every town and village; and from east to west, wherever the flag of red, white, and blue floats, hearts were sad.”

After her funeral her oldest son became king, King Edward VII. His coronation wasn’t until later in the year, in August. He was 59 years old when he became king. He was a great king but he didn’t live long. He was only king for eight years and then he died.

King Edward VII had a number of health problems during his lifetime (largely from his bad eating habits and from being a smoker most of his life), but he was full of energy and wanted to be the best king he could be. Before he died he had a few heart attacks in April. He was taken to Buckingham Palace to rest and was encouraged to go to bed but he said, “No, I shall not give in; I shall go on; shall work to the end.” Soon after this his son came in to let him know that his horse had won in a horse race. The king replied, “I am very glad.” As much as he wanted to do more for his country, he couldn’t do anything more. His heart gave in and he fainted. He died a few hours later.

Thousands of people lined the streets to say farewell to their king, just eight years after they said farewell to their beloved Queen Victoria. King Edward VII’s son (and Queen Victoria’s grandson) became the next king: King George V. Normally the oldest son becomes king, but King Edward VII’s oldest son,

Albert, had died years before this. So George became king instead. Sadly, he was a bad smoker like his father was and often had health problems because of it. Soon after becoming king, he and his wife



traveled to India and the surrounding countries to see the British Empire.

Something that King George V had to deal with soon after becoming king was the sinking of the Titanic. The Titanic was a huge ship that was equipped with all the latest technology and fitted with beautiful furniture. The ship boasted of large ballrooms, huge dining rooms and live music by an orchestra. Many rich people scrambled to buy tickets to be on its first trip from England to America.

The ship was only four days into its journey when it struck an iceberg that was hard to see in the dark night. Since the ship was thought to be “unsinkable” many people laughed when they were

told to get into lifeboats.

However, as the ship started to sink more and more, people scrambled for the lifeboats. Some of them were so full that they broke or flipped over in the icy waters of the Atlantic. Towards the end they only allowed women and children to get into the



lifeboats. Of those who went on Titanic’s maiden voyage, only few lived.

There were many heroes that day, including the musicians who played in the orchestra on the ship. They kept playing as long as they could until the ship sank. They could’ve easily gotten into the lifeboats and saved their lives but they chose instead to play music to help everyone stay calm.

Many people died and afterward a foundation was started to help provide for those who had lost parents or loved ones. When King George V got news of the disaster, he said: “The Queen and I

are horrified at the appalling disaster which has happened to the Titanic and at the terrible loss of life. We deeply sympathize with the bereaved relations and feel for them in their great sorrow with all our heart.”

Society was changing in the early 1900s. Most of the population of England were young- twenty years old or younger. Many families moved to the cities. One of the big things Queen Victoria did during her reign was to require children to go to school and to create public schools so that children’s education could be free. As a result, in the early 1900s most of the population of England could read so there was a boom in the amount of newspapers and books being published. Women were also taking to the streets to protest for their right to vote and own land.

II. Europe at Ends



When King George V took the throne, countries in Europe were racing to have the biggest and best armies. Each country wanted to be the best country it could be. Of course England did too and had many big ships built during this time for its navy.

We are now going to start talking about World War I and what led up to it. This time period is very confusing and to this day, there's not one clear reason why World War I happened. I will try to explain a few things that led to the start of the war.

Certain countries in Europe had agreements with

other countries to work together and help each other, especially if there was any war. The German Empire found allies in Austria-Hungary and Italy. Russia had an ally with France. England tried to stay out of it for a while, but eventually joined France and Russia once the war started. It was (for the most part) three countries against three countries. If you remember, Britain had a big navy at the time and Germany also had a substantial navy.

Tensions tightened all over Europe as countries wanted to make sure that their allies would come to their aid if anything happened. June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were killed in Sarajevo. Archduke Ferdinand was heir to the Austria-Hungarian empire. He was 50 years old. They were taking a trip and were warned beforehand not to go. One evening they were in a convertible car with the top down, driving down the street, and both of them were shot. The car was going rather slow because they were going

through a market area and there were many people around them so it wasn't entirely clear who shot them. Austria-Hungary said that Serbia was to blame for it.

Serbia said that they weren't to blame for it, but Austria-Hungary didn't believe them. Soon leaders in Austria-Hungary wanted to fight Serbia for the killing of their archduke. It was supposed to be a small war with just Austria-Hungary and Serbia. However, soon Serbia asked for help from its ally, Russia.

If you remember, Austria-Hungary had an ally with Germany. Germany thought it would be a good time to fight and maybe even make the German Empire bigger than it was already by fighting and taking over other countries. It soon became Austria-Hungary and Germany against Serbia and Russia. Later in July Austria-Hungary sent one last note to Serbia to Austria-Hungary demanding a number of things or they would come and fight. In many ways, sending the note to Serbia was just an excuse for them to officially declare war. Some of the demands they were asking of Serbia they knew Serbia would never agree to. They only gave Serbia two days' time to reply. Serbia agreed to some of their terms, but not all of them.

July 28 Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. It was still only these two countries, but since both of these countries had allies with other countries, it quickly got much larger. July 30, Russia told its army to get ready and move to help Serbia. Kaiser Wilhelm II, the leader of Germany, sent a note to Russia to tell them to stop helping Serbia. The czar of Russia and Kaiser Wilhelm II were actually cousins and great friends before this. The king of Britain, King George V, was also their cousin. These three cousins had taken trips before this and were good friends, but now their countries were on the verge of war.

England still didn't want to join the war if there was going to be one. Many messages were sent between the leaders of the countries to see if there was anyway to avoid a big war. However, it didn't solve anything. August 1, Germany declared war on Russia. Germany started to take over Belgium August 3 and also declared war on France. Finally, August 4, England officially joined the war. On the morning of August 4, King George wrote: "I held a council at 10:45 to declare war with Germany. It is a terrible catastrophe but it is not our fault. Please to God it may soon be over."

It was a sad day, but now that war was officially declared, everyone got ready for it. One of the big things that made World War I different from any war before this was technology. Trains could be used to bring troops and supplies to the frontline faster than ever before. In the beginning, this was one of Germany's reasons for wanting to start a war sooner rather than later, before Russia had time to finish building its railways. If Russia had developed railways like Germany and other countries did, it could get its soldiers to the frontline very fast (and it had many soldiers!).

World War I changed the society in England drastically. For many years those who owned a lot of land had money. They could rent out parts of their land to farmers who would pay rent for it. In the countryside, many rich people lived in huge houses or estates with many servants working for them to clean the house, cook for them, and help them with anything else they needed. However, when World War I happened, all of this changed. People who had a lot of land found themselves in trouble. The big estates cost a lot of money to keep clean and to take care of. Sometimes the roof needed mending or the walls painted, which cost money. After World War I many of these families sold their lands and their big estates because they couldn't afford them anymore.

World War I brought about something else, that is very sad: death. Many of England's brave young men were killed. At the time, if you had a big estate, the estate and land would be passed down to the oldest son. However, if that oldest son was killed in the war, then who would everything go to? Would that person have enough money to pay for the upkeep of the big estate or even want the bother of it? Many of the big estates were shorthanded during the war since many of their male servants were off fighting. They had to make do with having less elaborate dinner parties (or none at all) and sometimes even doing some of the work themselves. During the war some of these big homes were turned into convalescent homes for wounded soldiers to get rest and get better.