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The Fall of the Dynasties: The Collapse of the Old Order: 1905-1922

Edmond Taylor

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“Popular history of the finest sort . . . an excellent book worthy to rank with Barbara Tuchman’s The Guns of August and Alan Moorehead’s Gallipoli.” —The New York Times

On June 28, 1914, in the dusty Balkan town of Sarajevo, an assassin fired two shots. In the next five minutes, as the stout middle-aged Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Habsburg, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife bled to death, a dynasty—and with it, a whole way of life—began to topple.

In the ages before World War I, four dynasties—the Habsburg, Hohenzollern, Ottoman, and Romanov—dominated much of civilization. Outwardly different, they were at bottom somewhat alike: opulent, grandiose, suffocating in tradition, ostentatiously gilded on the surface and rotting at the core. Worse still, they were tragically out of step with the forces shaping the modern world.

The Fall of the Dynasties covers the period from 1905 to 1922, when these four ruling houses crumbled and fell, destroying old alliances and obliterating old boundaries. World War I was precipitated by their decay and their splintered baroque rubble proved to be a treacherous base for the new nations that emerged from the war. “All convulsions of the last half-century,” Taylor writes, “stem back to Sarajevo: the two World Wars, the Bolshevik revolution, the rise and fall of Hitler, and the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East. Millions upon millions of deaths can be traced to one or another of these upheavals; all of us who survive have been scarred at least emotionally by them.”

In this classic volume, Taylor traces the origins of the dynasties whose collapse brought the old order crashing down and the events leading to their astonishingly swift downfall.

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