



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE  
WORLD AT WAR

M. B. Syngé

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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The Story of  
**The World at War**

by

M. B. SYNGE



# EUROPE BEFORE THE WAR

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## 1. THE NEW GERMAN EMPIRE

"Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?  
Ist's Preussenland? Ist's Schwabenland?  
Ist's wo am Rhein die Robe blüht?  
Ist's wo am welt die Möve zieht?  
O nein! O nein! O nein!  
Sein Vaterland musz grösser sein."

—E.M. ARNDT.

As the British Empire grew in size and prosperity during the long reign of Queen Victoria, so the German Empire—united in 1870 after the Franco-German War—entered on a period of triumph and achievement more splendid than anything the world has known in modern times. And it is one of the greatest tragedies in European history that this progress was suddenly arrested with the first shots of the Great War in the summer of 1914.

Look back at that triumphant scene at the Palace of Versailles in 1870 when amid rare enthusiasm William I., King of Prussia, was proclaimed Emperor of a united Germany! At his side stood Count Bismarck, the man who had worked with his royal master for the last eight years, the man to whom the old King owed his throne and now his Empire. Although no longer young, Bismarck was in the full vigour of life. His tall figure, his powerful head, his severe expression made him almost as imposing a figure as William I., who was fifteen years his senior.

Such were the heads of the new Germany, a land which was

to dominate Europe for the next forty-four years and then to fall with a mighty crash.

France had a heavy price to pay to her German conquerors. The indemnity demanded from her was double the sum that the war had cost Germany, and she had to give up besides her rich lands of Alsace and Lorraine with their border strongholds of Strasbourg and Metz.

“France must be so completely crushed, that she can never again come across our path,” commented her conquerors.

France was wounded, but not killed. Her thrifty citizens set about their colossal task, patiently bearing the burden of overwhelming taxation. They repaired the havoc of war with amazing rapidity under the veteran President of their new Republic, until, in the space of four years, the great war indemnity was paid off.

Meanwhile the organisation of the new German Empire with her five-and-twenty separate States was no light task. To bring into line four Kings, six Grand Dukes, and many smaller Principalities with all their differing manners and customs, needed the genius of a Bismarck, but with the first meetings of an Imperial Council and Reichstag, he could exclaim with confidence: “The unity of Germany is completed.”

For the next twenty years Bismarck was the foremost figure in the politics of Europe.

But it was not the “Iron Chancellor” alone who accomplished such great things for the German Empire. The German people, flushed with victory, had boundless ambition and limitless strength. In industry, population, wealth, and power they went forward with amazing strides. Their success was due to the splendid qualities of the people themselves; with their genius for organisation, they applied themselves to winning triumphs in peace, as they had won victory in war.

Up and down the valley of the Rhine grew huge factories, while forests of chimneys arose as they had done in Central England years before. Lorraine, recently taken from France, supplied an abundance of iron ore, and a great industrial development lay in her huge stores of coal and iron.

German goods soon found their way to all parts of the world.

There was outside work to be done too.

The new German Empire must be in close alliance with the neighbouring States of Europe. The world must be at peace—old wounds must be healed, old jealousies annulled.

Alexander III., Tsar of Russia, and Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria-Hungary, were invited to Berlin as guests of William, the first German Emperor. It was a brilliant affair, this Three Emperors' League, and made for the peace of Europe for some years.

"We must make greater exertions than other Powers," said Bismarck, "on account of our geographical position. We lie in the middle of Europe; we can be attacked from all sides."

Great Britain was not included in the League, and Queen Victoria is reported to have commented: "We are well out of it."

To safeguard his conquests Bismarck set about securing an efficient army to protect the Fatherland, which, as he had remarked, could be "attacked from all sides."

But shadows were falling athwart the newly born Empire.

In 1888 the old Emperor William I. died just before his 91st birthday, and with him passed the support on which Bismarck's power had rested. The short and tragic reign of his son Frederick—already stricken with cancer of the throat—forbade the raising of any points of conflict during his ninety days of sovereignty.

His death made his son, William, the third German Emperor.

On that fateful day in June 1888, the new “Kaiser,” aged but thirty, in helmet and crimson cloak, received the homage of some twenty ruling sovereigns who proclaimed the proud young Hohenzollern ruler over fifty million people.

Married to a German Princess, with four sturdy little sons, the new Kaiser was perhaps one of the strangest characters that ever made world-history. Until his father’s illness, he had taken little interest in public affairs. Always intensely patriotic, he loved Germany’s richly storied past—always intensely industrious, in a nation of hard workers, he was ever one of the hardest and ablest. Matters concerning the German army appealed to him, and he was never weary of asserting that the army was the true basis of his throne: “The soldier and the army, not parliamentary majorities, have welded together the German Empire. My confidence is placed in the army.” That he was genuinely anxious for peace was beyond all doubt. “I am determined to keep peace with every one so far as it lies in my power,” he told his first parliament (Reichstag).

To this end, within a month of his accession, the young Kaiser left Kiel in his old yacht—the *Hohenzollern*—for Russia, where he impressed on the Tsar his anxiety for the preservation of peace.

It is said that the old Emperor William I. had whispered to his grandson before he died that, whatever happened, he must always keep friends with Russia.

How he lost that friendship, and how the Tsar of all the Russias was the first to declare war on Germany that fateful day in August 1914, is known to every student of modern history.

Returning by Sweden, he greeted King Oscar, and made a good impression on King Christian of Denmark, the Tsar’s father-in-law, during a brief visit to Copenhagen.

The following year, 1889, he spent a week in England, where

he was welcomed as a grandson of Queen Victoria. High appointments were exchanged. The Kaiser was appointed honorary Admiral of the British Fleet, in return for which he appointed his grandmother Colonel of a Prussian Regiment, to be called “The Queen of England’s Own.”

“I regard the British Navy as the most magnificent in the world,” he stated with enthusiasm before he sailed home to Berlin to receive a visit from the Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria-Hungary. The tragedies of the House of Austria had already begun, and but a few months before the Crown Prince Rudolf—the Emperor’s only child—had killed himself in a country house near Vienna.

Again the Emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary vowed eternal friendship.

“Both my people and my army hold firmly and faithfully to the alliance concluded between us,” cried the young ruler of Germany as he drank the health of his guest. “The army is well aware that, for the preservation of peace, it may be called on to stand by the side of the brave Austro-Hungarian Army and to fight shoulder to shoulder.”

Twenty-five years later found the armies of these two men fighting “shoulder to shoulder” against Europe in arms.

A journey to Greece to attend the wedding of his sister Sophia with Constantine, Crown Prince of Greece, was followed by a cruise to Constantinople, a friendly visit to the Sultan of Turkey, and a dramatic journey to Jerusalem. What wonder, then, if twenty-five years later Turkey threw in her lot with Germany in the Great War!

“I believe I have succeeded in ensuring the peace of the world for many years to come,” said the youthful ruler of the German Empire at the end of his first year’s reign.