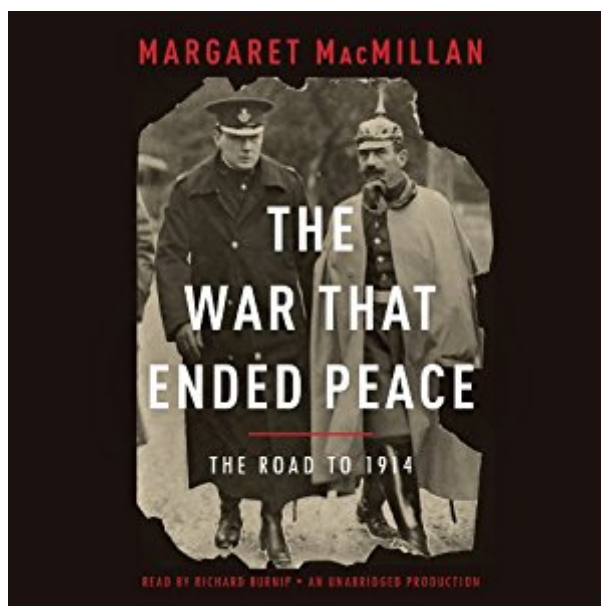


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# The War That Ended Peace: The Road To 1914



## Synopsis

From the best-selling and award-winning author of *Paris 1919* comes a masterpiece of narrative nonfiction, a fascinating portrait of Europe from 1900 up to the outbreak of World War I. The century since the end of the Napoleonic wars had been the most peaceful era Europe had known since the fall of the Roman Empire. In the first years of the twentieth century, Europe believed it was marching to a golden, happy, and prosperous future. But instead, complex personalities and rivalries, colonialism and ethnic nationalisms, and shifting alliances helped to bring about the failure of the long peace and the outbreak of a war that transformed Europe and the world. *The War That Ended Peace* brings vividly to life the military leaders, politicians, diplomats, bankers, and the extended, interrelated family of crowned heads across Europe who failed to stop the descent into war: in Germany, the mercurial Kaiser Wilhelm II and the chief of the German general staff, Von Moltke the Younger; in Austria-Hungary, Emperor Franz Joseph, a man who tried, through sheer hard work, to stave off the coming chaos in his empire; in Russia, Tsar Nicholas II and his wife; in Britain, King Edward VII, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, and British admiral Jacky Fisher, the fierce advocate of naval reform who entered into the arms race with Germany that pushed the continent toward confrontation on land and sea. There are the would-be peacemakers as well, among them prophets of the horrors of future wars whose warnings went unheeded: Alfred Nobel, who donated his fortune to the cause of international understanding, and Bertha von Suttner, a writer and activist who was the first woman awarded Nobel's new Peace Prize. Here too we meet the urbane and cosmopolitan Count Harry Kessler, who noticed many of the early signs that something was stirring in Europe; the young Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty and a rising figure in British politics; Madame Caillaux, who shot a man who might have been a force for peace; and more. With indelible portraits, MacMillan shows how the fateful decisions of a few powerful people changed the course of history. Taut, suspenseful, and impossible to put down, *The War That Ended Peace* is also a wise cautionary reminder of how wars happen in spite of the near-universal desire to keep the peace. Destined to become a classic in the tradition of Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*, *The War That Ended Peace* enriches our understanding of one of the defining periods and events of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a Brit, studying the First World War at school in the seventies, memories of the Second World War were still fresh and bitter enough amongst parents and teachers that there was never really a question that the Germans were the 'bad guys' in both wars while we (the Brits, primarily, though a little bit of credit was occasionally given to the Allies) were the knights in shining armour. Enough time has passed since both wars now for a more rational view to be taken and this book by Margaret MacMillan is a well balanced, thoughtful and detailed account of the decades leading up to 1914. MacMillan begins by giving an overview of the involved nations as they were at the turn of the century - their political structure, alliances and enmities, their culture and economic status. She then takes us in considerable depth through the twenty years or so preceding the war, concentrating on each nation in turn, and going further back into history when required. She introduces us to the main players: political, military and leading thinkers. She explains how and why the two main alliances developed that divided Europe and shows the fears of each nation feeling threatened or surrounded by potential enemies. And she shows how this led to an arms race, which each nation initially thought would act as a deterrence to war. Throughout she draws parallels to more recent history and current events, sometimes with frightening clarity. In the mid-section, MacMillan discusses public opinion and cultural shifts, highlighting the parallel and divisive growth of militarism and pacifism and how the heads of government had to try to reconcile these factions. She indicates that, although the peace movement was international, that at times of threat, the membership tended to split on national lines - an indication that the movement would falter in the event of war, as indeed it did. Next MacMillan explains the development of military planning and how these plans gradually became fixed, allowing little room for movement when war began. She explains that the Schlieffen Plan assumed war on two fronts and that, when it came to it, the military insisted that it wasn't possible to change the plan at the last moment to limit the war to the Eastern front, with all the

implications that had for ensuring that France and therefore Britain would become involved. MacMillan also shows how the plans of each nation assumed an offensive, rather than defensive, strategy, taking little account of how modern weaponry would change the nature of warfare. Thus, when the war did come, the leaders still expected it to be short and decisive rather than the long drawn out trench warfare it became. In the final section, MacMillan walks us through the various crises in the Balkans and elsewhere in the years leading up to the war. She makes the point that not only did these crises tend to firm up the two alliances but also the fact that each was finally resolved without a full-scale war led to a level of complacency that ultimately no country would take the final plunge. And in the penultimate chapter, she takes us on a detailed journey from the assassination of Franz Ferdinand up to the outbreak of war, showing how each government gradually concluded it was left with no alternatives but to fight. In a short final chapter, she rather movingly summarises the massive losses endured by each nation over the next four years, and gives a brief picture of the changed Europe that emerged. Overall, I found this a very readable account. MacMillan has a clear and accessible writing style, and juggles the huge cast of characters well. I found I was rarely flicking backwards and forwards to remind myself of previous chapters - for me, always the sign of a well-written factual book. As with any history, there were parts that I found more or less interesting. I found the character studies of the various leaders very enlightening, while I was less interested in the various military plans (though accepting completely MacMillan's argument of their importance to the eventual inevitability of war). I got bogged down in the Balkans (always a problem for me in European history) but in the end MacMillan achieved the well-nigh impossible task of enabling me to grasp who was on whose side and why. This is a thorough, detailed and by no means short account of the period, but at no point did I feel that it dragged or lost focus. One of the problems with the way I was taught about WW1 was that we tended to talk about the nations rather than the people - 'Germany did this', 'France said that', 'America's position was'. MacMillan's approach gives much more insight, allowing us to get to know the political and military leaders as people and showing the lack of unanimity in most of the governments. This humanised the history for me and gradually changed my opinion from believing that WW1 was a war that should never have been fought to feeling that, factoring in the always-uncertain vagaries of human nature, it could never have been avoided. This isn't MacMillan's position - she states clearly her belief that there are always choices and that the leaders could have chosen differently, and of course that's true. However, it seemed that by 1914 most of them felt so threatened and boxed in that it would have taken extraordinary courage and perception for them to act differently than they did, and inaction may have meant their country's downfall anyway. A sobering account of how prestige, honour and national interest led to a

devastating war that no-one wanted but that no-one could prevent. Highly recommended. NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Random House.

With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Europe settled into a century of comparative peace. Yes, there were a number of smaller wars but, by and large, peace prevailed. However, in 1914, Europe walked over a cliff into a cataclysmic war unlike one ever seen before. *“The War That Ended Peace”* is a scholarly attempt to analyse how this happened. The author, Margaret MacMillan, achieves this end with great distinction. MacMillan begins in turn of the century Europe where there are the early signs that the continent is sleep walking into war. Germany is building its navy, the Ottoman Empire is crumbling and the great powers of England, Germany, Austria-Hungary, France and Russia are slowly forming new alliances. These alliances entail responsibilities that are eventually triggered in 1914 as nations lurch towards war. *“The War That Ended Peace”* is a significant tome of more than 700 pages. However, it is well written and easy to read. It flows well and should not intimidate the general reader. Margaret MacMillan has meticulously compiled a mass of information from a variety of sources and brought it together into an excellent piece of history. As it turned out, the First World War was a catastrophe. In August 1914, most people on both sides thought that hostilities would be over by Christmas. This was a misjudgement on a grand scale. By the time the war ended in November 1918, sixty five million men had fought and 8.5 million had died. Ironically, even more were to die in the subsequent Spanish flu epidemic. Tragedy was piled upon catastrophe. However, the war should not have been inevitable. MacMillan concludes her book with two reasons as to why events unfolded as they did: *“First, a failure of imagination in not seeing how destructive such a conflict would be and second, their lack of courage to stand up to those who said there was no choice left but to go to war. There are always choices.”* These choices were not considered. Catastrophe was the result. Bravo Margaret MacMillan for such a terrific work of history.

Margaret Macmillan explains in clear and thoughtful prose why Europe went to war in 1914 after a century of peace and material and social progress (following the defeat of Napoleon.) The intricacies of Balkan politics and the ambitions of innumerable ethnic groups in southeastern Europe produced an eruption of conflict and hatred that shocked and surprised the rest of Europe, already divided by alliances and rivalries of their own. While most observers suspected that war would eventually come from French-German bitterness over the consequences of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, few suspected that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would lead to

minor conflicts in southeastern Europe that would drag all the Great Powers into a conflagration of unimaginable proportions. To understand the origins of the Great War and its consequences to this day, read this scholarly yet beautifully written study of a war of unimaginable tragedy.

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