Margaret MacMillan: The War That Ended the Peace

Margaret MacMillan, arguably Canada's pre-eminent historian (who teaches at Oxford), has recently released another grand narrative concerning the First World War. Her earlier work, *1919*, combined a fascinating subject with solid archival work and a really great narrative style: the trifecta for the historian.

The War that Ended the Peace re-casts the traditional narrative of World War 1 from the "War to End All Wars" to the title of her latest work, an end to peace. Many historians see the period from 1914-1945 as a second Thirty Years War, but on a grander scale. If this is so, how could Europe have gone nearly a century without war (the revolutionary activities of the 1848 period notwithstanding) and then careen into three decades of war? Starting with the World's Fair in Paris in 1900, MacMillan traces the lines that would lead to war a decade later. MacMillan weaves together stories of changing technology, national prejudices, cynicism, brilliance and stupidity that would hurl Europe toward destruction and herald the emergence of new Powers. MacMillan takes a traditional Canadian approach recognizing that the diplomatic peace that was established early in the 19th century allowed economic development but that this was precarious and not inevitable. Peace meant continuous State management. Negotiations and discussions were they key to managing the Balance of Powers. The "balance" was artificial. Progress was not inevitable. The peace that allowed for the economic and material growth in Europe necessitated cool heads willing to negotiate and practice Power Politics. This was what was lost along the way, MacMillan argues.

More here.