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EMPEROR  
FRANCIS JOSEPH  
OF AUSTRIA

*A Biography*

BY  
JOSEPH REDLICH

*Ὡς ἄθος μαραίνεται καὶ ὡς ὄναρ παρέρχεται  
καὶ ἡλιθίως πᾶς ἄνθρωπος.*

Like a flower Man withers and like a dream  
he passes away and vanishes.

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**TO MY DEAR WIFE  
GERTRUD REDLICH  
IN LOVE AND GRATITUDE**

## INTRODUCTION

THE life of Emperor Francis Joseph can only be understood in close connection with the political transformation of Europe and the progressive shift in world power that went on during the century between the Congress of Vienna and the Treaty of Versailles. It is from that standpoint that it is here written. At the same time the specific content of this description is his human and political personality. On no other terms can any bounds be set or any form given to the vast mass of interconnected historical events covered by the period of Francis Joseph's life and reign.

Since, however, whether as man or ruler, he falls far short of being an embodiment of human greatness, it is in a somewhat limited sense only that he fills the conception of a historic personality. So comprehensive, on the other hand, is the range of countries and peoples over whom he reigned; so extensive is the period of his governance; so mighty and multifarious are the European issues influenced, and deeply influenced, by his action and his character, that, judged by the test of influence on great events, he must be said to have counted for more than any other European monarch of the nineteenth century. Compared with his, the singular and momentous career of Napoleon III is but an entr'acte in Europe. Guardian of an ancient line, inheritor and defender of rights that

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date far back into medieval times, natural foe of the modern struggle to transform Europe into a series of closed national states, Francis Joseph assumed and maintained for sixty years a position in the Europe that the war destroyed to which that of no other sovereign affords an analogue. What makes him all the more impressive is that there was in him, as in no other European monarch of the past century, a perfect correspondence between the man and his work.

To Francis Joseph and to the Empire that came to an end in 1918 the saying certainly applies which is the veritable title deed of biographical history—History is made by men. Even in a period preoccupied as is our own with research into the development and function of ideas and of institutions, economic, social and political, history cannot omit personality, since it is the instrument through which the will of a nation or a state has to be exercised. Least of all can this be done where, as with Francis Joseph, the idea of the ruler overpowers that of the man and makes his personal individuality its servant.

This is the special note of the problem in biography here attempted. Its peculiarity lies in the sharpened contrast with which we have here to deal, between the limited mental and spiritual powers of the individual in his individual life, and unexampled pressure upon it of political and national, social and economic, ideas and tendencies in all their national and international complexity and all their permutations and combinations, affecting as they did, now this way, now that, the equilibrium of forces in Europe.

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The extent and difficulty of the task which fell to Francis Joseph in his early youth lends an interest and a special color to his purely personal story. Here the dominant note is given by the fact that, throughout nearly seventy-seven years of action and suffering, Francis Joseph maintained, unaltered, the position he took up on entering on his inheritance. The whole weight of the problems, internal and external, of his realm rested on him; he stood firm. This is his distinguishing mark. Constitutional forms might and did alter, but the Emperor retained to the end his primitive conception of the ruler whose will is always the strongest political force in his realm. Actually Francis Joseph never was a shadow Emperor; down to the day when the World War began, he was the ultimately deciding will in his wide empire.

A historical survey of European monarchy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows clearly enough the roots of the idea of the old right of the ruler. They strike down to the notion of the right and duty of the hereditary sovereign and the belief that in the exercise of the office given him by Providence the Christian ruler was limited only by his own conscience. For all the princes of Europe this idea proved an unassailable moral and spiritual foundation, which persisted even after the French Revolution set against it, successfully for a time, the idea of the unlimited sovereignty of the people. It is the idea repeatedly proclaimed by Frederick William IV of Prussia and his brother, the German Emperor, William I. It reappears, more or less definitely, in every prince of the German Empire, as well as in the French



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Bourbons, with a specific nationalist admixture, as in the Russian Czars, and in the rulers of the Habsburg realm. Fundamentally, monarchy in Europe is a uniform product of the thousand-years-old common history of the Continent. Orleans and Napoleons do not belong to it any more than do the Bernadottes in Sweden, Coburgs in Belgium, Karageorgiević in Serbia, or the rulers of United Italy, elected by plebiscite.

This legitimist conception of the ruler, operating from childhood up, inevitably conditions and determines the human personality and its possibilities of development. The individual character of the monarch tends to be subdued to his "ruler personality"; individual traits, while they affect the success or failure of his government, can hardly be detached from his political existence. No clearer case of this exists than Francis Joseph. The life exposed to us over a period of 68 years' rule is almost from the beginning history—and more history; the history of his countries and peoples, the history of Europe, in the last resort, the history of the world.

His biographer must, therefore, attempt to show the person in the politician, the man in the ruler. Despite the extreme difficulty of the task, aggravated as it is by the lack of sufficient data about his personal life, an endeavor will here be made to show the Europe of Francis Joseph's day from the standpoint of his personal activity as ruler. Justice may thus be done to the personality of the most impersonal monarch of the nineteenth century. It must never be forgotten that from the time of his accession at eighteen, the single influence that brought

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his character to maturity was his position as a ruler. His education from the day he became emperor was not derived from any school or study; only from practical politics. At the same time there was no "favorite" to spare him the burden and responsibility of his duties. On the contrary, the daily demands of his task of maintaining a great old European Empire, of molding its internal and external policy by decisions derived in the last analysis from his own judgment of men and things—this it was that made him what he was, as the men of his day saw him and as he lives on in the recollection of those who knew him.

This is the distinguishing trait in Francis Joseph's life. It was his destiny to be called, on the very threshold of life, to put his own manner of thinking against almost all the great forces and movements of the Europe of his day. It was his own, it was the inviolable tradition of his ancestors; such education as he had received presumed it. And he was an autocrat. In 1848 revolution shook the Habsburg realm to its foundation. He ascended the throne in 1848 as its conqueror. Through nearly seven decades, he had again and again to feel, first in this part of his realm and then in that, the contradiction between his inmost convictions and the political ideas derived from them and the political aims and objects of the day. Again and again he recognized it as his highest duty to overcome this contradiction, and did overcome it, for the sake of the one task that was always before him—the maintenance of his inherited realm. The method of overcoming it was sometimes difficult enough; generally

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through temporary compromises; generally step by step, though sometimes with astonishing rapidity.

His immovable guiding idea was his duty to maintain his realm intact. To realize it permanently by a creative application of modern ideas to the old Habsburg conception of the realm of the peoples of the West and East, lay beyond his mental scope. But he was strong enough always to impose compromises upon himself and upon his peoples that could only be regarded as temporizing expedients, means of coping with an immediate difficulty. The peoples, on the other hand, were never strong enough to unite and so provide a constructive, positive solution to the problem, growing more momentous year by year, of the continued existence of the old many-nationed realm.

Neither in the past nor in the present has European democracy been able to found lasting realms or create great new human units. Thus it is not astonishing that the contemporary nationalist democracy which attained to full power at the opening of the twentieth century could not achieve this task in Francis Joseph's kingdom. But it was the World War, unleashed by Francis Joseph's ultimatum to Serbia, bringing in its train the active coöperation of the enemy in revolutionizing the Slav and Romanic peoples of the monarchy and the ultimate dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian army, that finally dissolved the realm itself into its historic component parts. Francis Joseph maintained Austro-Hungarian unity throughout his long life. Whether the destruction of that unity was really an act of creative policy for the liberated peoples and for Europe as a whole; whether it signifies lasting peace in

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the new national states and among their peoples, whether it will produce elevation of the general level of European life—these are questions that the present may put to the future but cannot answer itself.

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