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A scandal in Vienna

THE DEVIL'S LIEUTENANT.

By M. Fagyas. Putnam. 384 pp.
\$6.95.

Its setting and subject may put you off, but this historical/political/suspense novel is skillful and relevant. In 1909, when a young officer in the Austro-Hungarian army was charged with the poison-murder of one of his colleagues, the ensuing scandal exposed not only the army's corruption, but the rotted fabric of a whole society. M. Fagyas has used the incident and its subsequent investigation to explore the dynamics of the remarkable society which condoned it, and to give us a picture of public and private life in elite Vienna between 1909-1914. The book's major protagonists are fictionalized versions of the officer who confessed to the crimes and of the military judge advocate who is appointed to investigate them — the first so hungry for war that he considers his acts only logical efforts in behalf of the monarchy he serves, the second a man of

conscience and compassion who realizes that the real pursuit of justice is in direct contradiction to the interests of the monarchy.

There is a great deal of intrigue and suspense as the investigation moves forward, exposing secret liaisons and the double lives of those who fall under its net. As marriages and careers topple and suicide and emotional breakdown become the order of the day, what is revealed is a hypocritical social order which imposes impossible demands upon its members while it condones tawdry alternatives to them for a privileged few. M. Fagyas has a solid talent for characterization, and the people who inhabit the world she details here are believable as individuals and arresting as symbols of the forces which divided the empire before it disappeared. The Archduke Ferdinand has just been assassinated at Sarajevo as the novel ends, with both its protagonists still alive and at war with one another.

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case

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