

**THE WAR & THE PROPHETS;
NOTES ON CERTAIN
POPULAR PREDICTIONS
CURRENT IN THIS LATTER AGE**

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The war & the prophets; notes on certain popular predictions current in this latter age by
Herbert Thurston

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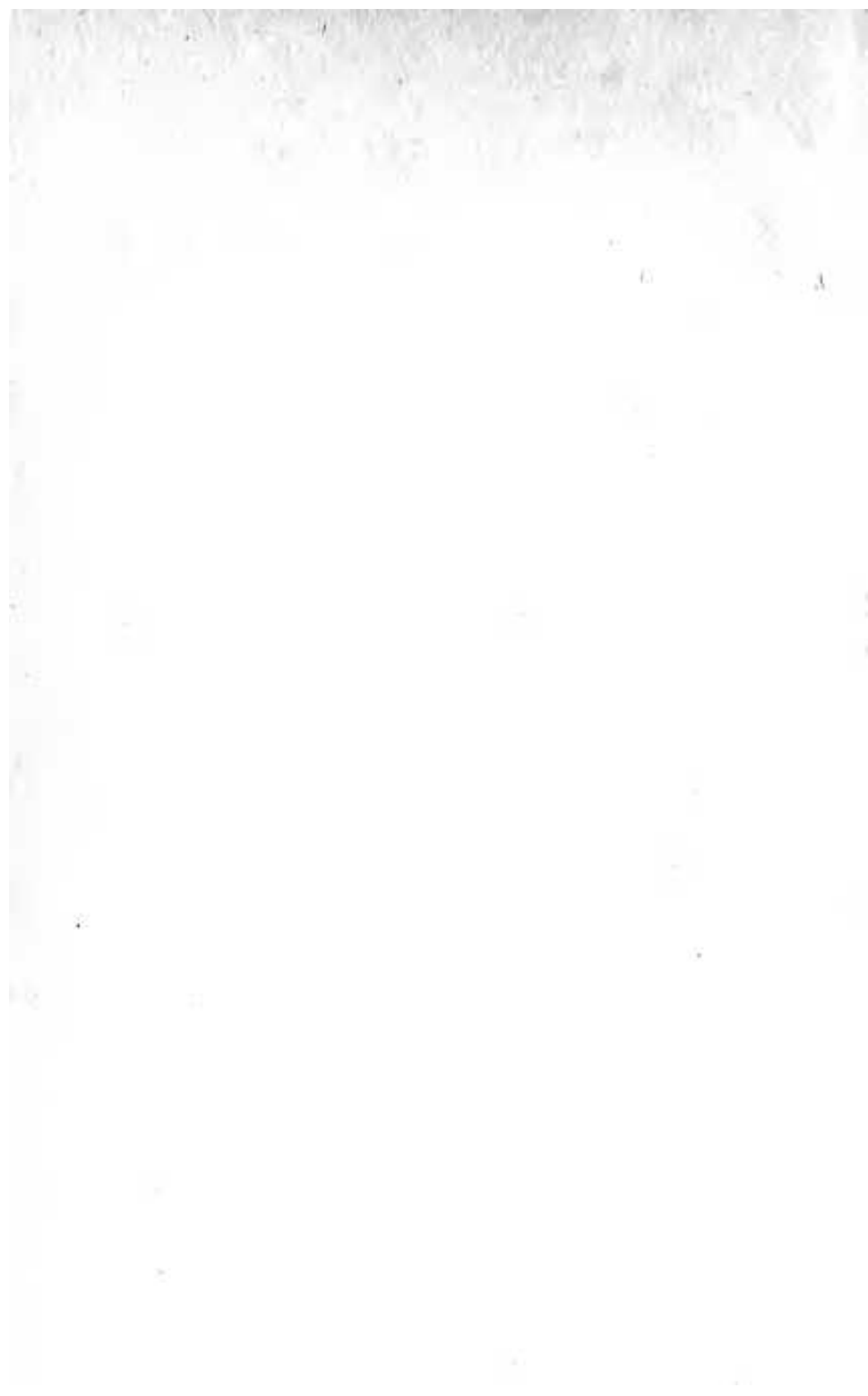
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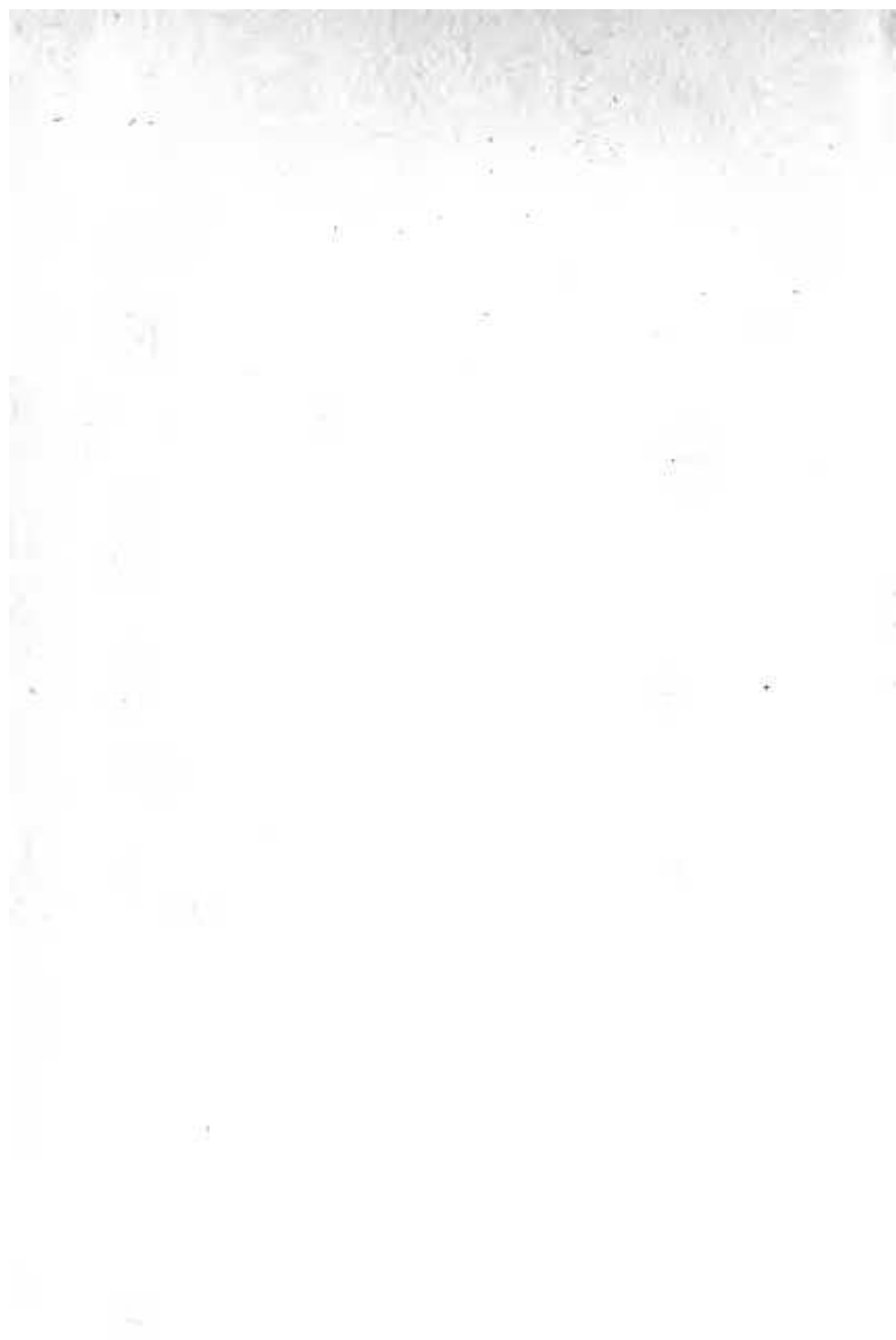
BY

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Μάντις ἀριςτος ὅστις εἰκάζει καλῶς

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P R E F A C E

THIS little book, dealing with the prophecies current during or recalled to memory by the present war, has been suggested at least in part by Döllinger's well-known essay, *Der Weissagungsglaube und das Prophetenthum in der christlichen Zeit*, of which an excellent translation was published forty years ago by Mr. Alfred Plummer. Dr. Döllinger's survey dealt almost exclusively with the predictions of the Middle Ages; the present work concerns itself with those prognostics which have attracted attention in recent times, and are expected to find their fulfilment in our own generation. Even Döllinger, in spite of his strongly antipapal standpoint, did not think of questioning the possibility of a genuine gift of prophecy, whether natural or infused. He believed, for example, that Savonarola possessed it, although by no means all Savonarola's predictions were justified by the sequel. Naturally it is not the aim of the following pages to show that credibility is to be denied on principle to every attempt to foretell future events. St. Paul writes, as we all know :

“Despise not prophecies, but prove all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. v. 20-21); and although, as Lightfoot well notes, the meaning of *προφητεία* in the New Testament is “forth-telling rather than foretelling,” inspiration, in other words, rather than prediction, still the latter sense is also implicitly included. That there have been, and are, many persons to whom a knowledge of the future is imparted in ways that transcend our comprehension, I fully believe. But that this knowledge ever extends to the foreseeing of political events of general interest is very difficult to establish by evidence. It does not seem to be part of the divine dispensation that assurance regarding the decrees of Providence should be given to any considerable body of mankind. Certainly a careful scrutiny of such pretended oracles as are discussed in the present volume must lead to an attitude of extreme suspicion in regard to all literature of this type. Of the many hundred predictions recorded in the various collections which I have examined almost all have been long ago refuted by the actual course of events. I have, in fact, come across but one, and that a prophecy to which attention has not hitherto been directed, which seems to me to retain the least semblance of intrinsic probability (see pp. 80-84 below). Moreover, even here the extrinsic evidence is quite unsatisfactory, and should the terrible catastrophe foreshadowed unhappily come anywhere near realization, one

could feel no confidence that we were in the presence of anything more than a rather exceptional coincidence.

Although the longest chapter in this volume, that concerned with the pretended "prophecy of St. Malachy," may seem at first sight to have little to do with the present war, the observant reader will soon discover that these papal mottoes are closely interwoven with the fabric of nearly all the recent religious predictions concerning present calamities and the end of the world. It therefore seemed desirable to discuss the question of the fraudulent origin of the list in some detail, the more so that much that is written on the subject is curiously ill-informed. The substance of the chapter dealing with St. Malachy is taken from two articles which I contributed to *The Month* as far back as June and July, 1899, where the intimate dependence of the mottoes on Panvinio was, I think, made clear for the first time. The fact that even in such a work as *The Catholic Encyclopædia* the "prophecy" should be treated as a document of serious value seemed to render it needful to deal with the subject somewhat more fully and exhaustively than the matter in itself deserved.

March 31st, 1915.