

however, criticised by Catholic organisations. In October 1914, the *Annales d'Ars*, the monthly magazine of the sanctuary dedicated to Vianney, complained that 'every day or nearly every day we are asked about the prophecy of the blessed *curé d'Ars* or information on the predictions that he had made concerning the current war'. It desired to state publicly, once and for all, that, the prophecy published by the newspapers was false and that they knew of no authentic predictions made by the blessed *curé*. This statement was widely reprinted in diocesan magazines across France. It was also echoed on the other side of the world by the Catholic periodical the *New Zealand Tablet*, which told its readers 'Catholics cannot defend a prophecy which is so unauthenticated as this one.'⁸⁰

A profusion of modern prophets

As well as the reinterpretation, reinvention, and faking of prophecies by dead or legendary figures, there were also hordes of living prophets who staked their claim to oracular greatness – though usually with the power of hindsight. They came in many guises and professed a variety of occult inspirations. At the modest end of the scale were the likes of the seaside fortune-teller, Clementina Norton, who proudly claimed during her prosecution in 1915 that at 'Southend on a public platform I prophesied the war.' Then there were the notorious boasters, such as the ritual magician Aleister Crowley. Under the name Frater Perturabo, he wrote to the *Occult Review* in September 1914, to state that on 8 May 1910, he, along with an acquaintance high up in the Admiralty, and a well-known violinist, had conjured up the spirit of Mars, who was named Bartzabel. They asked him if there would be war in Europe, to which Bartzabel replied, yes, within five years, and that Germany and Turkey would be involved.⁸¹

There were numerous claims by mediums. Arthur Conan Doyle was impressed by the Sydney medium Mrs Foster Turner, who, in February 1914, before an audience of hundreds, apparently channelled the spirit of the well-known journalist and spiritualist W.T. Stead (1849-1912): 'I want to warn you that before this year 1914 has run its course, Europe will be deluged in blood.' The London-based 'Scottish seer', Miss McCreadie, apparently told friends that, during a trip to France several years before the war, she had felt a foreboding psychic sense of turmoil and treachery, of a great conflict triggered by Germany.⁸² There was a stir in occult circles in 1918 when a series of mediumistic interviews with Julius Caesar, purportedly conducted in Teddington, Middlesex, in 1909 and 1912, were published that seemed to prophecy the war and its ending. The first communication in 1909 began with the question, 'What is impending?' The reply from the Roman emperor was, 'War – horrid war. Mars is king ... The weak must suffer. The strong will die. Those who are neither will suffer and live'. There followed a stream of cryptic lyrical statements, including, 'Red Poppies in the graveyard. And then Red Poppies in the smiling cornfields in the sun. Read, learn, and fear not.' Caesar returned to his poppy theme in October 1912, 'The Poppies cometh to pass before the Day of Christ. Note what we have said. Poverty and Hunger and the War-lust in every land on which lieth the shadow of the Cross. ... when Europe is exhausted the reign of Asia will begin, for there the sun is rising. So say we.'⁸³

⁸⁰ For example, *Église d'Albi : la semaine religieuse de l'Archidiocèse d'Albi*, 17 October 1914, 530 ; *New Zealand Tablet*, 14 January 1915.

⁸¹ *Occult Review*, 20 (1914) 174.

⁸² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (Cambridge, 1926), Volume 2; 'A Scottish Seer', *Light*, 12 February 1916, 56.

⁸³ Frederick Bligh Bond, *The Hill of Vision: A Forecast of the Great War* (Boston, 1919), pp. 15, 16, 19.

In France today, Mme Fraya is sometimes cited as the grand prophetic dame of the Great War, due in large part to a biography published in the 1950s that contained highly dubious claims about her war-time prowess and political clients.⁸⁴ Fraya's real name was Marie-Valentine Dencausse (1871-1954). Born in the Landes region of southwest France, she made her name as a chiromancer and graphologist, but also professed clairvoyant powers. She became a well-known figure amongst psychical researchers, and in 1913 the doctor and psychical researcher Eugène Osty published a book on metapsychic cognition in which he explored Fraya's powers and her 'very advanced' brain.⁸⁵ Her consulting room in Rue d'Edimbourg, Paris, was frequented by international high-society figures. Just before the war, the Paris journal of the Radical Ottoman Party liked to mention the visits of its political rivals to the clairvoyant's rooms. She received press interest in December 1914 for her analysis of the Kaiser's handwriting, which, she stated, exhibited the signs of a strongly unbalanced mind, and that he was vain, slow to comprehend, and would offer a sad spectacle when he was inevitably defeated.⁸⁶ But look through the international literature of the war period and one name stands out above all the rest: Madame de Thèbes. Indeed, after the War the French press referred to Mme Fraya variously as the 'new Mme de Thèbes' or her 'proclaimed heiress' in the public consciousness.⁸⁷

Madame de Thèbes was born Annette Savary at 52 Rue des Envierges in the hamlet of Ménilmontant, in the commune of Belleville, around 1844. Her father was a carpenter, and at the time of her birth Ménilmontant was a small village on the outskirts of Paris that would soon be swallowed up into the twentieth *arrondissement* of the expanding city. She began working as a cashier in a gentleman's outfitters near the Palais-Royal, then around 1877 as a private tutor for a bourgeois family.⁸⁸ From around 1882 she was drawn to the stage and appeared in small roles in provincial tours under the stage name of Mlle Dhalyle. Then, in 1884, she became a *confidante* of the actress and notorious courtesan Léonide Leblanc (1842-1894), herself a former primary school teacher. Leblanc, who was nick-named 'Madame Maximum' for her prodigious sexual appetite, had many high-profile lovers included George Clémenceau, who would later lead France through the last two years of the First World War.

It was in 1890 that Savary took her first big step towards celebrity and power, when she adopted the name Madame de Sauval and established herself as a card-reader or *cartomancienne* at 46 Rue Laugier. She then learned the more 'scientific' art of chiromancy, influenced by the work and fame of the Parisian artist and well-known chiromancer Adolphe Desbarrolles. He had published an influential manual on the subject in the 1850s, which went through numerous editions in several languages over the ensuing decades. Desbarrolles died in 1886, and a gap appeared in the firmament of high-society prognosticators. Still, prognostication was a crowded market in Paris. An ambitious young woman trying to make her way in the business required an influential patron, and he appeared in the form of Alexandre Dumas, son of the famous novelist, and a successful dramatist in his own right. Dumas *filis* had a long-standing interest in chiromancy having learned the art from

⁸⁴ Simone de Tervagne, *Madame Fraya m'a dit: Les confidences de la plus grande voyante du siècle* (Paris, 1955).

⁸⁵ Eugène Osty, *Lucidité et intuition: étude expérimentale* (Paris, 1913).

⁸⁶ Gabriel Cabannes, *Galerie des Landais* (Hossegor, 1931), vol. 5, pp. 123-6; *Mècheroutiette* 26 (1912) 63; 18 (1911) 47; 13 (1910) 60; *Le Figaro*, 10 December 1914.

⁸⁷ *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 10 January 1920, 7; *Le Petit Parisien*, 29 August 1931; *Echo de Bougie*, 16 December 1934.

⁸⁸ Details of her early life were investigated by her contemporary the theatre journalist Louis Schneider. See his pieces in *Gil Blas*, 13 June 1906; *Le Petit Parisien*, 12 August 1932. See also *L'ami de Ménilmontant: Organe de la paroisse Notre-Dame de la Croix* 104 (1919) 2-6.

Desbarolles. Savary and Dumas were introduced by a mutual acquaintance, the son of the popular painter of cats, Louis-Eugène Lambert. Savary was invited several times to Dumas' home in Paris and his country mansion at Marly. There is no evidence as to whether their relationship was sexual, however. Although a public critic of society-climbing courtesans, Dumas was not averse to sleeping around. The first public mention of their relationship concerned a dinner party hosted by Dumas that included several eminent doctors and members of the *Académie Française*, and involved a discussion on and session of palm reading. The nature of the dinner party and its guests was reported with a raised eyebrow by *Le Figaro* in March 1893.⁸⁹ A few days later, the conservative daily newspaper *Le Gaulois* mockingly compared Savary to the mussel and potato salad that had come into vogue in Paris salons after its description in Dumas' play *Francillon*, referring to 'this Madame de Thèbes, who Dumas has just thrown at us, as, not long ago, the indigestible *salade japonaise!*'⁹⁰ But Savary proved no flash in the pan.

It was Dumas who suggested to Savary that she adopt the professional name 'Madame de Thèbes' in reference to a play he had been working for years called *La Route de Thèbes*, a psychological drama centred on a mysterious woman. He never finished the play but the creation of Madame de Thèbes was completed to great effect. By the time Dumas died in 1895, de Thèbes' business was well established, and for the next two decades the elite of Parisian society made their way to her consulting rooms at 29 Avenue de Wagram. There were several clients from the literary world. Marcel Proust once went to consult her after feeling ill. She read his palm, gave him a worried look, and sensibly told him go 'far away for a rest'. There were international royal and political clients. A Serbian diplomat recalled in 1917 how in the early 1890s Queen Nathalie of Serbia had taken two female acquaintances to see Madame de Thèbes, one of them, Draga Mashin, who was to become her daughter-in-law. Mashin and her future husband Alexander, now the king of Serbia, were assassinated in a coup in 1903 – an event Mme Fraya claimed to have predicted. Apparently de Thèbes had, likewise informed Mashin, 'that she [Mashin] cherished very high ambitions, that she would see the desire of her heart fulfilled, but that very fulfilment would lead to a catastrophe in which both she and her husband should perish.' Writing of his time in Haiti the travel writer Harry Franck observed the influence of Madame de Thèbes amongst the Caribbean island's tumultuous political elite: 'If the stories which gradually leak out from the confidences of returning natives to their friends are trustworthy, she tells all Haitians that they are someday to become president of their country, not a bad guess under old conditions ... More than one revolution has been started on the strength of her Prophecies.'⁹¹

Madame de Thèbes had a successful publishing career, with titles such as *L'Énigme de la main* (1901). The vehicle for her First World War prophecies, though, was her *Almanach de Mme A. de Thèbes*, the first volume of which appeared in 1903. It was released at Christmas and unlike British predictive almanacs at the time, its contents were largely based around her divinatory investigations as a chiromancer, though numerological and astrological observations were included.⁹² In her *Almanach* for 1913, de Thèbes had predicted, 'Germany menaces Europe in general and France in particular. When the war breaks out she will have willed it, but after it there will be no longer Hohenzollern or Prussian domination.' She was

⁸⁹ *Le Figaro*, 31 March 1893.

⁹⁰ *Le Gaulois*, 2 April 1893.

⁹¹ Chedomille Mijatovich, *The Memoirs of a Balkan Diplomat* (London, 1917), p. 195; Harry A. Franck, *Roaming Through the West Indies* (New York, 1920), p. 163.

⁹² Nicole Edelman, *Histoire de la voyance et du paranormal du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 2006), pp. 100-101.

far from alone in her confidence. Several prominent French diviners and occultists also indicated war would break out in 1913, including the influential Gérard Encausse, otherwise known as Papus. In January 1913, he predicted in the occult magazine *Mystéria* that the year would be dark, bringing many tears, blood shed, and cruel bereavements, ‘never have the signs of war been so numerous’. ‘I am no prophet’, he declared, but ‘the hour is dangerous and the future menacing’. This was certainly true for himself, as he died from tuberculosis in 1916 while working in the French army medical corps.⁹³ J.-H. Lavour, had published a range of prophecies that collectively pointed to the end of the German empire in 1912 and 1913. In the preface to his 1914 edition, he accepted that 1913 ended without the predictions being realised, but he said his conclusions remained absolutely justified in that 1913 ‘was the beginning of a period of two years in the course of which the said events would infallibly occur!’ This edition would go on to be published in Spanish and Romanian.⁹⁴ The supposed prophecy of Count Leo Tolstoy, which circulated in England and France, foretold that Europe would be consumed by a destructive calamity in 1913. In Germany, meanwhile, gloomy predictions were made about the number 13, as it was in 1813 that the bloody campaign with Napoleon was fought. The centenary heralded a new conflict.⁹⁵

War obviously did not come that year, but deeply puzzled by the strength and number of the war predictions, several occultists suggested there was a crucial reason. The compiler of prophecies of the Great War, Countess Zalinski, wonder in 1917 whether ‘some great occult force or power interposed in an effort to stay the calamity, but which was able only to postpone it for a single year.’ Electrical engineer and ‘Thought power’ advocate, F.L. Rawson, believed the delayed outbreak of war was due to the many prayers that had been said by ‘mental workers’ striving for peace.⁹⁶

As 1914 loomed, several French diviners rolled back on the ominous predictions. Mme Andréé, who read the coffee grounds, and the tarot reader Mme Lorenza, assured readers that there was no reason to worry, and that 1914 might even be a prosperous period. ‘I do not foresee any particularly serious events – such as war – for the year 1914’, divined the latter.⁹⁷ But de Thèbes stuck to her claims, with her *Almanach* for 1914 warning:

This year we shall pass through the gravest and most decisive hours. It will be a year especially happy for France, in spite of blood, in spite of tears, and in spite of uneasy omens, victory! Victory! We have nothing to fear from the trials of fate. France will emerge renewed in strength, reconstituted by war.

Regarding Germany: ‘All is disquieting in her destiny. The person of the Emperor is most threatened by fate. It is not the eagle of victory he bears on his helmet.’

⁹³ “‘Année sombre’ dit le docteur Papus’, *Mystéria* 1 (1913) 95-6.

⁹⁴ J.-H. Lavour, *Comment se réalise en ce moment même la fin de l'Empire allemand, annoncée par plusieurs prophéties célèbres, précises et concordantes* (Paris, 1915), p. 5. J.-H. Lavour, *Cómo llega en los actuales momentos el fin del Imperio alemán*, trans. Juan García Valladolid (Madrid, 1915); J.-H. Lavour, *Cum se indeplinește chiar în momentul acesta sfârșitul Imperiului german prevestit prin mai multe proorociri celebre, precise și concordante*, trans. Scarlat Ion Ghica, (Bucharest, 1919).

⁹⁵ *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, Vol. 9, p. 473.

⁹⁶ Countess Zalinski, *Noted Prophecies, Predictions, Omens, and Legends Concerning the Great War* (Chicago, 1917), p. 83; F.L. Rawson, *How the War Will End* (London, 1917), p. 43.

⁹⁷ Le Naour, *Nostradamus*, pp. 43-4.

During the early months of the war these pronouncements were repeated in the international press from New Zealand to America, Britain to Germany.⁹⁸ The French press regularly reported on and criticised the activities of Madame de Thèbes. Her almanac for 1914 was a popular seller on the streets of Paris. ‘Men lend an ear to prophecies,’ wrote one reporter from the capital, ‘and books containing the predictions of Madame de Thèbes and the Prophecy of Mayence are for sale on the boulevards.’⁹⁹ There was also a trade in bogus prophecies under her name. She wrote to the newspapers several times during 1914 and 1915 to complain of the ‘audacious jokers’ who were peddling such street literature. The only predictions on the war she had published, spoken about, and authorised, she stated, were her *Almanachs* for 1913 and 1914.¹⁰⁰

While one Austrian newspaper dismissed ‘the famous Madame de Thèbes’ as being a mere agitator for the ‘Pan-Slavic’ clique in Paris who sought to unify the Slavic nations of eastern Europe, she was widely feted as an extraordinary international figure.¹⁰¹ Such was her fame due to her war prophecy, that in 1915 the Finnish-Swedish film director Mauritz Stiller made a romantic drama about an ambitious politician who does not realise that he is the illegitimate son of none other than Madame de Thèbes, but this knowledge falls into the hands of a political rival. By this time, de Thèbes sought a degree of refuge from the media scrutiny and glare, and bought a farm in Meung-sur-Loire, southwest of Orleans, where she raised turkeys. The French press did not miss a trick in mocking her flight to the countryside. *Le Cris de Paris*, observed that she ‘who can announce the fall of empires and the death of kings, a dozen months in advance, cannot foresee from one week to another the rise or fall in the price of eggs’.¹⁰² She died alone in her country home in December 1916, her adopted son having died of an illness sometime before - a fate she said she had read in his palm. Her demise was global news, reported in newspapers from Austria to Australia and America.¹⁰³ She left a bequest that the capital from the sale of her farm be used to provide a dowry for one of the poorest and most deserving girls born in Ménilmontant who agreed to marry that same year, the recipient to be chosen by the parish priest. Fitting for the resting place of a global superstar, she was buried in the celebrity-laden Père Lachaise cemetery, not far from her birthplace.

Looking to the stars

During the war, as at other times of conflict down the centuries, people pondered the portent of unusual astronomical occurrences in the sky. Italian and Serbian soldiers were keen interpreters of meteors, shooting stars, and halos. A total eclipse of the sun across the Baltic and Russia on the 21 August 1914 was taken by some as a bad omen about the nascent war. And when the white dwarf Nova Aquilae was detected by telescope in June 1918 it led to speculation in the press as to whether it heralded anything for the conflict’s end.¹⁰⁴ Then there were the planets; the brightness of Venus was the focus of particular attention in Italy as the ‘star of peace’. One planet, above all, was thought to preside over the outcome on the battlefields – Mars. ‘Was it the influence of Mars, the god of war, which drove the wind on

⁹⁸ See, for example, *Evening Post* (New Zealand), 12 December 1914.

⁹⁹ *British Review* 8 (1914) 227.

¹⁰⁰ *La Lanterne*, 29 October 1914.

¹⁰¹ *Wiener Journal*, 19 November 1915.

¹⁰² *Fortnightly Review*, 5 May 1916, 156.

¹⁰³ See, for example, *The Argus* (Melbourne), 24 February 1917; *Boston Daily Globe*, 27 December 1917; *Der Tiroler*, 5 January 1917;

¹⁰⁴ Dauzat, *Légendes*, p. 253; Nikola Marković, “‘Od kopile kočicu i pobeg-zrno od kukuruz’”. Sujeverje u srpskoj vojsci tokom Prvog svetskog rata’, *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 13 (2006) p. 65; Le Naour, *Nostradamus*, pp. 53-4; *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 19 June 1918.

the warpath'? Pondered the *Whitby Gazette*, in its report of a lecture at the London Royal Institution, entitled, 'Wireless Messages from the Stars'. The lecturer observed how the position of Mars in relation to the constellation Leo was just the same as at the time of the Crimean and Boer Wars. This was surely no coincidence. In France, the bellicose astrologer Raoul Larmier, predicted the fall of the Hohenzollerns in 1913 or 1914 because of the conjunction of the malign planet Saturn with Mars in the House of Taurus.¹⁰⁵

The scanning of the skies for portentous comets and shooting stars was an aspect of natural astrology, but most of the astrological ruminations about the war concerned the 'science' of natal and horary astrology. In simple terms, the former concerns the calculation of the position of the planets and constellations in the heavens at the exact moment of a person's birth. A horoscope or birth chart can then be constructed that indicates what the future holds based on the qualities of the most influential planets and constellations. Horary astrology involves calculating the position of the planets at the moment a question is asked, such as, 'When will the war end?'

On the eve of war, there was little apparent public preoccupation with astrology in France and Germany, and there were only a handful of manuals and guidebooks compared to those explaining other occult sciences such as palmistry and cartomancy. Most of those who published on the astrology of the war, such as the Frenchman Albert Faucheux (F. Ch. Barlet), were Theosophists who practised astrology more as an aspect of mystical occultism than a practical 'science'.¹⁰⁶ At the centre of the very small astrological fraternity in Germany was the Austrian actor and occultist Karl Brandler-Pracht who set up astrological societies in Vienna, Munich, and Leipzig between 1907 and 1910. He and several others, such as Otto Pöllner, Wilhelm Becker, and Ernst Tiede would be central to the popularising of astrology in Germany during and after the war.¹⁰⁷ Britain was recognised as the superpower in the astrological world, and the renaissance of popular astrology in Germany was based, in part, on German translations by the likes of Brandler-Pracht and Becker of English astrological manuals. Before setting up his professional astrological service in Berlin in 1910, for instance, Becker had gone to England to learn astrology from Alan Leo, a Theosophist and the founding editor of *The Astrologer's Magazine*. While there, he acquired the German rights to several of Leo's numerous popular astrological books.

The vast majority of the population never consulted an astrologer in person, but many people read or heard about their war predictions, which were set out in numerous pamphlets, such as *The Great Devastation; A Prophecy of the Times that are coming upon Europe, Astrologically Interpreted by Sepharial* (1914). While British newspapers only began to produce the now very familiar horoscope columns from the 1930s, during the First World War they periodically reported on the latest astrological pronouncements, sometimes with a disapproving air, sometimes with tongue firmly in cheek, but often without comment. Astrologers also gave numerous public lectures. In February 1915, for instance, the press reported on a public talk at the Picture Palace in Wells, Somerset, in aid of the Red Cross by the president of the Cardiff Astrological Society, Mr T. Gould, entitled 'Astrology and the Great War', in which he observed that eclipses were the most potent causes of conflict. Later that year, Mr H.B. Hammond lectured at the Arthur Hall, Dover, on 'Astrology as a Guide to

¹⁰⁵ *Whitby Gazette*, 21 January 1916; Naour, *Nostradamus*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Edelman, *Histoire de la voyance*, p. 104 ; F. Ch. Barlet, *L'astrologie et la guerre* (Paris, 1917).

¹⁰⁷ Ellic Howe, *Urania's Children: The Strange World of the Astrologers* (London, 1967), pp.77, 82-4; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Geschichte der Astrologie: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2003), pp. 321-36.

Life', and fascinated his audience by revealing the Kaiser's horoscope and what it meant for Germany's destiny.¹⁰⁸

But it was Britain's venerable astrological almanacs that had the widest influence on wartime popular culture. The main titles were: *Zadkiel's Almanac*, named after the *nom de plume* of its founder Richard James Morrison (1795-1874); *Raphael's Almanac or the Prophetic Messenger*, which dated back to the 1820s; and the granddaddy of them all, *Moore's Almanac* or *Vox Stellarum* ('Voice of the Stars'), founded by the astrologer-physician Francis Moore in the 1690s. *Moore's Almanac* sold in its hundreds of thousands every year during the nineteenth century and became deeply rooted in folklore.¹⁰⁹ Its pronouncements for the coming year were a perennial fascination for the press. As to the war, *Moore's* certainly gains first prize for the most understated prediction of the coming conflict, with its advice for August 1914 reading: 'The vacation is likely to be disturbed by adverse events, in which the travelling public are involved.'¹¹⁰ Out on the battlefield, one officer reminisced, in 1921, about his Cockney army driver, who called one of his horses Old Moore because 'e knows every blinkin' fing like Old Moore's *Almanac*.' One evening they were warned of a gas attack, and the recently supplied nose-bag gasmasks for horses were put into action. When the officer walked back to the rear of the column labouring in his own gas mask he saw that his driver had taken his off already. When he asked why he was not wearing his, 'he leaned over the saddle and replied, in a confidential whisper, "Old Moore chucked his orf, so there ain't no blinkin' gas abaht - 'e knows.'"¹¹¹

As the war clouds gathered, and during the early months of the conflict, the race was on to calculate and unpick the horoscopes of the European aristocracies and the leaders of the combatant countries to see what lay in store for their subjects. The German astrologer Ernst Tiede concluded from his examination of the horoscopes of Europe's statesmen that there was a two-to-one chance that the Central Powers would be victorious.¹¹² Not surprisingly, British astrologers read the same horoscopes very differently. In September 1914, E.H. Bailey gave his assessment in the periodical *Old Moore's Monthly Messenger*. The President of France had 'a fatalistic horoscope', concluded Bailey. The Sun was conjoined with the Moon, and in square to Mars and Venus, which were 'terrible influences, indicative not only of war but of personal violence'. The King of Italy was born with Mars and Saturn conjoined, however, which denoted that he was keeping out of conflict, though an impending solar eclipse could change things. As to the Kaiser, he had 'Mars in square to the radical Sun' – 'another evil ray'. Bailey concluded with the stirring news that there was every indication from the stars that, 'the greatest victory in the annals of the British Army and the ultimate crushing of the German Empire' were in prospect.¹¹³

As the war progressed, the almanac compilers applied their calculations to mapping out the twists and turns of the military campaigns. A digest of the war predictions in *Moore's*

¹⁰⁸ *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 24 February 1915; *Wells Journal*, 26 February 1915; *Dover Express*, 1 October 1915.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 101-2; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 153-57. In Ireland there was also *Old Moore's Almanac* founded by the eighteenth-century Dublin astrologer Theophilus Moore.

¹¹⁰ Allan Haywood Bright, 'The Prophetic Literature of the War', *Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool* 64 (1916) 88.

¹¹¹ *500 of the Best Cockney War Stories* (London, 1921), pp. 114-5.

¹¹² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (London, 1985), p. 103.

¹¹³ E.H. Bailey, 'The Armageddon of Nations', *Old Moore's Monthly Messenger* 7 (September 1914), 227-8.

Almanac for 1916 is typical. The ‘Voice of the Stars’ predicted violence and further bloodshed in Italy in January, and that ‘the legions of Germany will be rolled back to the borders of their own country.’ For February, however, it appeared that ‘our enemies will be active, and may gain temporary advantages’. The centre of Europe would be, by then, a scene of ‘carnage and devastation.’ In May, the position of Jupiter to Mars presaged a ‘brilliant victory’ for the British Navy. In August, the new moon falling on the Kaiser’s Saturn signified the beginning of Germany’s downfall. Aviation would also make great strides. As for December, ‘the end of the year does not, to my judgement, see the end of the war ... So far as our own country is concerned, continued progress and victory are assured’. Unsurprisingly, Old Moore’s long-standing, though less popular, astrological competitor *Raphael’s Prophetic Almanac*, followed in a similar vein for 1916. There was no immediate end in sight to the bloodshed and sacrifice, but the stars assured a glorious victory whenever it would come.

In 1915, the Jesuit priest Herbert Thurston analysed the content of a range of astrological almanacs and their myriad war predictions up to that date, including *Old Moore* and *Zadkiel’s Almanac*. His explanation of the ‘system’ used by almanac compilers was spot on. As he noted, they worked on the balance of probabilities: ‘an immense number of shots are made – that many of them are mutually inconsistent matters little – and it is hoped that a fair proportion of these will go near enough to the mark to be claimed as successes.’ He noticed how they made prognostications three times over in each issue. First, the headline predictions appeared in the general outlook for the year, then in the monthly calendar of events, and also in the horoscopes of important people. The forecasts in each could be quite divergent from one another and even contradictory, as a means of covering a range of prognosticatory possibilities. Statements were also phrased with ‘judicious hedging’ – ‘we are not told positively that a war will take place, but that peace is seriously menaced; we are not informed that the Emperor of Austria, for example, will die, but that he ought to take care of his health.’¹¹⁴ *Raphael* rather gave the game away when ‘he’ apologised as follows: ‘My Almanac is published on the first day of August in each year, and the great war broke out in 1914 a few days afterwards, consequently I was unable to make special reference to it in the 1915 edition.’¹¹⁵

If the British almanacs were unanimous in their predictions of ultimate victory, they were remarkably coy about when that would happen. After giving a brief overview of *Old Moore’s* predictions in ‘his’ almanac for 1918, one British newspaper grumbled humorously in August 1917 that “‘Old Moore’ does everything but tell us when the war will end.”¹¹⁶ This was very true, but people also read what they wanted into astrological predictions. An Essex vicar noted in his diary for September 1917, ‘many of the country people have absolute faith in the predictions of ‘Old Moore’s’ *Almanac*. Several have told Dr Smallwood how relieved they are to know that the war will be over in 1918; Old Moore says so.’ This was actually because *Moore* predicted that in April ‘the foe will be pressing at the gates’, so villagers were quite sure that the Germany would launch a failed invasion of Britain that month.¹¹⁷ *Zadkiel’s Almanac* for 1915 - one of the few almanacs for that year to be printed *after* the outbreak of the war – thought that with Uranus setting, Russia would swiftly defeat Germany, and the war would likely end before 1915 arrived. It was less confident in subsequent years.

¹¹⁴ Herbert Thurston, *The War & the Prophets* (London, 1915), pp. 108-9.

¹¹⁵ Bright, ‘The Prophetic Literature of the War’, 88.

¹¹⁶ *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 14 August 1917.

¹¹⁷ James Munson (ed.), *Echoes of the Great War: the diary of the Reverend Andrew Clark 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1985), p. 211.

Writing in January 1915, Sepharial, the pen name of astrologer Walter Gorn Old (1864-1929), critiqued the astrological efforts to date, and announced that according to his own meticulous mathematical calculations the war would not end ‘until Saturn comes to the opposition of the Sun in the Kaiser’s horoscope’, and that would happen in August 1917. This conflicted with the verdict of an Austrian astrologer, Karl Zanolovsky, who after months of calculations reported to the Austrian press that the war would end on the 17 August 1916, with three emperors and three kings being victorious. In March 1918, German occultist and astrologer Oskar Ganser had a dream: ‘I was with my deceased father. He said to me, “my dear son, you have calculated carefully, but you have not considered various factors; the war will not be over on 2 May 1918, but on 19 August 1919. You will experience that.”’¹¹⁸ Then, in the autumn of 1918, a Bombay newspaper printed the latest calculations of the Calcutta astrologer Manmatha Bhattacharjee who forecast that the Allies would enter Cologne by the 1 July 1919 and the Germans would finally capitulate by 5 September 1919.¹¹⁹ I have not come across any astrological predictions that accurately predicted either the armistice or the eventual end of the war.

Each time the stars failed, the astrologers would go back to their charts. It was questioned how the horoscope of one man could foretell the fate of a whole empire. But Alan Leo was bullish, ‘To say that the horoscopes of monarchs have no national influence is to deny the truth of Astrology.’¹²⁰ They returned over and over again to see how past developments in the war had related to the horoscopes of the rulers and the position of the planets and constellations at the time. The successful astrological matches were taken as firm proof, while the many inconsistencies and failures were rarely discussed. Ralph Shirley stuck his neck out into deep astrological space in January 1917 by suggesting that as well as employing horoscopes, the course of the war could even be mapped out by assessing the signs of the zodiac governing the different combatant countries. ‘There have been some curious confirmations,’ he observed, ‘though we are still left in doubt with regard to very important points in this connection.’¹²¹ ‘Twice over have we had confirmation of the rule of Libra over Austria,’ he concluded for example. The first proof was that Mars transited Libra at the time of the victories of the Russian General Brusilov against the Austrians in the spring of 1916. The successful German campaign against Rumania led by Field Marshal Mackensen was corroboration that Leo ruled over Rumania.

Armageddon and the new world order

While much time and thought went in to proving that the war had been predicted in old prophecies or by the application of occult sciences, as the horrific nature of the conflict unfolded, the war came to be seen as an omen, in itself, of a far more momentous transformation of the world to come, a metaphysical crisis of spiritual destiny. For Christian occultists such as the French mystical philosopher and electrical engineer Michael Forhan, the war was a spiritual conflict in which Germany and Turkey would be defeated, because Jesus would finally bless those who he loved. Members of the British ritual occult organisation, the Golden Dawn, talked expectantly of a war that would herald a magical new

¹¹⁸Sepharial, ‘The End of the War. A Contest of Astrological Opinion’, *The British Journal of Astrology* 8 (January 1915) 74-5; *Mittags-Zeitung*, 23 February 1916; ‘Wann ist der Krieg zu Ende?’, *Zentralblatt Okkultismus*, 11 (1918) 473.

¹¹⁹ *Leamington Spa Courier*, 25 October 1918.

¹²⁰ Alan Leo, *Mars: The War Lord* (London, 1915), p. 44.

¹²¹ ‘Notes of the Month’, *The Occult Review* 25 (1917) 9.

age.¹²² Numerous authors reached for their Bibles to see what the Old and New Testaments had to say. One argued that the war was playing out the ancient Biblical struggle between the Assyrians and the Israelites. The British were gifted a special providence by God, like the Israelites, and Germany harboured the poison of jealous hatred in their breasts, like the Assyrians. Their fate would be the same.¹²³

The apocalypse predicted in the Book of Revelation, with the antichrist descending to wreak catastrophic death and destruction on the battlefield of Armageddon, proved the most obvious analogy. It was depicted and described in numerous artistic and literary representations of the Western Front. The German painter Max Beckmann repeatedly dreamed of the destruction of the world. While serving as a hospital orderly he came across a cemetery blown to pieces by grenade fire, and wrote home to his wife of the tombs ripped open and bones and skeletons hurled into the air and exposed, as if in some mocking pantomime of the Resurrection. The work of fellow German artist and machine gunner Otto Dix similarly borrowed from the biblical imagery of sixteenth-century art in portraying life in the trenches as a modern Armageddon.¹²⁴ A vision of the apocalypse was also the creative key to the international best-selling novel by Blasco Ibañez, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1916). This novel about an Argentinian family with German and French members who are drawn into the war on opposite sides, also includes Tchernoff, a wild Russian mystical-socialist living in Paris, who on seeing the French troops heading for the front, prophesizes that ‘when the sun arises in a few hours, the world will see coursing through its fields the four horsemen, enemies of mankind’. He goes on to describe a vision of the horsemen, the emissaries of German militarism, leading the apocalypse: ‘The blind forces of evil were about to be let loose throughout the world.’¹²⁵

For some, the apocalypse was not a metaphor for the war: the war was truly the end times of the Book of Revelation. While that meant the near annihilation of humankind, it also heralded the return of Christ on earth and a wonderful future – a new millennium. Only a small percentage of humans, the elect, would survive to repopulate this New Jerusalem or Kingdom of God on earth. While the Book of Revelation had long been either ignored or quietly disputed in Christian theology, over the centuries profound upheavals, such as the German Reformation or the British Civil War, inspired episodes of millenarianism that gripped sections of the population. The First World War was no exception, and it fuelled pre-existing millenarian strands in evangelical Christianity and western occultism. In America, several popular evangelists were vocal in their conviction that the war was the ultimate sign of the apocalypse. The Baptist minister G.R. Eads, wrote in the Arkansas newspaper *Baptist and Commoner*, ‘the end of the age is approaching with lightning speed.’ The African-American Pentecostal leader Charles Mason, likewise explained, ‘present events proved that we are

¹²² YRAM (Michael Forhan), *La Guerre et le Merveilleux. Prophéties connues et Prédications inédites. Apparitions célèbres. Les Nombres. Une clef de l'histoire de France. Causes de la Guerre* (Paris, 1915).; Marcus Osterrieder, ‘Der prophezeite Krieg’, *Gegenwart. Zeitschrift für Kultur, Politik, Wirtschaft* 2 (2010) 25-34; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 221-3.

¹²³ Marr Murray, *Bible Prophecies and the Present War* (London, 1915). See also, for example, Georg Greite, *Was bedeuten die Weissagungen d. Propheten Daniel* (Lorch, 1916); F.P. Argall, *The Prophet in War Time: Isaiah's Message for To-day* (London, 1916).

¹²⁴ Jay Winter, ‘Painting Armageddon’, Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London, 1996), pp. 859-66.

¹²⁵ Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Changed Religion For Ever* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 143-4.

living in the last days and the end was near.’¹²⁶ While most equated Germany with the forces of the antichrist, the Iowa pastor D.W. Langelett produced a pamphlet in German and in English, published by the German Literary Board, in which he expressed ‘not the slightest doubt that the present European war is a manifestation of the wrath of God’, concluding that ‘England is the Gog of Prophecy and is Therefore Doomed to be Defeated’. The people or peoples referred to in Revelation as Gog and Magog, the sworn enemies of God according to the Old Testament, were the servants of Satan who the Messiah would finally defeat to usher in the new millennium. Langelett wrote the pamphlet with the ‘object of warning the small remnant of God’s people in England of the approaching doom’, but grumbled that not one of his fellow ministers with whom he discussed the unfolding prophecy were responsive to promoting his anti-British interpretation.¹²⁷

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Watch Tower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses), dedicated much time to calculating from Biblical references when the world would end and concluded it would be the year 1914. By the time of the war, there were over a thousand Russellite communities and millions of copies of his books and sermons had been printed. The advent of war gave a further boost to Russell’s aura of prophetic wisdom. He confirmed to his followers that ‘the present great war in Europe is the beginning of the Armageddon of the Scriptures.’¹²⁸ When the apocalypse clearly failed to happen, he had to revise his predictions. Before his death in 1916 he declared that Christ had, indeed, returned in spirit, but that the apocalypse would happen sometime hence.

These American influences enflamed millennial tensions across the Atlantic in colonial Africa where several African evangelical prophets, influenced by Baptist missionaries and the Watch Tower Society, prophesied that the German army would come and destroy the hated colonial rulers, enabling Africans to control once more their own lands and destiny under a supreme African ruler. In the Witwatersrand, near Johannesburg, prophets preached that the war was a sign to reject Western customs in preparation for salvation in a new era.¹²⁹ In Malawi (Nyasaland), around 1908, Kenan Kamwana, a subscriber to the Watch Tower Society, echoed Charles Russell by publicly predicting that the Second Coming of Christ would happen in October 1914. The British would be driven out and Christ would end taxation in the country. Concerned that Kamwana’s followers might rise up in preparation for this glorious millennium, the British authorities deported him to South Africa. With the advent of war in Europe, the authorities’ fears were confirmed when, in January 1915, the American-trained Baptist missionary John Chilembwe led a messianic revolt against British conscription of Africans that was inspired by a blend of millennial expectation and colonial repression.¹³⁰

Millenarian evangelism regarding the war was not as influential in Britain, but there was evidently considerable public interest in the issue. Pamphlets appeared with titles such as,

¹²⁶ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014), p. 69.

¹²⁷ D.W. Langelett, *Gog und seine Niederlage : Hesekiel 38 und 39 ; ein Nachweis, daß England der Gog ist, von welchem der Prophet geweissagt hat, und darum in diesem Kriege unterliegen muß* (Luzerne, Iowa, 1915); Langelett, *The World-War in the Light of Prophecy* (Luzerne, 1915), pp. 3, 4.

¹²⁸ Tony Wills, *A People for His Name: A History of Jehovah's Witnesses and an Evaluation* (New York, 1967), p. 52.

¹²⁹ Albert Grundlingh, *War and Society: Participation and Remembrance: South African black and Coloured Troops in the First World War, 1914-1918* (2014), pp. 16-17.

¹³⁰ Assa Okoth, *A History of Africa: African societies and the establishment of colonial rule, 1800-1915* (Nairobi, 2006), pp. 393-4; John McCracken, *A History of Malawi, 1859-1966* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 135-7.

*The Great War--in the divine light of prophecy: Is it Armageddon?*¹³¹ Similar questions were posed in local newspapers. It was observed in 1915 that ‘the word “Armageddon” has now become a household word; it appears in the Press, and is used by the “man in the street”’, and the French professor of literature, Fernand Baldensperger, confirmed from experience three years later that the British ‘specially indulged’ in such war-time literature.¹³² Numerous clergymen gave sermons and talks on the subject. In November 1917, Pastor W.W. Foulston preached on the matter to an audience at the Congregationalist Church in Aylesbury. He was inspired to do so because he had received numerous enquiries about the Book of Revelation in relation to the war.¹³³ The Rev. Henry Charles Beeching, preaching in Norwich Cathedral in September 1914, was quite clear in his views that the country was engaged in ‘a war of Christ against anti-Christ’, and that ‘the battle is not only ours, it is God’s, it is indeed Armageddon. Ranged against us are the Dragon and the False Prophet.’¹³⁴ But it would appear that most clergy refrained from such dramatic prophetic judgements. The Rev. J.W. Genders, for instance, told a large audience at Ilfracombe, Devon, that with three grandsons in the forces and two grand-daughters in army hospitals abroad, he took a special interest in this question. He concluded that as dreadful as the war was, it was not the Armageddon of Scripture.¹³⁵ Foulston quoted approvingly from the Irish biblical scholar, Robert Henry Charles, who had written that, ‘Never in the whole history of Christianity has the power of Anti-Christ asserted itself so triumphantly as in the last three years’, but Foulston was ultimately not convinced that the apocalypse was imminent.¹³⁶ The war was, nevertheless, considered a profound intimation of the metaphorical Armageddon that *could* befall humanity. When Bishop D’Arcy preached on the subject in Belfast Cathedral in December 1915, he explained that the Book of Revelation was not concerned with the course of history: it was a warning from God, and as such, it ‘possessed for them here and now, a value beyond all estimation.’¹³⁷

The most vocal expressions of wartime millenarianism in Europe issued from the burgeoning theosophical movement. The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by the mystic Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891). She constructed a faith that blended Western occult traditions with Eastern religion, Buddhism and Hinduism in particular. She claimed to possess her wisdom and secret knowledge from mysterious spiritual masters known as the Mahatmas who resided in Egypt and the Himalayas. The concepts of karma and reincarnation were central to the theosophical faith and how the movement would come to view the war. Although by 1914 global membership of the Theosophical Society only stood at around 25,000 (2905 of them in Britain), its cultural influence was significant. A prodigious amount of theosophical literature was produced during the war included the battlefield paper *Kurukshetra*. A ‘Soldiers and Sailors Literature’ fund was created. Staff at the Society’s offices reported receiving letters from the front line expressing gratitude for the courage and strength such literature gave them.¹³⁸

¹³¹W.F. T. Salt, *The Great War--in the divine light of prophecy: is it Armageddon?* (Bristol 1915); Augusta Cook, *Is it Armageddon? Tthe present War in the light of divine prophecy* (London, 1917).

¹³²Henry Sulley, *Is it Armageddon? Or Britain in Prophecy* (London, 1915), p. 5; Fernand Baldensperger, ‘Propheying in Time of War’, *Columbia University Quarterly* 20 (1918) 108.

¹³³ *Bucks Herald*, 3 November 1917.

¹³⁴ Henry Charles Beeching, *Armageddon. A sermon upon the war preached in Norwich Cathedral* (London, 1914), p. 14.

¹³⁵ *North Devon Journal*, 20 January 1916.

¹³⁶ *Bucks Herald*, 3 November 1917.

¹³⁷ *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 December 1915.

¹³⁸ Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton, 1993), p?; Herman A.O. de Tollenaere, *The Politics of Wisdom: Theosophy and Labour*,

Following Blavatsky's death, the leadership of the Society adopted a more millenarian outlook, particularly as expressed by the former Anglican clergyman, Charles Leadbeater. When he met an adolescent Indian boy named Jiddu Krishnamurti at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Madras, Leadbeater, who professed to have clairvoyant powers, received the revelation that the boy was destined to be the vehicle for the awaited World Teacher - Christ reborn, who would establish a new world religion on earth. Krishnamurti was brought from India to Britain in 1911 and on the outbreak of war he and his brother were removed to Cornwall for a year, and then he was looked after by the Theosophist Gertrude Baillie-Weaver and her husband in a house in Wimbledon.¹³⁹ A new branch of the Theosophical Society called the Order of the Star in the East was set up to welcome the World Teacher, with Krishnamurti at its head. The cataclysm of the war indicated that the triumph of spirituality over materiality that would herald the arrival of the World Teacher was imminent: the new spiritual age would begin in England.

The war was interpreted as a great cosmic movement, an inevitable battle between the powers of Good and Evil - sometimes referred to as the White Lodge and the Black Lodge. The supernatural 'Intelligences' of each were believed to draw upon the thoughts and desires of men and women for spiritual sustenance. While many Theosophists downplayed the role of supernatural or semi-divine beings other than the Mahatmas, others, such as Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840-1921), sought to delineate the nature, history, and purpose of the Black Lodge and its role in the war. For Sinnett, the crisis represented by the conflict lay beyond the national karma of the countries concerned. To understand the cosmic significance of the war it was necessary to understand the great age of Atlantis that began millions of years before the earliest civilisations recorded in history. The first people of Atlantis were guided by the semi-divine members of the great White Lodge. But some mere mortals began to foster covetous and selfish desires for power, and so these dark devotees generated a new Lodge to serve their purposes. The human dark host may have been wiped out with the rest of Atlantis by the great flood, but the karmic restoration of their collective evil was destined to manifest itself one day. Humankind would avail itself of the Black Lodge again. In Atlantian times, the dark magical forces had existed in the astral plane, but as now manifest in the Great War, they had descended to the mental plane, and were all the more destructive for it. Germany had drawn down this evil, of course. 'The fate of the world depends upon the final extermination of that enemy,' Sinnett warned, 'the banishment from this world finally and altogether of those mighty entities aiming at its ruin.'¹⁴⁰

Considering such views, it is hardly surprising that the war fundamentally challenged the principle of 'a universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race' espoused by Theosophists. In 1915, the Theosophical Society convention in America discussed a resolution to be agreed across all national societies with regard to the war:

- (a) The war is not of necessity a violation of Brotherhood, but may on the contrary become obligatory in obedience to the ideal of Brotherhood.
- (b) That individual neutrality is wrong if it be believed that a principle of righteousness is at stake.

National, and Women's Movements in Indonesia and South Asia 1875-1947 (Leiden, 1996), pp. 153, 156-60; Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, 2001), p. 88.

¹³⁹ RADHA RAJAGOPAL SLOSS, *Lives in the Shadow with J. Krishnamurti* (London, 1991), p. 36.

¹⁴⁰ A.P. Sinnett, *The Spiritual Powers and the War* (London, 1915), p. 23. For a theosophical critique of these views, see N.D. Khandalavala, 'The Great War and the Dark Powers', *The Theosophist* 37 (1916) 65-75.

The Berlin theosophical bookseller Paul Raatz, Secretary of the Union of German Branches of the Theosophical Society, wrote to the Convention Committee expressing bitter criticism of the political nature of the resolution. He argued that it was still too early for the principle of Universal Brotherhood to be fully defined, and ‘the Committee is not justified in passing resolutions which bind the whole Society to one view.’ The 1916 Convention considered Raatz’s letter at length, but resolved that, ‘it is the conviction of the Convention that the powers of good are now raged against the powers of evil: that, among the nations, France is leading the charge of the White Lodge against the attack of Germany supported and directed by the Black Lodge and all of the evil forces of the world.’ Several German-American members spoke up in support of this resolution, but considering the sensitivity there was general agreement to postpone a vote indefinitely.¹⁴¹

A mystical revolution was in the making, and the conduct of the war would be decisive. As one contributor to the *American Theosophical Quarterly* wrote in 1916, ‘tolerated evil in us now may mean sinister world events twenty centuries hence. Sacrifice and aspiration now will without doubt bring spiritual fruit for centuries to come.’¹⁴² There was a common view amongst British and American Theosophists, though, that the fight was against German militarism and materialism and not the German people *per se*, many of whom they recognised were privately against the war. Their good karma would ensure that Germany would prosper spiritually and culturally once the bad national karma had played its course. Germans, as much as any other peoples, would contribute spiritually to the new age of Universal Brotherhood that would come after.¹⁴³ It was also argued by some, that, through its pursuance of war and supposed atrocities, the German state was actually making good karma by uniting the decency of the world against the country. German troops would not die in vain. ‘We were content with material progress, and Germany, by showing us how vile a thing material progress can be, turned our minds and hearts to spiritual values and to everlasting truths’, wrote one Theosophist. As a karmic consequence, ‘the powers of evil are foredoomed: their success will become their undoing’.¹⁴⁴

Theosophy was a ‘broad church’, and despite the principle of Universal Brotherhood, nationalist and racist interpretations of Theosophy became prominent during the war. The Russian Theosophical Society had been founded in 1908, and during its early years it produced a flurry of literature to cater for its few thousand members and the growing public interest in their message. The environment in Russia was receptive, with the country being described as ‘a continuous battle-field of prophecies’ since the war’s outbreak.¹⁴⁵ The Society was confident that its rapid growth was a sign of the spiritual renewal of the world in the depths of conflagration. The writings of Anna Kamenskaia, one of the leading contributors to the main Theosophical journal *Vestnik Teosofii (Herald of Theosophy)*, which ran from 1908 to 1917, pushed a popular predictive view that Russia was destined to play a superior occult role in the war. The nation’s karma was linked to the war-time suffering it would endure by cleansing the cosmic soul of the world. Traditional Slavic spirituality was destined, through

¹⁴¹ *Theosophical Quarterly* 14 (1916) 84, 85, 90.

¹⁴² ‘Some Spiritual Issues of the War’, *Theosophical Quarterly* 14 (1916), 115.

¹⁴³ F. Hallett, ‘The Inner Side of the War’, *The Theosophist* 36 (1915) 533-47. See also, C.W. Leadbeater, ‘The Great War’, *The Theosophist* 37 (1916), 511-28.

¹⁴⁴ ‘On the Screen of Time’, *Theosophical Quarterly* 13 (1915) 287.

¹⁴⁵ Baldensperger, ‘Prophesying in Time of War’, 110.

Theosophy, to conquer and rescue the decaying, egotistical, and materialist West.¹⁴⁶ Wellesley Tudor Pole was one British spiritualist who was in agreement, stating in late 1914, that in the midst of the current Armageddon, ‘the Slav child-soul is destined to bring illumination to us all.’¹⁴⁷ But three years later, such millennial enthusiasm was smothered by the Russian Revolution: the materialists had struck back. Still, as an article in the *Theosophical Quarterly* in January 1918 explained, the Revolution was clearly a manifestation of German karmic evil. Most of the Petrograd Bolsheviks talked a dialect of German, it claimed, ‘and they still think in that German dialect’.¹⁴⁸

Germany had its Christian evangelical prophets, such as the spiritual healer and clairvoyant, Joseph Weibenberg (1855–1941). The Berlin authorities, concerned by the destabilising effect of his pronouncements and the growth of his following, temporarily incarcerated him during the war claiming he was insane, and continually hampered his activities. After the war, he made international headlines in May 1929 by prophesying that the Archangel Gabriel had told him that Britain was imminently doomed by an earthquake and would sink beneath the waves of the subsequent apocalyptic flood.¹⁴⁹ However, the most influential, nationalist millenarian tendencies in Germany and Austria were fuelled by Theosophy.¹⁵⁰ In the latter country, the war was enthusiastically embraced by its leading occultist Guido von List (1848–1919), whose ideas would go on to influence the ideology of the early Nazi Party. An ardent nationalist, von List had spent decades piecing together what he believed to be the true religion of the ancient Germans, and endeavoured to unlock the mystic powers of the runes. He sought the renewal of a pure Arian race and its pre-Christian faith and believed such a momentous time would inevitably come. This notion followed a long tradition of predictions of an age of Teutonic hegemony that date back to the medieval period. For List and his followers, the First World War heralded this long-awaited prophetic moment. In April 1915, he delivered a speech to the organisation he had recently founded, the *Hohe Armanen-Orden* or Higher Armanen Order (HAO), in which he welcomed the conflict as the beginning of a millenarian struggle, which after much apocalyptic woe, would herald a new, true German age wiped free of corrupted Christian religion. A ‘Strong one from Above’ would institute a totalitarian regime that would end the corrosive influence of inferior non-German peoples. Influenced by his Theosophist views, he believed that karma would ensure that the hundreds of thousands of German and Austrian war dead would be reborn as the elite shock troops of this new world order. One of List’s disciples, the fantasist and racist Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, embellished the vision, seeing the war as heralding the beginning of a bloody chaotic period that would ultimately lead to an ‘ario-christian’ New Age. Inferior races would be wiped off the face of the earth and a mystical priesthood would govern a supranational Aryan state led by super humans imbued with holy electronic power.¹⁵¹

Another leading figure in Austrian and German occultism, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), founder of the Steiner School movement, argued publicly and repeatedly that the war was ‘a

¹⁴⁶ Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 77–8.

¹⁴⁷ Tudor Pole, *Some Deeper Aspects of the War*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ ‘The Karma of the Russians’, *Theosophical Quarterly* 15 (1918) 201.

¹⁴⁹ Ulrich Linse, *Geisterseher und Wunderwirker: Heilssuche im Industriezeitalter* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 118–9; *The Irish Times*, 24 May 1929.

¹⁵⁰ See Ulrich Linse, ‘“Universale Bruderschaft” oder nationaler Rassenkrieg – die deutschen Theosophen im Ersten Weltkrieg’, in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Dieter Langewiesche (eds), *Nation und Religion in der deutschen Geschichte* (Frankfurt, 2001), pp. 602–45.

¹⁵¹ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, pp. 86–9, 90–104.

conspiracy against German spiritual life.¹⁵² Although not formally a member of the Theosophical Society, he was responsible for leading its first German section in 1902. The Society flourished under Steiner's industrious leadership, but he was all the while reformulating and reinterpreting aspects of Blavatsky's teachings. He rejected Krishnamurti, and in 1912 he co-founded the Anthroposophical Society, which soon had some three thousand members. Its aim was 'to nurture the life of the soul, both in the individual and in human society, on the basis of a true knowledge of the spiritual world.' The Anthroposophical Society was run from a village in Switzerland, but Steiner spent much time in Austria and Germany during the war spreading his message and views. These included the belief that the conflict was the earthly manifestation of a cosmic spiritual battle, 'a world of demons and spirits which works through humankind when nations battle one another.' The war was necessary for the salvation of mankind, and 'Germandom' must conquer the spiritually bankrupt nations of the West and the spiritually immature Slavic foe in the East. It would result, he affirmed in early 1916, with the German people leading 'the entire realm of human spiritual culture.'¹⁵³

666: The sign of the Kaiser

And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. (Revelation 13:5)

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six (Revelation 13:18)

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him ... These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone (Revelation 19:20)

If the war truly heralded the imminence of the apocalypse then for allied evangelicals, Christian occultists, and prophets one did not have to look far to identify the personification of the antichrist. Reviewing a book entitled *Ancient Babylon and Modern Germany*, a Scottish newspaper commented in May 1916, 'there is an epidemic of this sort of thing just now, and attempts to identify Germany with Babylon and the Kaiser with Anti-Christ form a prominent feature of the literature of the war.'¹⁵⁴

In September 1914, the national French newspaper *Le Figaro* published the sensational revelations of a recently discovered prophecy attributed to an early seventeenth-century monk called Johannes. No other details of this mysterious personage were forthcoming, though one English medium reported received a psychic message that he was an Italian.¹⁵⁵ The prophecy was given to the paper by the well-known art critic, novelist, and occultist Joseph Péladan (1858-1918), who claimed to have found a translation of it amongst his father's manuscripts

¹⁵² Quoted in Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden, 2014), p. 68.

¹⁵³ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism*, pp. 65, 66. See also, Peter Staudenmaier, 'Esoteric Alternatives in Imperial Germany: Science, Spirit, and the Modern Occult Revival', in Monica Black and Eric Kurlander (eds), *Revisiting the "Nazi Occult": Histories, Realities, Legacies* (Rochester, 2015), pp. 23-42; Markus Osterrieder, *Welt im Umbruch. Nationalitätenfrage, Ordnungspläne und Rudolf Steiners Haltung im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 2014).

¹⁵⁴ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 23 May 1916.

¹⁵⁵ 'The Prophecy of Johannes', *Light*, 21 November 1914, 559.

on his death in 1890. His father had been a journalist with a preoccupation with ancient prophecies, who had apparently obtained it from a French clergyman. According to Johannes's prophecy, 'the veritable Antichrist will be one of the Monarchs of his time; a son of Luther; he will invoke God and call himself His messenger.' This was clearly none other than Kaiser Wilhelm. Thankfully, Johannes predicted that this antichrist will 'lose his crown and will die demented and alone'.¹⁵⁶ The prophecy disseminated widely, and was published in pamphlet form in Switzerland and France, leading one critic to grumble in 1916 that 'it has sold for far too long on our boulevards'.¹⁵⁷ In England, translated extracts were printed in the press under the heading, 'Is the Kaiser the Antichrist?'¹⁵⁸ The occultist Ralph Shirley published his own edition entitled *The End of the Kaiser* (1915), and a cheap penny tract also appeared with the title *Doom of the Kaiser 'Anti-Christ'* (1914), which was offered on credit to the first two hundred purchasers in London and the provinces.¹⁵⁹ Speculation, rumour and lies gave the prophecy a more venerable history of dissemination than it had. A correspondent to *Light*, Alderman Ward of Harrogate, said he had seen a copy in the hands of a Belgian judge he met in a London hotel, who said he had been in possession of it for many years. A correspondent to the *Daily Call* said he knew the prophecy had circulated in Dublin in 1868.¹⁶⁰ The general reception was understandably negative and sceptical. The prophecy was widely dismissed as a fraud, though Ralph Shirley thought it so remarkable in its prophetic accuracy, that even if Péladan was its author 'its extraordinary character would hardly be diminished'.¹⁶¹

The occultist Arthur Trefusis took a different prophetic inspiration to reach the same conclusion about the Kaiser. He focussed on the early Christian author Lactantius, who wrote in the early fourth century about a prediction, then in circulation, that the despotic emperor Nero (*d.* 68AD) would return as 'a messenger and forerunner of the Evil One, coming for the devastation of the earth'. Trefusis drew parallels between the brutality and cruel acts of Nero with those of the purported German atrocities in Belgium. 'The order to sink the *Lusitania* is in strict accord with Nero's record', he decided, and 'asphyxiating gases, flame projectors, and corrosive liquid all show the mind of Nero'.¹⁶² There was only one conclusion to be drawn: the Kaiser was Nero reincarnated, who in turn was the Beast of Revelations. The prophecy had been fulfilled. But all the Kaiser's schemes would fail, the Hohenzollern dynasty would end, and a terrible revolution would plague the German nation.

In June and July 1915 a number of British newspapers reported that a Montreal student had discovered firm proof that the Kaiser was indeed the Beast of Revelations.¹⁶³ He had deciphered 'the number of the man' by giving a sequential number to the alphabet (A = 1 through to Z = 26), totting up the value of each letter in the word 'Kaiser', and adding a six to each number - six being the number of letters in 'Kaiser':

K: 11 + 6 = 116

¹⁵⁶ *Le Figaro*, 10 September 1914.

¹⁵⁷ Julien de Narfon, 'Prophéties de guerre', *La Guerre Mondiale* 23 February 1916, 3658.

¹⁵⁸ Thurston, *War & the Prophets*, pp. 47-68; Le Naour, *Nostradamus*, pp. 110-13.

¹⁵⁹ *The People*, 6 December 1914; *West London Observer*, 30 October 1914.

¹⁶⁰ *Light*, 24 October 1914, 506; 14 November 1914, 547; C. de Vesme, 'Petite excursion critique à travers les prophéties de la guerre', *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* 25 (1915), 238.

¹⁶¹ Joanny Bricaud, *La Guerre et les Prophéties Célèbres. Etude Historique et Critique* (Paris, 1916); Ralph Shirley, *Prophecies and Omens of the Great War* (London, 1914), p. 28. See also Ralph Shirley, 'The Kaiser and Antichrist', *Occult Review* 20 (1914) 354.

¹⁶² Arthur Trefusis, *The War in a New Light* (London, 1915), p. 41.

¹⁶³ See, for example, *Taunton Courier*, 14 July 1915; *Evening Despatch*, 24 June 1915.

| | |
|---------|------|
| A: 1 +6 | =16 |
| I: 9+6 | =96 |
| S: 19+6 | =196 |
| E: 5+6 | =56 |
| R: 18+8 | =186 |
| | ---- |
| | 666 |

This revelation was also printed in the French press the following year, where it was attributed to an English researcher.¹⁶⁴ In December 1916, a new calculation promulgated in Moscow, did the rounds. According to this, it was worked out from a formula involving the lunar and calendar months, that the war would last three years, three months and six days, or 1193 days. If that number was subtracted from the number representing the Kaiser's birth year, 1859, the result was 666.¹⁶⁵

The Kaiser calculations were given a full blown national airing in the Spring of 1916 by the jingoist and propagandist Horatio William Bottomley (1860-1933). He was the editor of the popular patriotic newspaper *John Bull*, and an attention-seeking politician and demagogue, similar to a couple of figures in England today, who was finally brought low by a fraud conviction shortly after the war. Bottomley, who was critical of government propaganda efforts, used *John Bull* to spout a constant stream of crude, xenophobic rhetoric against what the paper called the 'Germhuns'. The Kaiser was described as the 'Potty Potentate of Potsdam' and the paper printed spurious stories such as that the Kaiser had been certified insane. Bottomley went so far as to call for a vendetta against all Germans in Britain.¹⁶⁶ His old personal assistant, Henry Houston, recalled in 1923 how, in early 1916, he and his master had met an old acquaintance of the latter called Mr Pritchard who was somewhat obsessed with the 666 prophecy. As Pritchard wrote down the calculation and cited the relevant passages from Revelation, Bottomley gave Houston 'a look that plainly indicated he had found his subject for the next week's article. The Beast of Revelation, the mystery of the ages, had been solved'. After Pritchard had left, Bottomley turned to Houston and asked, 'This is all right for next Sunday, but what shall we make the title? "The Mystery of 666"?'¹⁶⁷ A three-quarter page article by Bottomley duly appeared under that title in several national papers in April 1916. He told readers that the revelation had been revealed to him by an 'interesting acquaintance' while snowed up in a Midlands hotel without telephone or post the previous week. After explaining the references to the antichrist in Revelation and the numerological prophecy, he remarked, 'A fascinating theme, isn't it? Upon my word, the more you study the Book, the more remarkable the vision becomes. I confess it haunts me.' He ended on a lighter note, though, exclaiming, 'Phew! I must never get snowed up again!'¹⁶⁸

German occultists came to very different conclusions, of course, when applying similar numerical divination. An article in the occult periodical *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus* in 1916 totted up the number of the Kaiser from relevant astral dates and came to the conclusion that the emperor was, in fact, the instrument of God and destined to destroy Germany's enemies who obviously had very bad karma. The author concluded that Germany would win and 'the ancestors would look down proudly from the sky'.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, by no means all occultists

¹⁶⁴ Dausat, *Légendes*, p. 174.

¹⁶⁵ *Western Gazette*, 29 December 1916.

¹⁶⁶ Julian Symons, *Horatio Bottomley* (Looe, [1955] 2001), p. 140.

¹⁶⁷ Henry J. Houston, *The Real Horatio Bottomley* (London, 1923), pp. 161-2.

¹⁶⁸ *Sunday Pictorial*, 2 April 1916.

¹⁶⁹ F.B. Naga, 'Deutschlands Krieg und die Zahlenmagie', *Zentralblatt für Okkultismus* 9 (1916) 4-6.

and evangelists in allied countries were convinced that the Kaiser was the antichrist either. In 1915, Marr Murray explained in his *Bible Prophecies and the Plain Man*, that although the Kaiser bore resemblance to the antichrist he was not the real deal. This was because, Murray reasoned, the Kaiser had shown he was no military genius: ‘if we imagine a blend of Napoleon and Kaiser then we have an idea of what the real Antichrist will be like.’¹⁷⁰ Most American evangelists also concluded that the Kaiser was a herald of the Antichrist but not the prophetic man himself. They kept more of an eye on the pope and an alliance between the Vatican and the Germans as the firmest sign of the coming apocalypse.¹⁷¹

In the autumn of 1915 the vice-president of the *Société Universelle d’Etudes Psychique*, Edmond Duchatel, proposed to hold a conference after the war to subject to close scrutiny all the predictions and prophecies that had been published about the conflict, and to clarify the actual dates of their publication or references to them.¹⁷² Come the end of the war, there was little appetite, however, for treating the raft of dubious and failed war prophecies to further scientific inquiry. They were largely discredited as a body of evidence for psychic, occult, and scientific insight. But there was academic interest in how the prophecies had impacted upon society. In his book *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), the young American sociologist Harold Lasswell, who would go on to become a pioneer of communication theory, noted the value of prophetic announcements in bolstering morale and undermining that of the enemy nations. ‘It was safe to predict that they would carry reassurance to the most superstitious and credulous strata of the population,’ he observed, but that the sophisticated would contemptuously dismiss them. As a consequence, he thought it ‘perfectly safe to launch the crude and sophisticated together, for the people capable of reacting to the latter will not be estranged by the former; they will merely remain indifferent and condescending.’¹⁷³ Lasswell noted, in particular, the morale-nourishing influence of the *Almanach de Madame de Thèbes* amongst the French public during the early years of the war. But how complicit were the prophets and astrologers in producing propaganda?

There is a long history of state-inspired employment of prophecy in wartime, and France, Germany, and Britain had sophisticated propaganda machines during the war.¹⁷⁴ But, despite the overwhelming biases of the wartime prophecies, there is very little indication that the authorities in any of the combatant countries were involved in producing or commissioning such literature. In Britain, for instance, the National War Aims Committee, set up in 1917, was assisted by clergymen who produced patriotic rhetoric about the spiritual superiority of the British and their divine destiny to defeat the foe.¹⁷⁵ But there is no evidence that prophecies and astrologers were similar co-opted. Horatio Bottomley’s piece of 666 propaganda was clearly his own initiative, for instance, and, in other respects, the government found his jingoistic mouthing and methods highly distasteful. Religious interests, if not Church authorities, were clearly involved in using prophecy for propaganda purposes,

¹⁷⁰ Cited in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 27 July 1915.

¹⁷¹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, p. 69.

¹⁷² ‘Les documents sur les prophéties de la guerre’, *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* 25 (1915), 241.

¹⁷³ Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (New York, 1927), p. 201.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Lesley Ann Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2000); Ottavia Niccoli, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton, 1990), ch. 1; Jürgen Beyer, *Lay Prophets in Lutheran Europe (c. 1550–1700)* (Leiden, 2016), ch. 6.

¹⁷⁵ David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool, 2012), pp. 97-8.

though. Sometimes religious motives were wrapped up in national interests, but sometimes the prophecies were intended for purely confessional promotion and advantage.

Did the astrologers and almanac-makers shape their predictions for the greater good of their respective countries out of patriotic zeal? It is most likely, otherwise how else could astrological calculations so predictably follow the narratives of glorious victory? But there were also commercial forces at play. While governments and military authorities did not actively produce morale-boosting prophecies, they certainly were not going to allow the propagation of ominous predictions detrimental to public confidence. In short, there was little latitude for publishing troubling national forecasts - and no commercial incentive either. Good news sold in wartime, and for the compilers of almanacs and the authors of astrological literature, the astral science was their livelihood. As long as the commercial and national imperatives aligned, the *public* soothsayers were largely free to go about their business. But, as we shall see in Chapter Three, the *private* discourse around wartime divination, and the myriad conversations in fortune tellers' consulting rooms across the combatant countries, was much less bullish in tone, and more worrying for the authorities.