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THE ANGEL WARRIORS AT MONS

Including

NUMEROUS CONFIRMATORY TESTIMONIES

**EVIDENCE OF
THE WOUNDED**

and

CERTAIN CURIOUS HISTORICAL PARALLELS

AN AUTHENTIC RECORD

BY

RALPH SHIRLEY

EDITOR OF "THE OCCULT REVIEW"

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THE ANGEL WARRIORS AT MONS

THE press in this country has recently given publicity to various stories claiming to be authentic of appearances of phantom warriors who are stated to have come to the rescue of the hardly-pressed armies of France and England at the time of the retreat from Mons. At this date it will be recollected that the German army was carrying everything before it in a triumphant advance towards Paris, and it seemed to the majority of people both in this country and across the Channel that nothing could prevent the capture of the French capital. Suddenly there came a change over the whole outlook—a change that was explained in all sorts of different ways according to the conceptions of the military situation as seen from the point of view of innumerable armchair strategists. An opinion which held favour with many, and which rumour loudly supported, was that a Russian army had come by sea to an English port, and passing through this country and across the Channel had landed on the French coast, and was threatening the German line of retreat. This bubble was soon burst, but people still continued to ask themselves how it was that the triumphant onward march of the irresistible German army had suddenly been thrown back at the battle of the Marne, in disastrous and ignominious retreat.

The Bowmen

It was about this time (September 29, 1914, to be precise) that a circumstantial narrative which might have been intended to be taken either as fact or fiction appeared in the columns of the *Evening News* under the title of *The Bowmen*. This story narrated how at a critical point in the retreat of the Allies an apparition of an army of English bowmen with St. George at their head had come to the rescue of the retreating forces of General Joffre and Sir John French, and had struck terror into the German armies. Many readers took this charmingly-written tale as a statement of fact, but a letter addressed to the author, Mr. Machen, by the present writer, elicited the response that the narrative had no foundation outside the writer's vivid fancy. Soon, however, correspondence began to reach the papers from various quarters giving records more or less circumstantial of appearances of phantom warriors who, it was confidently averred, had actually come to the rescue of the defeated armies at this critical moment. These correspondents would have none of Mr. Machen's statement that his story was pure romance. 'It might not be, they said in effect, that the phantom English bowmen had been seen on the battlefield (though one of the narratives actually maintains this), but they stoutly declared that of the apparitions of spirit warriors and especially of St. George on his white charger, there could be no possible doubt. These stories were in their turn borne out by the French wounded, many of whom maintained that while the English had seen the figure they took for St. George, they themselves had seen St. Michael, while many others had witnessed the apparition of Joan of Arc riding at their head in full armour.

Such stories had indeed been widely current in France at the time of the retreat from Mons—nearly a month before the appearance of Mr. Machen's story. Thus a lance-corporal, who was subsequently wounded, and is

now in an English hospital, told his nurse (Miss C. M. Wilson) of his own experience on or about August 28. It is not so definite or circumstantial as some of the others, but it has the merit at least of being first-hand. "The weather," he states, "was at the time very hot and clear, and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening we were standing with a party of nine other men on duty. Immediately behind us half of our battalion was on the edge of a wood resting, when an officer suddenly came up in a state of great anxiety and asked if we had seen anything startling," the impression at the moment being that a German surprise attack was threatened. Immediately after this the lance-corporal's attention was drawn to a strange appearance in the sky.

A Lance-Corporal's Evidence

I could see quite plainly in mid-air (he said) a strange light which seemed to be quite distinctly outlined and was not a reflection of the moon, nor were there any clouds in the neighbourhood. The light became brighter and I could see quite distinctly three shapes, one in the centre having what looked like outspread wings, the other two were not so large, but were quite plainly distinct from the centre one. They appeared to have a long loose-hanging garment of a golden tint, and they were above the German line facing us.

We stood watching them for about three-quarters of an hour. All the men with me saw them, and other men came up from other groups who also told us that they had seen the same thing. I am not a believer in such things, but I have not the slightest doubt that we really did see what I now tell you.

In most of the records of the appearance the apparition of a luminous cloud is alluded to. One of these narrates how "in this cloud there seemed to be bright objects moving. The moment it appeared the German onslaught received a check. The horses could be seen rearing and plunging and ceased to advance." A soldier of the Dublin Fusiliers is cited as confirming this phenomenon, adding, with

regard to the cloud, that it quite hid them from the enemy. Numerous references have been made in the pulpits to these phenomena, some of the clergy going so far as to read letters from soldiers at the front to their congregations. Mr. Lancaster, for instance, a Weymouth clergyman, read one of these letters from a soldier who said that his regiment was pursued by a large number of German cavalry, from which they took refuge in a quarry, where the Germans found them and were on the point of shooting them. "At that moment," said the writer, "the whole top edge of the quarry was lined by angels, who were seen by all the soldiers and the Germans as well. The Germans suddenly stopped, turned round, and galloped away at top speed." The *Universe*, a Roman Catholic paper, gives a story told by a Roman Catholic officer at the front, of an apparition of men with bows and arrows, and states that when he was talking to a German prisoner afterwards the man asked who was the officer on a great white horse who led them, for although he was such a conspicuous figure they had none of them been able to hit him. This is the single instance above alluded to where the story tallies with Mr. Machen's bowmen.

Such stories as that of the apparitions at Mons have been told in connexion with various great historical battles, but they have always been put down as legendary. The most famous instance of this is that so brilliantly utilized by Lord Macaulay in his ballad entitled "The Battle of Lake Regillus," where two mysterious horsemen appear, who lead the Roman army to victory and are subsequently averred to have been the great Twin Brethren of Roman Mythology, Castor and Pollux. Among Bible records we have the story of the siege of Dothan by the King of Assyria, when Elisha is narrated as turning to his terrified servant and stating that, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." Elisha then prays that his servant's eyes may be opened, that he may see, and,

continues the Bible narrative, "The Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

A somewhat similar story is told with regard to the victory of Judas Maccabeus in the second century B.C. over Lysias, the General of Antiochus Epiphanes. The army of Judas only consisted of 10,000 men whereas that of Lysias numbered 80,000. "When they were at Jerusalem," says the historian,* "there appeared before them on horseback one in white apparel shaking his armour of gold. Thus they marched forward in their armour, having an helper from heaven; for the Lord was merciful unto them."

Among the most important records of psychic phenomena occurring on the occasion of the Battle of Mons is that of Miss Phyllis Campbell, who has for many months of the war been a nurse at a hospital near the front. It fell to her lot to tend various wounded soldiers who had witnessed these strange phenomena and she gave a record of her experiences in the form of an article which appeared in the August issue of the *Occult Review*.† On one occasion while she was bandaging a shattered arm, the President of the post, Mme de A——, came and took her place, asking her to attend to an Englishman who was begging for a holy picture. The idea of an English soldier making such a request at such a time seemed curious enough, but she hurried off to attend to his needs. He proved to be a Lancashire Fusilier.

St. George at Mons

He was propped in a corner (says Miss Campbell), his left arm tied up in a peasant woman's head kerchief, and his head newly bandaged. He should have been in a state of collapse from loss of blood, for his tattered uniform was soaked and caked in blood, and his face paper-white under the dirt of conflict. He looked at me with bright courageous eyes and asked for a picture or a medal (he did not care

* II Maccabeus, xi, 8, 9, 10.

† Reprinted in the September number.

which) of St. George. I asked if he was a Catholic. "No," he was a Wesleyan Methodist, and he wanted a picture, or a medal of St. George, because he had seen him on a white horse, leading the British at Vitry-le-François, when the Allies turned. There was an R.F.A. man, wounded in the leg, sitting beside him on the floor; he saw my look of amazement, and hastened in, "It's true, Sister," he said. "We all saw it. First there was a sort of yellow mist, sort of risin' before the Germans as they come on to the top of the hill, come on like a solid wall they did—springing out of the earth just solid—no end to 'em. I just give up. No use fighting the whole German race, thinks I; it's all up with us. The next minute comes this funny cloud of light, and when it clears off there's a tall man with yellow hair, in golden armour, on a white horse, holding his sword up, and his mouth open as if he was saying, 'Come on, boys! I'll put the kybosh on the devils.' Sort of 'This is my picnic' expression. Then, before you could say 'knife,' the Germans had turned, and we were after them, fighting like ninety. We had a few scores to settle, Sister, and we fair settled them."

Both these soldiers knew it was St. George, for "Had not they seen him with his sword on every quid they'd ever had?" The "Frenchies," however, they admitted, maintained that it was St. Michael. The French wounded Miss Campbell describes as being in a curiously exalted condition—a sort of rapture of happiness. It was quite true, they maintained. The Germans were in full retreat, and the Allies were being led to victory by St. Michael and Joan of Arc. One of the wounded French soldiers happened to have come from Domremy, Joan of Arc's native home, and declared that he saw her brandishing her sword and crying, "Turn! turn! advance!" "No wonder," he cried, "the Boches fled down the hill."

A Dying Guardsman's Narrative

Miss Phyllis Campbell told Mme de A—— her experience with the soldiers, and they agreed to compare notes with the rest of the staff. All but one had heard the tale of the angelic leaders, and this one had been detailed to guard

three wounded Germans, and had therefore had no opportunity of conversation. Miss Campbell mentions the case of three men of the Irish Guard who were mortally wounded and asked for the Sacrament before death, and before dying told the same story to the old abbé who confessed them. The author of this remarkable article draws attention to the fact that whereas immediately before the apparitions were seen all the wounded soldiers who were brought in expressed the conviction of swiftly approaching disaster, immediately afterwards there was a complete transformation of their attitude, the sense of despair giving place to a state of strange exaltation and confidence of victory. It is only natural that long forced marches without adequate food, under a condition of intense strain and anxiety, should produce a condition of the nerves which is far from normal, and however ready we may be to grant the genuineness of the experiences above narrated, it must be borne in mind that men in such a state of tension will be far more susceptible to psychic influences than they would be under normal, everyday conditions. Granted, however, that such conditions were prevalent, it is noteworthy that very similar, though not identical, experiences were undergone, if the records are to be relied upon, by thousands of French and English soldiers.

The abnormal conditions induced by the intense strain of the long marches enforced by the rearguard fighting is made evident by a curious passage which appears in a recently published work entitled *The Crucible*, by Mabel Collins. She here cites a letter from a young officer who was killed immediately afterwards, who says, "I had the most amazing hallucinations marching at night, so I was fast asleep, I think. Every one was reeling about the road and seeing things." And again, of the following night, he adds, "I saw all sorts of things, enormous men walking towards me and lights and chairs and things in the road."

Another contribution to the evidence on the subject of

the apparitions at the front has been sent me by the Rev. Alexander A. Boddy, Vicar of All Saints, Monkwearmouth.* Mr. Boddy was for two months at the front with the troops in France, and in the course of his work was the recipient of some interesting communications. Among other stories he gives that of a soldier of the third Canadians who stated that after the second battle of Ypres, when their battalion was retiring through their communication trenches towards their rest camp, they were obliged to halt where a West Riding regiment was stationed. During the halt one of the men of this regiment was narrating to those around him a strange experience of his own. He had seen, he said, what appeared at first to be a ball of fire. Afterwards it took the form of an angel with outstretched wings standing between the British front line and that of the enemy. Mr. Boddy also mentions a story told to the sister of a gentleman who had given up his house as a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. One of the wounded soldiers told the lady that at a critical moment an angel with outspread wings like a luminous cloud stood between the advancing Germans and themselves. This figure appeared to render it impossible for the Germans to advance and annihilate them. The lady in question was subsequently speaking of this incident in the presence of some officers and expressed her own incredulity. One of the officers, a colonel, looked up at this, and observed—"Young lady, the thing happened. You need not be incredulous. I saw it myself." It is curious to note that similar phenomena to those which have occurred in the present war were narrated of the siege of the British Legation by the Boxers at Peking. The occupants of the Legation found the house they occupied untenable, and were obliged to move to another position, and while the removal took place the British were in full view of the

* From an address at an open-air meeting reported in the *Sunderland Echo* of August 16.

Chinese insurgents, who they took for granted would fire upon them. To their great surprise they failed to do so. An Englishman who was present on the occasion and who knew Chinese as well as his own native language, took the opportunity afterwards of asking one of the Chinese soldiers why they missed such a fine chance. The Chinaman gave as a reason the fact that "There were so many people in white between them and the British that they did not like to fire."

A valuable addition to the list of records in connexion with the phenomena at Mons was supplied by Miss Callow, secretary of the Higher Thought Centre, at South Kensington, to the *Weekly Dispatch*. She writes :

An officer has sent to one of the members of the Centre a detailed account of a vision that appeared to himself and others when fighting against fearful odds at Mons. He plainly saw an apparition representing St. George the patron saint of England, the exact counterpart of a picture that hangs to-day in a London restaurant. So terrible was their plight at the time that the officer could not refrain from appealing to the vision to help them. Then, as if the enemy had also seen the apparition, the Germans abandoned their positions in precipitate terror. In other instances men had written about seeing *Clouds of Celestial Horsemen* hovering over the British lines.

Miss Callow also adds that a nurse at the front on one occasion asked her patients why they were so silent, to which the men replied, "We have had strange experiences, which we do not care to talk about. We have seen many of our mates killed, but they are fighting for us still."

Doubt has, not unnaturally, been cast upon the credibility of these records in England, owing to the publication of Mr. Machen's story and his persistent affirmation that this story was purely evolved from his own inner consciousness. There appears, however, to be no question that at the time of his writing *The Bowmen* and for weeks before, these stories had been current, especially on the other side of the Channel, and if we are to accept the now generally admitted fact of

telepathy, nothing is more likely than that a record passing from mouth to mouth might have reached Mr. Machen's subconscious intelligence and formed the basis of a story the main details of which, after all, only approximately corresponded to the experiences of the soldiers at the front.

Spiritual Exaltation

The spiritual exaltation above alluded to, which is always liable to accompany great battles, has indeed given rise in numerous authenticated instances of psychical phenomena of an entirely abnormal kind, and such phenomena on the present occasion have not been confined to only one theatre of the war. Stories have been widely current in the Russian army that many Russian sentinels have seen the famous ghost of General Skobelev in white uniform and riding his white charger. This apparition is supposed to appear when the armies of the Tsar are in imminent danger, and invariably to create a panic in the enemy's ranks. General Skobelev, it will be remembered, played a conspicuous part in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, in particular in the storming of the then Turkish fortress of Plevna.

A spiritual experience of another kind is also told in connexion with the battle of Augustovo in October 1914, in which the German army met with its first disastrous defeat at the hands of the Russians. The story, which was communicated by a Russian general who was with the army operating in East Prussia, runs as follows :

Vision of The Virgin Mary

While our troops were in the region of Suwalki, the captain of one of my regiments witnessed a marvellous revelation.

It was eleven o'clock at night, and the troops were in bivouac. Suddenly a soldier from one of our outposts, wearing a startled look, rushed in and called the captain. The latter went with the soldier to the outskirts of the

camp and witnessed an amazing apparition in the sky. It was that of the Virgin Mary, with the Infant Christ on one hand, the other hand pointing to the west.

Our soldiers knelt on the ground and gazed fervently at the vision. After a time the apparition faded, and in its place came a great image of the Cross, shining against the dark night sky.

Slowly it faded away.

On the following day our army advanced westward to the victorious battle of Augustovo."

This strange state of psychic exaltation is also doubtless accountable for the remarkable and well-attested phenomena which took place nightly for some months after the Battle of Edge Hill, in the English Civil War, on the subject of which Lord Nugent makes comment "that the world abounds with histories of preternatural appearances, the most utterly incredible, supported by testimonies the most undeniable." Here is a ghost story of the most preposterous sort. "Yet is this story," he adds, "attested upon the oath of three officers, men of honour and distinction, and of three other gentlemen of credit, selected by the King as commissioners to report upon these prodigies, and to tranquillize and disabuse the alarms of a country town." The record of these phenomena is given in a rare and curious tract entitled *A Great Wonder in Heaven, showing the late Apparitions and Prodigious Noyses of War and Battels, seen on Edge Hill, neere Keinton in Northamptonshire. Certified under the Hands of William Wood, Esquire, and Justice for the Peace in the said Countie, Samuel Marshall, Preacher of Gods Word in Keinton, and other Persons of Qualitie.*—London: Printed for Thomas Jackson, January 23, Anno Dom. 1642 (1643?). Its bearing on the question under discussion seems to me to warrant its reproduction here in the words of the narrator:

The Battle of Edge Hill

Between twelve and one o'clock in the morning (says our authority), was heard by some shepherds, and other

country-men, and travellers, first the sound of drummes afar off, and the noyse of souldiers, as it were, giving out their last groanes ; at which they were much amazed, and amazed stood still, till it seemed, by the neernesse of the noyse, to approach them ; at which too much affrighted, they sought to withdraw as fast as possibly they could ; but then, on the sudden, whilst they were in these cogitations, appeared in the ayre the same incorporeall souldiers that made those clamours, and immediatly, with ensignes display'd, drummes beating, musquets going off, cannons discharged, horses neyghing, which also to these men were visible, the alarum or entrance to this game of death was strucke up, one Army, which gave the first charge, having the King's colours, and the other the Parliaments, in their head or front of the battells, and so pell mell to it they went ; the battell that appeared to the Kings forces seeming at first to have the best, but afterwards to be put into apparent rout ; but till two or three in the morning in equall scale continued this dreadful fight, the clattering of Armes, noyse of cannons, cries of souldiers, so amazing and terifying the poore men, that they could not believe they were mortall, or give credit to their eares and eyes ; runne away they durst not, for feare of being made a prey to these infernall souldiers, and so they, with much feare and affright, stayed to behold the successe of the businesse, which at last suited to this effect : after some three hours fight, that Army which carryed the Kings colours withdrew, or rather appeared to flie ; the other remaining, as it were, masters of the field, stayed a good space triumphing, and expressing all the signes of joy and conquest, and then, with all their drummes, trumpets, ordinance, and souldiers, vanished ; the poore men were glad they were gone, that had so long staid them there against their wills, made with all haste to Keinton, and there knocking up Mr. Wood, a Justice of Peace, who called up his neighbour, Mr. Marshall, the Minister, they gave them an account of the whole passage, and averred it upon their oaths to be true. At which affirmation of theirs, being much amazed, they should hardly have given credit to it, but would have conjectured the men to have been either mad or drunk, had they not knowne some of them to have been of approved integritie : and so, suspending their judgements till the next night about the same houre, they, with the same men, and all the substantiall inhabitants of that and the neighbouring parishes, drew thither ; where, about half an

houre after their arrivall, on Sunday, being Christmas night, appeared in the same tumultuous warlike manner, the same two adverse Armies, fighting with as much spite and spleen as formerly. The next night they appeared not, nor all the week, so that the dwellers thereabout were in good hope they had for ever departed; but on the ensuing Saturday night, in the same place, and at the same houre, they were again seene with far greater tumult, fighting in the manner afore-mentioned for foure houres, and then vanished, appearing againe on Sunday night, and performing the same actions of hostilitie and bloodshed; so that both Mr. Wood and others, whose faith, it should seeme, was not strong enough to carry them out against these delusions, forsook their habitations thereabout, and retired themselves to other more secure dwellings; but Mr. Marshall stayed, and some other; and so successively the next Saturday and Sunday the same tumults and prodigious sights and actions were put in the state and condition they were formerly. The rumour whereof coming to his Majestie at Oxford, he immediately dispatched thither Colonell Lewis Kirke, Captaine Dudley, Captaine Wainman, and three other gentlemen of credit, to take the full view and notice of the said businesse, who, first hearing the true attestation and relation of Mr. Marshall and others staid there till Saturday night following, wherein they heard and saw the fore-mentioned prodigies, and so on Sunday, distinctly knowing divers of the apparitions or incorporeall substances by their faces, as that of Sir Edmund Varney, and others that were there slaine; of which upon oath they made testimony to his Majestie. What this does portend God only knoweth, and time perhaps will discover; but doubtlessly it is a signe of his wrath against this Land, for these civil wars, which He in His good time finish, and send a sudden peace between his Majestie and Parliament.

This strange psychic record is not indeed in any sense an exact parallel to the phenomena which have excited so great an interest at the present time, but it serves to show the effect that war is liable to produce upon the psychic atmosphere, and in this manner may render such incidents as those recently recorded credible to the minds of many who would at first sight be disposed to reject

them as old wives' tales. If the phenomena following the Battle of Edge Hill so fully substantiated by contemporary evidence actually took place, why should it not be possible for psychic phenomena of a certainly no more remarkable kind, to be one of the concomitant circumstances of the greatest war in the world's history? Would it not rather be strange if it were otherwise?

These records do not in fact stand alone. The ghostly story of the Battle of Edge Hill which has been perpetuated in the *Memorials of John Hampden, His Party and Times*, by Lord Nugent, finds a close parallel in the record of the Battle of Mook-Heath of April 13, 1574, as narrated in *Motley's Rise of the Dutch Republic*. In both cases were individual combatants identified. In both cases the phenomena were not confined to experiences of the sight alone. The shouts of the combatants and the discharge of cannon and the rattle of musketry were clearly audible in both instances. The main difference indeed lay in the curious fact that whereas the phenomena at Edge Hill followed the date of the battle, in the case of Mook-Heath they preceded it by some two months. It appears, indeed, that in some peculiar way great wars open up fresh channels for the psychic senses, and the physical struggle of great armies appears ever to have its counterpart on the spiritual plane, by the bringing into action of psychic forces working for good or evil, on the side of Light or of Darkness—"principalities and powers mustering their unseen array"—upon whose efforts no less than upon the efforts of those now living on the physical plane the great and final issues of this vast world-conflict ultimately depend.

The Pros and Cons

One important point is inevitably raised with regard to these apparitions on the European battlefields. They have this in common, with many similar apparitions—that is they are not seen alike by all witnesses. Where one sees St. George another sees St. Michael, and a third Joan of

Arc. Were all three of these heroes of the past actually present on the battlefield, or indeed were any of them? Even assuming that we accept the authenticity of the visions, we are not, I think, called upon to say that they were. Spirit is plastic. May we not rather say that it is Protean? It is clothed upon by the imagination of the beholder to an almost limitless extent. In a further account of Miss Phyllis Campbell's which she gave to the editor of the *Evening News*, she relates how a soldier of the Irish Guards, an enormous man who stood over six feet five inches, told her, narrating his own experiences, that "St. George was in golden armour, bareheaded, and riding a white horse." He cried "Come on!" as he brandished his sword. Why, we may ask, was St. George in golden armour? Doubtless because the Irish guardsman had seen him most recently on the back of a sovereign. Here also he is brandishing a sword. The apparitions which created such a sensation in the South of France a few months before the outbreak of war had the same tendency to vary according to the temperament of the beholder. Here, too, Joan of Arc was seen (among others) and foretold the fact that she was the harbinger of a great war, by making stars appear from out of a clouded sky at the request of the village curé. Who can doubt that if a Theosophist had been present at the retreat of Mons he would have witnessed an apparition of one of the Mahatmas, just as the Russian soldiers saw the phantom of General Skobelev? The gods of ancient days, according to classical story, became visible to the heroes whose causes they espoused, in the guise of mortal men. The radiant forms of the spiritual hierarchies can only be made manifest to mortal eye in a form which the beholder can interpret. The spirit champion of British arms inevitably takes the form of St. George. He comes in the spirit and power of St. George to do St. George's work, and thus the British soldier interprets his spiritual leaders in terms of the ancient traditions of his race.

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