

The Phantom Armies Seen in France

By Hereward Carrington

History abounds in cases showing the apparent intrusion of spiritual help in time of trouble, and in the annals of military history these accounts are not lacking. On several occasions the Crusaders thought that they saw angelic hosts fighting for them—phantom horsemen charging the enemy, when their own utter destruction seemed imminent. In the wars between the English and the Scotch, several such cases were cited, and the Napoleonic wars also furnished examples. But the most striking evidence of this character—because the newest—and supported, apparently, by a good deal of first-hand and sincere testimony, is that afforded by the Phantom Armies seen in France during the retreat of the British army from Mons—the field of Agincourt. Cut off by overwhelming numbers, and all but annihilated, the British army fought desperately, but the 80,000 were opposed by 300,000 Germans, backed by a terrific fire of artillery, and were indeed in a critical position. They were only saved, as we know, by the heroism of a small force of men—a rear-guard—who were practically wiped out in consequence. At the most critical moment came what appeared to be angelic assistance. The tide of battle seemed to be stemmed by supernatural means. In a letter written by a soldier who actually witnessed these startling events, quoted by the Hon. Mrs. St. John Mildmay (*North American Review*, August, 1915), the following graphic account is given. Our soldier writes:

“The men joked at the shells and found many funny names for them, and had bets about them, and greeted them with music-hall songs, as they screamed in this terrific cannonade. The climax seemed to have been reached, but ‘a seven-times heated hell’ of the enemy’s onslaught fell upon them, rending brother from brother. At that very moment, they saw from their trenches a tremendous host moving against their lines. Five hundred of the thousand (who had been detailed to fight the rear-guard action) remained, and as far as they could see the German infantry was pressing on against them, column by column, a gray world of men—10,000 of them, as it appeared afterwards. There was no hope at all. Some of them shook hands. One man improvised a new version of the battle song Tipperary, ending ‘and we shan’t get there!’ And all went on firing steadily. The enemy dropped line after line, while the few machine guns did their best. Every one knew it was of no use. The dead gray bodies lay in companies and battalions, but others came on and on, swarming and advancing from beyond and beyond.

“ ‘World without end, Amen!’ said one of the British soldiers, with some irreverence, as he took aim and fired. Then he remembered a vegetarian restaurant in London, where he had once or twice eaten queer dishes of cutlets made of lentils and nuts that pretended to be steaks. On all the plates in this restaurant a figure of St. George was printed in blue with the motto, *Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius* (May St. George be a present help to England). The soldier happened to know ‘Latin and other useless things,’ so now, as he fired at the gray advancing mass, 300 yards away, he uttered the pious vegetarian motto. He went on firing to the end, till at last Bill on his right had to clout him cheerfully on the head to make him stop, pointing out as he did so that the King’s ammunition cost money and was not lightly to be wasted. For, as the Latin scholar uttered his invocation, he felt something between a shudder and an electric shock pass through his body. The roar of the battle died down in his ears to a gentle murmur, and instead of it, he says, he heard a great voice louder than a thunder peal, crying ‘Array! Array!’ His heart grew hot as a

burning coal, then it grew cold as ice within him, for it seemed to him a tumult of voices answered to the summons. He heard or seemed to hear thousands shouting:

“ ‘St. George! St. George!

“ ‘Ha! Messire, Ha! Sweet Saint, grant us good deliverance!

“ ‘St. George for Merrie England!

“ ‘Harow! Harow! Monseigneur St. George, succour us, Ha! St. George! A low bow, and a strong bow, Knight of Heaven, aid us!’

“As the soldier heard these voices, he saw before him, beyond the trench, a long line of shapes with a shining about them. They were like men who drew the bow, and with another shout their cloud of arrows flew singing through the air toward the German host. The other men in the trenches were firing all the while. They had no hope, but they aimed just as if they had been shooting at Bisley.

“Suddenly one of these lifted up his voice in plain English. ‘Gawd help us!’ he bellowed to the man next him, ‘but we’re bloomin’ marvels! Look at those gray gentlemen! Look at them! They’re not going down in dozens or hundreds—it’s *thousands* it is! Look, look! There’s a regiment gone while I’m talking to ye!’

“ ‘Shut it,’ the other soldier bellowed, taking aim. ‘What are ye talkin’ about?’ But he gulped with astonishment even as he spoke, for indeed the gray men were falling by the thousands. The English could hear the guttural scream of their revolvers as they shot, and line after line crashed to the earth. All the while the Latin-bred soldier heard the cry ‘Harow, Harow! Monseigneur! Dear Saint! Quick to our aid! St. George help us!’

“The singing arrows darkened the air, the hordes melted before them. ‘More machine guns,’ Bill yelled to Tom. ‘Don’t hear them,’ Tom yelled back, ‘but thank God, anyway, that they have got it in the neck!’

“In fact, there were ten thousand dead German soldiers left before that salient of the English army, and consequently—no *Sedan*. In Germany the General Staff decided that the English must have employed turpentine shells, as no wounds were discernible on the bodies of the dead soldiers. But the man who knew what nuts tasted like when they called themselves steak, knew also that St. George had brought his Agincourt Bowmen to help the English.”

Such accounts have been confirmed by others. Thus, Miss Phyllis Campbell, writing in *The Occult Review* (October, 1915), says:

“I tremble, now that it is safely past, to look back on the terrible week that brought the Allies to Vitry-le-François. We had not had our clothes off for the whole of that week, because no sooner had we reached home, too weary to undress, or to eat, and fallen on our beds, than the ‘chug-chug’ of the commandant’s car would sound into the silence of the deserted street, and the horn would imperatively summon us back to duty—because, in addition to our duties as *ambulancier auxiliaire*, we were interpreters to the post, now at this moment diminished to half a dozen.

“Returning at 4:30 in the morning, we stood on the end of the platform, watching the train crawl through the blue-green mist of the forest into the clearing, and draw up with the first wounded from Vitry-le-Francois. It was packed with dead and dying and badly wounded. For a time we forgot our weariness in a race against time—removing the dead and dying, and attending to those in need. I was bandaging a man’s shattered arm with the *majeur* instructing me, while he stitched a horrible gap in his head, when Madame de A—, the heroic president of the post, came

and replaced me. 'There is an English in the fifth wagon,' she said. 'He wants something—I think a holy picture!'

"The idea of an English soldier wanting a holy picture struck me, even in that atmosphere of blood and misery, as something to smile at—but I hurried away. 'The English' was a Lancashire Fusilier. He was propped in a corner, his left arm tied-up in a peasant woman's handkerchief, 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 didn't care which) of St. George. I asked him if he was a Catholic. 'No,' he was 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 F. R. 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-like, sort of risin' before the Germans as they came on 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 armor, 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 . . .'

"Where was this?" I asked. But neither of them could tell. They had marched, fighting a rear-guard action, from Mons, till St. George had appeared through the haze of light, and turned the enemy. They both *knew* it was St. George. Hadn't they seen him with a sword on every 'quid' they'd ever seen? The Frenchies had seen him too—ask them; but they said it was St. Michael..."

Much additional testimony of a like nature might be given—and has been collected by students of psychical research. If the spiritual world ever intervenes in matters mundane, it assuredly did so on this occasion. And it could hardly have chosen a more opportune time. Could the aspiring thoughts of the dead and dying, and those still living and fighting for their country, have drawn "St. George" to earth, to aid in again redeeming his country from a foreign foe? Could a simple "hallucination" have been so widespread and so prevalent? Or might there not have been some spiritual energy behind the visions thus seen—stimulating them, and inspiring and encouraging the stricken soldiers? We cannot say. We only know what the soldiers themselves say; and we also know the undoubted effects upon the enemy. For on both occasions were the Germans repulsed with terrible slaughter. Perhaps the vision of St. George led our soldiers into closer touch and *rapport* with the consciousness of some high intelligence—or the veil separating the two worlds was rent—as so often appears to be the case in apparitions and visions of this character.