



EMPTY SHELL CASES USED BY A SINGLE BATTERY OF "SEVENTY-FIVES" ON THE DAY OF THE GENERAL ATTACK IN CHAMPAGNE.

The present writer warned the Editor of the *Occult Review* that anything emanating from Peladan could only be a jest, but was rebutted by the evidence of an alderman from Harrogate, who was said to have seen the original. "An alderman from Harrogate" only made it worse!

However, the story "got over" and went the rounds of the press, and was swallowed by everybody. It did not last very long, though, for that part of the prophecy dealing with events subsequent to the Marne, though vague, was not vague enough to prevent even the most faithful believers from perceiving that it was totally wrong!

But all this palls before the superb story of "The Bowmen." There is nothing to beat it in all the annals of mythopoeia.

There is a writer in England who is not very well known abroad; but who is certainly among the first half-dozen living English authors. He is saturated with the love of mediaevalism and sacramentalism. His name is Arthur Machen. Falling upon evil times, he has had to write for the *Evening News*. In the course of this unhappy occupation, he read the famous *Weekly Dispatch* account of the retreat from Mons, which account was true, and caused the prosecution of the publishers. This was on Sunday morning, and he went to church later, and thought of the battle instead of the sermon. By and bye he wrote a story on it called "The Bowmen." In a few words, this was his yarn:

Five hundred British soldiers, the remains of a regiment, were covering the retreat from Mons. Disorganised and desperate, they saw annihilation approaching them in the shape of ten thousand pursuing cavalry. One of the men, who had been educated in Latin and the like, in the stress of emotion, found his mind wander back to a vegetarian restaurant in London where the plates had had on them a design of St. George and the motto "Adsit Anglis Sanctus Georgius."

With involuntary piety he uttered this motto. A shudder passed through him; the noise of battle was soothed to a murmur in his ears; instead, he heard a great roar as of thousands of soldiers shouting the ancient battle-cries that rang out at Crecy and Poitiers and Agincourt! He also saw before him a long line of shining shapes, "drawing their yew bows to their ears, and stroking their all-long shafts against the Germans."

It was then observed by all that the enemy was being swept away, not in single units but in battalions. In fact, they were slain to a man; and the British rearguard strolled off quietly in the wake of their army.

It is to be noted that the author very artistically refrained from trying to lend verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative by stating that the burying-parties found arrows in the dead Germans. He thought it too much mustard!

Well, he printed the story on September 29, 1914, and thought that that would be the end of it. But no! A few days later the *Occult Review* and *Light* wrote to ask for his "authorities!" He replied that the old musty English ale at the "Spotted Dog" in Bouverie Street might know; if not, nobody did.

In a month or so, several parish magazines asked leave to reprint it; and would he write a preface giving the name of the soldier, and so on? He replied "Reprint away; but as for the soldier, his name is Thomas Atkins of the Horse-Marines." The editor of one magazine replied (it was April, 1915, by now): "Pardon me, sir, if I appear to contradict you; but I know positively that the facts of the story are true; all you have done is to throw it into a literary form."

So they reprinted the story. But that was only the beginning of it. Variants began to appear. The soldier was an officer, and the picture of St. George a canvas instead of a plate. The dead Germans, too, were now

found with arrow wounds—the very detail that Machen had rejected as too absurd. Then again in some accounts a cloud appears between the armies to conceal the British. This is obviously an echo from Exodus. Sometimes the cloud disclosed shining shapes which frightened the chargers of the Uhlans. But April was to wane before the great transfiguration.

In May, Mr. A. P. Sinnett (the man who first wrote of the Blavatsky teacup fables) had an article in the *Occult Review* saying: "Those who could see said that they saw 'a row of shining beings' between the two armies."

Now Machen did say "a long row of shining shapes." In this phase one may find the *raison d'être* of the last stage of the myth. Angels are still popular in England; fairies are dead, and saints are held a trifle Popish; St. George is only a name except to mediaevalists like Mr. Machen. So he drops out of the story. "The Bowmen" became "The Angels of Mons" and the story fairly took the bit between its teeth, and bolted. It was quoted in *Truth*, in *The New Church Weekly*, in *John Bull*, in *The Daily Chronicle*, in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and in every case it was treated as a serious story.

*The Evening News* has been bombarded with letters on the subject; even the Psychological Research Society has got into one of its usual muddles over it. In a word, despite Machen's repeated explanations and denials, the silly fancy is taken everywhere for established fact.

The only attempt to give details of the yarn from the front has been that of Miss Phyllis Campbell, who is very young and very beautiful, but who, if she had been wiser, would have given as her authorities soldiers who had figured on the Roll of Honor. That would have sounded better than "a soldier," or than "a wounded man of the Lancashires," or "An R.F.A. hero," or "a nurse."