

## THREE EPOCHS OF WAR.

A Lecture delivered before the members of the Militia Officers' Association, Montreal, by Lieut. Colonel W. OSBORNE SMITH, Assistant Adjutant General, President of the Association.

I do not propose to-night to illustrate any particular species or series of tactics by the examples which the varied annals of war might afford: my endeavour in this lecture will be to sketch to you the modes of warfare which prevailed at three periods of the world—the ancient, the mediæval, and the modern—and to describe briefly the engines and arms with which war was waged, the men who formed the armies, and the men who commanded and controlled them, and this I think I can best do by giving you brief accounts of three celebrated engagements, and the causes which led to them.

I do not propose to travel back to the very very earliest ages for the first of these periods, for if I did so the history from which I should have had to gather dates would be so legendary, so doubtful in its nature, and facts would be so problematical, that they would border on fiction: neither will I take examples from battles of a very recent period; for experience shows us that history viewed through the glasses of man's political or national jealousies is, until sifted and cleared by time, as likely to be distorted and untrue as when surveyed through the darkened and shattered lenses of the most remote antiquity. The illustrations, then, which I will take will be a pitched battle of 479, B.C., Plataea, an extraordinary siege of A.D. 1188, Acre or Ptolemais, and what can scarcely be called either a battle or a siege, but rather a decisive surprise of A.D. 1759, Quebec.

The first example I choose, as one which ancient records have handed down in a most clear and lucid manner, and which presents combinations of mistakes and advantages in warfare of which history, reproducing as it does many things not only of war but peace, has subsequently given more than one instance. The second I take from the magnitude of the operations involved, from the almost unexampled slaughter and loss by which it was attended, and from the peculiar causes which occasioned it. The third I venture on, not only because it is one on which the clear rays of reliable testimony are amply shed, not only because it is an event of which the descendants of the winners and the losers may be equally proud; but because, strange to say, it is an undoubted fact, and I make the statement not only from my own very limited observations, but on the authority of one of the keenest observers of this country, that there is not one in ten in our Dominion averagely well read and educated men that can give the most elementary account of the causes, the circumstances and the results of a comparatively recent event so fraught with consequences to our own land as is that of

the action which led to the capture of Quebec.

The battle of PLATEEA took place B.C. 479. Xerxes, king of Persia, encouraged by his previous successes against the Egyptians, whom he had entirely subdued, and emboldened by his control over what was probably the largest army, or, more properly speaking, masses of levies composed for the most part of Persians, Medians and Assyrians, that the world has ever known, determined to attempt the subjection of the Grecian States, whose previous victories over the invading armies of his predecessors had created a bitter feeling of hostility in the breasts of the Persians. Crossing the Hellespont at or near Sestos, on a bridge of boats, formed at enormous expense with gigantic labour, Xerxes led into the Grecian states of Thrace and Macedonia, an army which the great living historian of the day, Herodotus, carefully computed at three millions one hundred thousand fighting men. In this computation he is borne out by the estimates of Plutarch and Isocrates, and although Diodorus Seculus and the great Piny do not set the numbers at so high a figure, the fact of Herodotus, a most careful and practical historian, being a cotemporary of the day, and corroborative evidence from monuments recording events in connection with this great invasion, lead the student to imagine that the force was approximately correctly stated. In Thrace and Macedonia friends, or rather conquered foes, were found, and it was not until the passes through the mountains leading to Greece proper were reached that Xerxes with his nations of armies and the masses of camp followers by which it was attended met a foe. There, in the ever-historic pass of Thermophyle, Leonidas and his three hundred devoted Spartans held the gateway of their country, and although overborne, not only by numbers but by treachery, gave a bright example by their glorious resistance of the foe, of the manner in which patriots few in number can obstruct hordes of invaders. Checked and disheartened by the brilliant resistance at Thermophyle, Xerxes led his army into Greece, wasted and destroyed the country and burnt Athens, the seat of learning and the acknowledged capital of the Grecian States; but in the course of his progress, triumphant through numbers as it was, experienced many of the reverses which must attend an army invading the country of a hardy and patriotic race,—experienced, indeed, at last, such a reverse at Salamis, where his enormous navy received a defeat only paralleled in the world's history by that of the Spanish Armada, that he withdrew the bulk of his forces and retired with difficulty, a defeated monarch with scarce a remnant of a disorganized host, across the Hellespont to Persia. He did not, however, abandon his design of subduing Greece, and he left behind him Mardonius, one of his foremost generals, and a chosen body of 300,000 men.

Of the various operations of the army, time does not permit me to treat, and I proceed at once to the battle of Plataea. This took place in Boeotia, some fifty miles from Athens. Opposed to Mardonius, were the Grecian forces, commanded by Pausanias and Aristides. These forces were composed for the most part of Lacedæmonians, or Spartans, and the Athenians, the two principal of the numerous Grecian States.—Mardonius had for a second time in the invasion ravaged the Athenian possessions, and was, previous to his taking up winter quarters, attempting to crush the army which the United Grecian States had gathered together. The opposing armies came first into contact some few miles from the town of Plataea: the Greeks numbered from sixty to seventy thousand; the Persian army proper some 200,000, with 50,000 auxiliaries taken from the conquered or allied states of the European territories. The first results were, so far as skirmishing was concerned, in favour of the Greeks. For some days the armies continued to face each other; until, with the view of gaining more advantageous ground, and, as Herodotus informs us, from want of water, the Greeks retired their forces to a fresh position. Mardonius, elated with the idea of an easy victory presaged by a retreat of the enemy without serious action, at once, and in opposition to the advice of Artabazus, a general of the army, ordered pursuit.

The Greeks, partly by accident and partly from the nature of the ground, had, when they retired, got their army divided, that which was composed of the Athenians, numbering some 12,000, being placed to the southward, and that of the Spartans and other allies to the northward, at an obtuse angle to each other and with a very considerable interval between, so that when they formed to repel the attack which the Persians subsequently delivered there were two distinct lines of battle. Mardonius, confident of success, neglected the caution which a very simple study of tactics would show to be necessary: he detached 50,000 men to engage the Athenian line, and with the bulk of his forces made his order of battle against the main body of the Greeks.

By the dispositions he made, it will be clearly seen that Mardonius exposed his flanks to the enemy, and, further, his whole force to the destruction which would ensue if either of the wings into which the army was virtually divided was to give way, in which case the other would inevitably be taken in reverse. This was what actually occurred; but, previously to narrating it, let us again refer to the rough diagrams, which, from the accounts we have, may, I think, fairly be deduced as shewing the action which ensued. Mardonius, confident and elated, led on his army from his entrenched camp in pursuit of what he thought were the defeated and discomfited Greeks. Finding that the Athenians were separated from the Spartans and allies, that their