

The World's Greatest Battle.

The vast table lands of Asia Minor are renowned in the annals of warfare as the scene of the most stupendous battle, in point of numbers engaged, of which there is an authentic record. This battle, which took place July 20, 1402, was fought between the Sultan Bajazet and the Mogul Emperor Timur. In this conflict over 2,000,000 men were engaged, and the result of it was the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the conquest of all Asia by the descendant of Genghis Khan.

In point of numbers, the only conquests of modern times which compare with that of Angora are the battle of Lepanto, which took place in 1571, and the battle of Sedan, fought in 1870. In the first of these the French, under Napoleon, numbered about 200,000 men, and the Russians, Prussians and Austrians and Swedes about 400,000. In the last instance the Austrian army of about 175,000 men was overwhelmed by about 250,000 Prussians.

The battle of Angora was the culmination of two years of acrimonious negotiation between a Turk and a Tartar both of whom aspired to the dominion of Asia. Bajazet was of the blood royal and born in the purple, as the saying goes. He succeeded his father, the Sultan Amurath I., who was killed in the hour of victory in the battle of Kosovo against the Russians in 1389. Bajazet upon his accession to the throne displayed high military intelligence, and his character was marked by love of military glory, unbounded ambition and indefatigable physical and mental energy, so much so that he was called in the Turkish tongue 'Ilderim' which means 'The Lightning.' Bajazet, during the ten years of his reign, subdued all Asia Minor, he sieged Constantinople and routed a great army put into the field by the leading European States. He had overrun southeastern Europe to the very gates of Vienna, when he was recalled to Asia to check the devastating advances of Timur.

Timur, who in the annals of warfare holds rank among the very best of the captains of the second class, was, by his mother, of the royal house of the Tartars. Like Bajazet, he displayed as a mere youth marked military ability and insatiable desire for achieving renown in war. From an humble beginning, in which his army consisted of seven male relatives, he successfully achieved the dominion first of his own tribe, next of his country, later of all Asia and finally of that part of Russia in Europe as far west as Moscow and to the mouth of the Don River.

Thus were the boundaries of the Turkish and the Mogul empires brought into touch. A collision obviously could not be averted; it was certain that sooner or later the two great military spirits of the age must contend with each other for the mastery. The event, however, did not take place before passing through several preparatory stages.

On the part of Timur the war was one of invasion; it was the policy of Bajazet to receive battle in the midst of his own country and of almost unlimited resources. In order to terrorize the vassal States of Asia, to break the strength of any possible rebellion and to insure prompt obedience to his commands from a distance, Timur marched into India, attacked and took Delhi, and massacred 100,000 captives. After this fearful object lesson on the folly of opposing the dictates of the Great Mogul, the Tartar army took up its march from the banks of the Ganges and advanced into Syria. As this mighty host moved across the surface of Asia deeds were done the magnitude of which it is difficult to realize. In the hyperbole of the Persian historians it is stated that the inhabitants vainly endeavored to find the countries over which the Tartars had passed.

One event is especially notable, and that is the march around the Caspian Sea by Timur's vanguard, consisting of 200,000 light cavalry. The inaccessible mountains, which surrounded this body of water seemingly bid defiance to the march of an army, and particularly to horsemen, yet it is a fact recorded by authority which is of the

best that the horsemen of Timur penetrated the defiles, thoroughly explored the mountains and made a complete circuit of the Caspian Sea.

Timur now overran Syria and stormed the city of Bagdad, where he built a pyramid in the market place formed of 90,000 human skulls. It was now that Timur received the first embassy of Bajazet. These epistles are in striking contrast to the diplomatic effusions of our time. The two great soldiers wrote to each other in the first person. There was no dissimulation, each of them called a spade a spade. Bajazet and Timur alike were entirely ignorant that they had an equal in understanding of military art and science, and each was impatient of what he deemed inexplicable insolence and folly on the part of the other. Timur on his part informed Bajazet that the latter's obedience, to the precepts of the Koran in waging war against the Christians was the only consideration that prevented the Tartars from lifting the Turkish Empire in their hands and throwing it into space. In order to impress upon Bajazet his insignificance as compared with the great Mogul, he was further informed that he was merely a little black ant which the elephant (Timur) was about to trample under his feet.

The Turkish Emperor upon the receipt of this epistle proceeded to decapitate with his own hand the bearer of the message, and to spend some hours in looting at the mouth and tearing out his whiskers by hand. Some hours later, when he had regained speech, Bajazet indited a reply. In his letter the Turk could find no more favorable light in which to regard the Tartar than as the father of thieves and of liars. After calling to the mind of Timur certain facts of dispute between them and assuring him of his intention to sustain his rights by

force of arms, the ungovernable rage of the Sultan invited an encounter in the field with the whole of their respective armies.

Timur's reply to this letter was to dig a vast pit and to bury 4,000 Turkish prisoners alive. Then giving orders for the concentration of his armies on the banks of the Araxes, he proclaimed his resolution of marching against the Turkish Sultan and of destroying the Ottoman Empire.

Both Bajazet and Timur alike were equally sensible to the terrific military force possessed by each other. Each made the most elaborate preparations to insure success. Months were spent in these preparations, and singularly enough a year and eleven days passed by from the time of their mutual personal defiance until their armies met in actual combat.

The armies which met in battle array on the plains of Angora at sunrise on the morning July 20, 1402, are variously estimated. The number of men present in any battle is more or less a matter of doubt and never is more than an approximation. In regard to the forces under Timur, there is a practical unanimity of sentiment among the various contemporary historians and his army is reckoned at from 800,000 to 1,600,000. On the other hand there is a great discrepancy in the estimates made of the Turkish troops, the lowest being 400,000 and the highest 14,000,000. From what appears to be the best authority, it would seem that the Turkish army was about 900,000 strong, and that Timur opposed it with a force of about 1,200,000 men.

The marching of the Tartar host to the field of battle was from the River Araxes, through the countries of Armenia and Anatolia. This forward movement on the part of Timur precipitated a condition whereby the fate of the two empires nec-

essarily must be determined by a pitched battle in the open country. This of course was to the advantage of him who could bring the largest force into action: for it must be remembered that the troops confronting each other were not composed of the degenerate peoples of southern Europe and Southern Asia, but were made up of the best fighting blood of northern Asia and of eastern Europe, and of men who had been trained in arms from infancy.

It does not appear that Bajazet was able to devise any plan to prevent Timur from taking up his position in the open plain with the Tartar army. In consequence the Great Mogul turned the intrenched camp of the Turkish host, and moving by the left occupied Caesarea, crossed the Salt desert and the river Helas and invested the city of Angora.

By this march of something like 100 miles, made with great swiftness and with the utmost order and covered by great clouds of light cavalry, Timur established himself in the very heart of the Ottoman Empire, and upon ground whose topography assured the full employment of his resources should the Turkish Emperor engage in battle.

Even while the Tartar army was in process of executing this great flank movement, Bajazet with equal swiftness attempted the correct counterstroke by marching against its communications and trying to attack it in flank and rear. But the military genius of Timur had foreseen and proved against such resource on the part of the Turks. Abandoning his original line of communications he established his army upon the city of Angora, proposing to capture the place and avail of it as a temporary point d'appui. Bajazet readily discerned this phase of the Tartar's plan, and it appears that he joyously accepted the

alternative thus presented to him of attacking the Tartar host in open field.

The battle of the plains of the Angora is most instructive and it is peculiarly interesting as an exposition of the tactics of the age in which it was fought.

Bajazet, with the full power of the Ottoman Empire, advanced to the attack with the rising of the sun. His army was made up of troops of many provinces, both in Europe and Asia. The most notable of his forces were 40,000 Janizaries.

These troops corresponded to the imperial guards of European States, and in fact constituted the choicest reserve of the Turkish Army. Next to these Bajazet valued a body composed of 20,000 Europeans clad in complete armor. Then came 100,000 Mamelukes or light Egyptian cavalry, whose fame for skill and courage was a household word throughout both Europe and Asia. In addition to these were mounted men by the hundreds of thousands, all men of valor and of years of experience.

It does not appear that by Bajazet's initial movement in attack he disclosed the plan of battle which he undoubtedly essayed to put into execution. It is not to be doubted that the Turkish Emperor gave the scientific direction to his troops and it is to be regretted that writers of the history of those days were less skilled in warfare than in letters.

It is impossible to discern from the vague and rhetorical descriptions of contemporary writers the initial movement of the Turkish army. This description exists undoubtedly in the still untranslated portion of Timur's own commentaries, but at present it is inaccessible to those who cannot read the ancient Arabic.

The second movement of the battle is clearer, and from that time on the grand tactics of this stupendous contest are readily followed. There is no doubt that for his victory the Mogul conqueror was indebted, first, to his own vast military genius, and second to a despotic discipline of thirty years, which had transformed his rank and file into automatons.

Timur took up a position with his army on the defensive and awaited the attack of the Turks. His central column, which constituted his main body, were posted in front of the city of Angora. The city itself was closely invested by a large detached corps in order to prevent the garrison from taking any part in the coming conflict. The two wings of his army extended diagonally forward from the central column, making two vast reentering angles and constituting three contiguous sides of a great octagon.

On each flank of his army Timur posted enormous masses of light cavalry, probably amounting to several hundred thousand troops, and the whole of the main line was supported in rear at regular intervals by dense masses of the choicest Tartar troops, selected for long experience and exact discipline. On the front of his line Timur displayed some 600 elephants. Upon the backs of these formidable creatures were great towers occupied by furnaces of Greek fire. His lines were still further strengthened by scores of cannon made in the gunshops of Europe.

In front of the Tartar line of battle and on the flanks of the advancing Turkish host skirmished thousands of Asiatic horsemen, who wielded with astonishing skill all kinds of missile weapons, javelins, slings and arrows, and advanced, retreated and manoeuvred in rapid evolutions which make such battles a study and the admiration of the student of cavalry tactics.

Whether it was the cannon or the Greek fire or the elephants, or all combined, or the superior numbers of the Tartar troops, it is impossible to say, but for some reason the critical attack of the Turkish army appears to have been repelled by the Tartars without difficulty.

About 10 o'clock in the forenoon it seems that the Mogul army had itself assumed the tactical offensive, and with superior forces, superior discipline and superior generalship was slowly but surely overwhelming the Ottomans. The strength of the Tartar host consisted in the skill with which Timur had combined the use of missile weapons with the evolutions of light cavalry. By this method the tactics were the same, both for the army as a whole and for each division of the army.

The front rank of each division, and consequently the front rank of the whole army deployed and advanced in open, skirmish order to the attack, supported, rank after rank, by other troops advancing in solid masses and then deploying into open order. In consequence of this there always prevailed one general attack made by the entire army as a unit, combined with numer-



GATHERING WILD FLOWERS.

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