

SIR JOHN FROISSART'S
CHRONICLES
OF
ENGLAND, FRANCE, SPAIN,
AND THE
ADJOINING COUNTRIES,
FROM THE LATTER PART OF THE REIGN OF EDWARD II.
TO THE CORONATION OF HENRY IV.

NEWLY TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH EDITIONS,
WITH VARIATIONS AND ADDITIONS FROM MANY CELEBRATED MSS.

By THOMAS JOHNES.

Who so shall telle a tale after a man,
He moke reherse, as neigh as ever he can,
Covetish worde, if it be in his charge,
All speke he never so rudely and so large;
Or elles he moke tellen his tale untrewe,
Or feinen thinges, or finden wordes newe.

CHAUCER'S PROLOGUE.

THE THIRD EDITION.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR, AN ESSAY ON HIS WORKS,
A CRITICISM ON HIS HISTORY,
AND A DISSERTATION ON HIS POETRY.

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tower of the Louvre, for the debt he had been sentenced to pay of one hundred thousand francs to the queen of Jerusalem. I imagine he engaged to pay the queen the above sum by instalments, but I will, for the present, leave speaking of these matters, and return to what was passing in Turkey.

CHAP. XLI.

THE CHRISTIANS ARE FORCED TO RAISE THE SIEGE OF NICOPOLI, BY THE ARRIVAL OF BAJAZET IN TURKEY.—THEY ARE DEFEATED AND THE HUNGARIANS PUT TO FLIGHT, THROUGH THE PRESUMPTUOUS FOLLY OF THE FRENCH.

YOU have before read in our history how the king of Hungary, and the lords from France who had gone to Hungary in search of deeds of arms, had valiantly crossed the Danube, and entered Turkey; where, during the summer, from the month of July, they had conquered a large tract of country, having mercifully spared the inhabitants and many towns and castles, for none could withstand their power. They had besieged the city of Nicopoli, and so hardly pressed it by their attacks, that it was on the point of sur-

rendering, without hearing any intelligence of Bajazet.

The king of Hungary had even addressed the French lords, such as the count de Nevers, the count d'Eu, the count de la Marche, the count de Soissons, the lord de Coucy, and the barons and knights of Burgundy, saying, — ' My fair sirs, thanks to God, we have made a successful campaign; for we have performed many brilliant deeds of arms, and have conquered Turkey. I look on the town of Nicopoli as our own, for it is so undermimed it can hold out no longer than we please. I therefore would propose, that after we shall have gained and shewn mercy to this town, we attempt nothing more this season, but recross the Danube, and return to Hungary, where I have many handsome towns and castles prepared to receive you, since you have so gallantly assisted me against the Turks, my bitter enemies. During the winter, we will provide stores for the ensuing summer, each according to his pleasure, and send information of our situation, and what we have done, to the king of France, who, before that time, will send us large reinforcements; and I hope, when he shall know the success we have had, he may be inclined to come hither in person, for he is young and fond of arms. But whether he come or not, if it please God, we will next summer cross the Hellespont, regain Armenia, and thence march to Syria, with the towns of Jaffa and Baruth, and conquer Jerusalem and the Holy Land,

Should

Should the fultan oppose us, we will offer him battle, and never return without having combated him.'

Such was the speech of the king of Hungary to the French lords: they considered Nicopoli as won, but it fell out otherwise.

During the whole summer, Bajazet had been busily employed in raising an army of Saracens and infidels: he had even sent to Persia for succour, and the great lords of his religion had joined him against Christendom. They had crossed the Hellespont to the amount of two hundred thousand; but the Christians were not only ignorant of their numbers, but of their approach; and, they advanced so secretly, they were close to Nicopoli before the besiegers knew of their having begun their march. Bajazet was as well acquainted with the stratagems of war as most, and of great valour and enterprise. He considered maturely the power of the Christians, and said they were a valiant race.

Bajazet marched to raise the siege of Nicopoli in the following order. His army was drawn up in the form of a harrow, and occupied about a league of ground: in front of this main body, and a league in advance, were eight thousand Turks, to mask the body of the army, which was divided into two wings. Bajazet was in the midst of his main body, who thus quietly advanced, with their van-guard of eight thousand in front: they were thus ordered, to make an appearance as if they were the whole army; but whenever they met

the Christians, they were to fall back gently towards the main body, which was then to extend itself as much as possible, and endeavour to enclose the Christians, whom they should then conquer at pleasure. Such was the order of battle of Bajazet.

It happened, that on the Monday preceding Michaelmas-day, in the year 1396, about ten o'clock, as the king of Hungary and the lords, who were lying before Nicopoli, were seated at dinner, news was brought them that their enemies, the Turks, were near at hand; but, as I heard, the scouts did not inform them of the whole truth: they had not noticed the main body of the Turks, for the moment they saw the van-guard they dared not advance farther, as they were not men at arms fearless of such an enterprise. The Hungarians and French had each scouts of their own, and both parties arrived nearly at the same time with this intelligence.

The greater part of the army were at dinner when the news was carried to the count de Nevers and the other French lords, the messenger bawling out, 'Come! quickly arm yourselves, that you be not surpris'd, for the Turks are on full march to meet you.' This information was agreeable to many who were desirous of arms: they instantly arose, pushed the tables aside, and demanded their horses and armour. They were somewhat heated with wine, and hastened to the field as well as they could. Banners and pennons were displayed, under which every one ranged himself in his proper post.

The

The banner of the Virgin Mary was unfurled, and the guard of it given to that valiant knight sir John de Vienne, admiral of France. The French were so eager to arm themselves that they were the first in the field; drawn up in handsome array, and seemingly fearless of the Turks; for they were ignorant of their immense numbers, and that Bajazet commanded in person.

As the French lords were hastening from their tents to the field, the marshal of the king of Hungary, named sir Henry d'Ostenlemhalle*, mounted on a handsome courser, came to them with few attendants. He was a valiant and experienced knight, and had borne before him a pennon of his arms, which were a cross anchored sable on a field argent, which in heraldry is called cross moine. He stopped, when opposite the banner of our Lady, where the principal lords were assembled, and said aloud,—‘I am sent hither by my lord, the king of Hungary; who entreats you by me, that you will not begin the battle before you shall again hear from him; for he much suspects and fears that the scouts have not brought exact intelligence of the numbers of the Turks. Within two hours you shall have more certain intelligence, for we have sent other scouts, who will advance farther than the former ones, and bring us better information. Be assured the Turks will never attack you, unless you force them to it, or until they have collected all their forces together. You will act as you shall think

* MSS. Steulemhalle.

best, but such are my lord the king's orders. I must now return, for I cannot longer stay.'

On saying this, the Hungarian marshal left them, and the lords assembled together to consider what was to be done. The lord de Coucy was asked his opinion, and replied, that the king of Hungary had a right to order them, and that what he had requested was perfectly just. It was mentioned to me that the count d'Eu, constable of France, was vexed that his opinion had not been first asked before the lord de Coucy's, and, through spite and malice, instantly opposed what he had said, adding; 'Yes, yes, the king of Hungary wishes to gain all the honour of the day: he has given us the van guard, and now wants to take it away, that he may have the first blow: let those who will believe what he sends to us, for my part I never will:' then addressing the knight who bore his banner, he said,—'In the name of God and Saint George, you shall see me this day prove myself a good knight.' The lord de Coucy thought this a very vain speech of the constable, and, turning to sir John de Vienne, who had the banner of our Lady under his guard, and by whom all the others were to rally, asked what ought to be done. 'Lord de Coucy,' he replied, 'when truth and reason are not heard, folly and presumption must reign; and, since the count d'Eu is determined to fight the enemy, we must follow him; but we should have greater advantage, if we waited the king of Hungary's orders, and were all united.'

While they thus conversed, the infidels were fast

fast approaching: the two wings of their army, which consisted of sixty thousand men each, were already closing round them. The Christians, observing this, would have retreated, but that was impossible, as they were completely surrounded. Many knights and squires, who had been used to arms, now knew the day must be lost: notwithstanding which they advanced, following the banner of our Lady, that was borne by that gallant knight sir John de Vienne.

The lords of France were so richly dressed out, in their emblazoned surcoats, as to look like little kings; but, as I was told, when they met the Turks, they were not more than seven hundred, which sufficiently shewed the folly of the measure; for, had they waited for the Hungarian army, consisting of sixty thousand men, they might, perhaps, have gained a victory, but, to their pride and presumption, was the whole loss owing; and it was so great, that never since the defeat at Roncesvalles, where the twelve peers of France were slain, did the French suffer so considerably. However, before they were overcome, they made great slaughter of the Turks; though several knights and squires saw they were marching to destruction, through their own folly.

The French defeated the van battalion, and put it to flight, pursuing it into a valley where Bajazet was posted with the main army. The French would have returned, as they were mounted on barbed horses, but could not, for they were now inclosed on all sides. The battle, therefore, raged with

with fury, and lasted a considerable time. News was carried to the king of Hungary, that the French, English and Germans were engaged with the Turks, not having obeyed his orders sent them by the marshal. He was very wroth on hearing it, as indeed he had reason to be, and foresaw they would all be cut off. He said to the grand master of Rhodes, who was beside him, 'We shall lose the day, from the vanity of the French: if they had believed me, and waited for our joining, we should have had sufficient strength to cope with the enemy.'

As he thus spoke, looking behind him, he perceived that his men were flying panic-struck, and the Turks pursuing them. He then saw the day was irrecoverably lost, and those near his person cried out,—'Sire, save yourself! for, should you be killed or taken, Hungary will be completely ruined. We must be defeated through French pride; and their valour will prove in vain; for every one of them will be taken or slain; not one can possibly escape. Fly, therefore, from the danger, before it be too late.'

The king of Hungary was in the utmost rage to be thus defeated through the arrogance of the French, and obliged to fly, if he would avoid captivity or death. It was a most unfortunate day for the Hungarians and French; whoever runs away from battle is pursued, and, as the Hungarians fled in the greatest confusion, the Turks followed, killing them or making prisoners at pleasure. God, however, assisted the king of Hungary and the
grand

grand master of Rhodes ; for, on their arrival on the banks of the Danube, they found a small vessel belonging to the grand master, into which they entered, with only five more, and crossed to the opposite shore. Had they delayed, they must have been killed or taken ; for the Turks came to the river as they were passing it, and made a great slaughter of those who had followed the king thinking to escape.

We will return to the French and Germans, who were fighting most valiantly. The lord de Montcaurel, a gallant knight from Artois, seeing the defeat inevitable, and wishing to save his son, who was very young, said to his squire,—‘ Carry off my son : thou mayest escape by that wing which is open : save my son ; and I will abide the event with my companions.’ The youth, on hearing his father thus speak, declared he would not go nor leave him in such danger ; but the father forced him away, and the squire brought him safely to the Danube : the youth, who was very melancholy at the situation of his father, was unfortunately drowned by falling between two barges, without a possibility of being saved. Sir William de la Trimouille, and his son displayed great feats of valour before they were slain. Sir John de Vienne, who bore the banner of our Lady, in spite of his deeds of arms, was killed grasping the banner in his hands, and thus was he found after the battle. The whole of the French force that had been engaged at this battle of Nicopoli were defeated and slain, by the means I have related.

The

The lord John of Burgundy, count of Nevers, was wondrous richly arrayed, as were the lord Guy de la Riviere, and many barons and knights from Burgundy in compliment to him. Two squires from Picardy, William d'Eu and the borgne de Montquel, who had displayed their courage in many former battles, did the same at Nicopoli. These two squires, by their vigorous courage, twice forced through the Turkish army, and returned to the fight, but were at length slain. To say the truth, the whole of the French chivalry and those from other countries acquitted themselves most gallantly; and, had they been assisted by the Hungarians with equal courage, the day would have turned out differently. But the whole of the mischief was caused by the French, and their presumption was their ruin. There was a knight from Picardy, called sir James de Helly, who had resided some time in Turkey, and had served in arms under Amurat, father of the sultan Bajazet, of whom we are now speaking, and who knew a little of the Turkish language. When he saw the day was lost, he thought of saving his life; and as he knew the Saracens to be a covetous race he surrendered himself to them, on their granting him his life. Thus did he escape, and also another squire from the Tournaisis, called James du Fay, who had formerly served Tamerlane king of Tartary; but when he learnt that the French were marching to Turkey, he quitted Tamerlane, and joined his countrymen. He was at this battle, and saved by Tamerlane's men, who had

had been ordered thither in compliance with the request made to him for assistance by Bajazet. Tamerlane had sent him a considerable body of men, as Sacaren and Pagan kings always do to the aid of each other.

CHAP. XLII.

THE TURKS, AFTER THE BATTLE OF NICOPOLI
PUT TO DEATH ALL THEIR PRISONERS, EXCEPT
THE COUNT DE NEVERS AND SOME OTHER
GREAT LORDS.

AT this battle of Nicopoli, which was so fatal to the French, very many were saved, from the extreme richness of their armour: they were dressed like kings; and the Saracens and Turks, who are avaricious, thought, by saving their lives, they should gain large ransoms; for they believed them much greater lords, from their appearance, than they really were.

The count de Nevers was made prisoner, as were the counts d'Eu and de la Marche, the lord de Coucy, the lord Henry de Bar, sir Guy de la Trimouille, Boucicaut and others. The lord Philip de Bar, sir John de Vienne, sir William de la Trimouille and his son were killed. This battle lasted for three hours; and the king of Hungary