

**THE HISTORY OF THE E. I.
DU PONT DE NEMOURS
POWDER COMPANY; A
CENTURY OF SUCCESS**

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The history of the E. I. Du Pont de Nemours powder company; a century of success by Various

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E. I. du Pont de Nemours
Powder Company

*A CENTURY
OF SUCCESS*

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I

GUNPOWDER—ARMS—AMMUNITION—EXPLOSIVES

NO one really knows when the making of gunpowder began. It may have been in China. It may have been in Arabia. It may have been in India. It may have been in Germany or England. Evidences of something like it are found in the oldest records of ancient Egypt. The mysteries of "Greek fire" are presumed to have been based upon it, and many of the spectacles of Imperial Rome are said to have owed much of their brilliant splendor to the flashes of pyrotechnics and the bursting of bombs which alone could have been created by substances analogous to powder.

So, in the first place, the manufacture of gunpowder has behind it the venerableness of age, together with all its romance. Instead of having first come into use for the deadly purposes of the Battle of Crécy, as is so often stated, it dates as far back as the time of far-away religious and imperial ceremonials and appears to have been used to impress both the susceptible and the ignorant with the mysteries of the

heavens and to stimulate their instincts of reverence and worship. The details of the earliest uses and forms are lost, but it is significant that with the knowledge of many things Oriental which the Crusaders brought back with them from the East was the familiarity with gunpowder, not as an instrument of warfare, but as an aid to churchly service. And long before the formal introduction of powder guns at Crécy by the English, tales are told of the customs at Florence and Siena where fables or stories were told in symbols and pantomimes at the Feast of St. John, or at the Assumption.

On these latter occasions, stage properties, including effigies made of wood with limbs of plaster, were grouped upon pedestals rising high in the air, and these figures gave forth flames, says the historian, whilst round about, tubes or pipes were erected for projecting fireballs into the air. So imposing were these affairs and so far were they from indicating the use of powder for destructive purposes that presently the spectacles came to be held only at Rome when an Emperor was to be crowned, or a Pope to be installed.

After a time spectacles of this sort spread to England and there, under Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, the most gorgeous and indescribable displays of the effects of gunpowder were made. At the marriage of Henry, the famous "Bachelor's Barge" carried a dragon spouting flames from his mouth, while at the marriage of Anne Boleyn "there went before the lord mayor's carriage a foyster or wafter full of ordnance, which foyster also carried a great red dragon that spouted out wild fire and round about were terrible monstrous and wild men casting fire and making a most hideous noise."

Later, as Europe drifted into the maelstrom of in-



PIERRE SAMUEL DU PONT.

ternational conflict which culminated in the ascension of Charles the Fifth and the reaction represented by the Reformation, the ceremonial aspect of gunpowder was lost, and the destructive aspect of it came to the front. But even here it is recorded that powder was quite as much used for ceremonial and display as for battle. Returning warriors, for instance, were greeted with *ignes triumphales*, or fireworks columns. Poles were erected with trophies at their tops, while clustered around their base were casks filled with combustibles, which when set afire, made the poles look like flaming trees, while forms of dragons and beasts were made to appear afire at the tree roots.

Still later, there developed a fad of what were called "fire combats." These consisted of military lists in which the participants wore helmets from which fire would shoot, and used swords and clubs from which sparks gave out at every stroke, "lances with fiery points, and bucklers, which when struck, gave forth a detonation and a flame."

Of course, in time it became impossible to withhold such a remarkable possession as gunpowder for the exclusive use of the church or the rulers; and it also became impossible to make a mystic or religious impression by gunpowder spectacles, however gorgeous and imposing they might be. The increasing intelligence of the public, the universal spread of science, and other developments of civilization led to a quite common understanding of the nature of the material used for these rites and spectacles; and the spectacle diminished accordingly in extent and in interest.

With that change came the great step which lifted gunpowder out of the realm of mysticism and placed it in the greater realm of practical affairs. And