

**JACOB
ABBOTT**

DARIUS THE
GREAT

Jacob Abbott
Darius the Great

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Jacob Abbott

Darius the Great / Makers of History

PREFACE

In describing the character and the action of the personages whose histories form the subjects of this series, the writer makes no attempt to darken the colors in which he depicts their deeds of violence and wrong, or to increase, by indignant denunciations, the obloquy which heroes and conquerors have so often brought upon themselves, in the estimation of mankind, by their ambition, their tyranny, or their desperate and reckless crimes. In fact, it seems desirable to diminish, rather than to increase, the spirit of censoriousness which often leads men so harshly to condemn the errors and sins of others, committed in circumstances of temptation to which they themselves were never exposed. Besides, to denounce or vituperate guilt, in a narrative of the transactions in which it was displayed, has little influence in awakening a healthy sensitiveness in the conscience of the reader. We observe, accordingly, that in the narratives of the sacred Scriptures, such denunciations are seldom found. The story of Absalom's undutifulness and rebellion, of David's adultery and murder, of Herod's tyranny, and all other narratives of crime, are related in a calm, simple, impartial, and forbearing spirit, which leads us to condemn the sins, but not to feel a pharisaical resentment and wrath against the sinner.

This example, so obviously proper and right, the writer of this series has made it his endeavor in all respects to follow.

Chapter I. Cambyses

B.C. 530-524

Cyrus the Great.

About five or six hundred years before Christ, almost the whole of the interior of Asia was united in one vast empire. The founder of this empire was Cyrus the Great. He was originally a Persian; and the whole empire is often called the Persian monarchy, taking its name from its founder's native land.

His extended conquests.

Cyrus was not contented with having annexed to his dominion all the civilized states of Asia. In the latter part of his life, he conceived the idea that there might possibly be some additional glory and power to be acquired in subduing certain half-savage regions in the north, beyond the Araxes. He accordingly raised an army, and set off on an expedition for this purpose, against a country which was governed by a barbarian queen named Tomyris. He met with a variety of adventures on this expedition, all of which are fully detailed in our history of Cyrus. There is, however, only one occurrence that it is necessary to allude to particularly here. That one relates to a remarkable dream which he had one night, just after he had crossed the river.

Cambyses and Smerdis.

Hystaspes and Darius.

To explain properly the nature of this dream, it is necessary first to state that Cyrus had two sons. Their names were Cambyses and Smerdis. He had left them in Persia when he set out on his expedition across the Araxes. There was also a young man, then about twenty years of age, in one of his capitals, named Darius. He was the son of one of the nobles of Cyrus's court. His father's name was Hystaspes. Hystaspes, besides being a noble of the court, was also, as almost all nobles were in those days, an officer of the army. He accompanied Cyrus in his march into the territories of the barbarian queen, and was with him there, in camp, at the time when this narrative commences.

Cyrus, it seems, felt some misgivings in respect to the result of his enterprise; and, in order to insure the tranquillity of his empire during his absence, and the secure transmission of his power to his rightful successor in case he should never return, he established his son Cambyses as regent of his realms before he crossed the Araxes, and delivered the government of the empire, with great formality, into his hands. This took place upon the frontier, just before the army passed the river. The mind of a father, under such circumstances, would naturally be occupied, in some degree, with thoughts relating to the arrangements which his son would make, and to the difficulties he would be likely to encounter in managing the momentous concerns which had been committed to his charge. The mind of Cyrus was undoubtedly so occupied, and this, probably, was the origin of the remarkable dream.

Dream of Cyrus.

His anxiety and fears.

His dream was, that Darius appeared to him in a vision, with vast wings growing from his shoulders. Darius stood, in the vision, on the confines of Europe and Asia, and his wings, expanded either way, overshadowed the whole known world. When Cyrus awoke and reflected on this ominous

dream, it seemed to him to portend some great danger to the future security of his empire. It appeared to denote that Darius was one day to bear sway over all the world. Perhaps he might be even then forming ambitious and treasonable designs. Cyrus immediately sent for Hystaspes, the father of Darius; when he came to his tent, he commanded him to go back to Persia, and keep a strict watch over the conduct of his son until he himself should return. Hystaspes received this commission, and departed to execute it; and Cyrus, somewhat relieved, perhaps, of his anxiety by this measure of precaution, went on with his army toward his place of destination.

Accession of Cambyses.

Cyrus never returned. He was killed in battle; and it would seem that, though the import of his dream was ultimately fulfilled, Darius was not, at that time, meditating any schemes of obtaining possession of the throne, for he made no attempt to interfere with the regular transmission of the imperial power from Cyrus to Cambyses his son. At any rate, it was so transmitted. The tidings of Cyrus's death came to the capital, and Cambyses, his son, reigned in his stead.

War with Egypt.

The great event of the reign of Cambyses was a war with Egypt, which originated in the following very singular manner:

Origin of the war with Egypt. Ophthalmia.

It has been found, in all ages of the world, that there is some peculiar quality of the soil, or climate, or atmosphere of Egypt which tends to produce an inflammation of the eyes. The inhabitants themselves have at all times been very subject to this disease, and foreign armies marching into the country are always very seriously affected by it. Thousands of soldiers in such armies are sometimes disabled from this cause, and many are made incurably blind. Now a country which produces a disease in its worst form and degree, will produce also, generally, the best physicians for that disease. At any rate, this was supposed to be the case in ancient times; and accordingly, when any powerful potentate in those days was afflicted himself with ophthalmia, or had such a case in his family, Egypt was the country to send to for a physician.

The Egyptian physician.

Now it happened that Cyrus himself, at one time in the course of his life, was attacked with this disease, and he dispatched an ambassador to Amasis, who was then king of Egypt, asking him to send him a physician. Amasis, who, like all the other absolute sovereigns of those days, regarded his subjects as slaves that were in all respects entirely at his disposal, selected a physician of distinction from among the attendants about his court, and ordered him to repair to Persia. The physician was extremely reluctant to go. He had a wife and family, from whom he was very unwilling to be separated; but the orders were imperative, and he must obey. He set out on the journey, therefore, but he secretly resolved to devise some mode of revenging himself on the king for the cruelty of sending him.

His plan of revenge.

He was well received by Cyrus, and, either by his skill as a physician, or from other causes, he acquired great influence at the Persian court. At last he contrived a mode of revenging himself on the Egyptian king for having exiled him from his native land. The king had a daughter, who was a lady of great beauty. Her father was very strongly attached to her. The physician recommended to Cyrus to send to Amasis and demand this daughter in marriage. As, however, Cyrus was already married, the Egyptian princess would, if she came, be his concubine rather than his wife, or, if considered a wife, it could only be a secondary and subordinate place that she could occupy. The physician knew that, under these circumstances, the King of Egypt would be extremely unwilling to send her to Cyrus, while he would yet scarcely dare to refuse; and the hope of plunging him into extreme embarrassment

and distress, by means of such a demand from so powerful a sovereign, was the motive which led the physician to recommend the measure.

Demand of Cyrus.

Cyrus was pleased with the proposal, and sent, accordingly, to make the demand. The king, as the physician had anticipated, could not endure to part with his daughter in such a way, nor did he, on the other hand, dare to incur the displeasure of so powerful a monarch by a direct and open refusal. He finally resolved upon escaping from the difficulty by a stratagem.

Stratagem of the King of Egypt.

There was a young and beautiful captive princess in his court named Nitetis. Her father, whose name was Apries, had been formerly the King of Egypt, but he had been dethroned and killed by Amasis. Since the downfall of her family, Nitetis had been a captive; but, as she was very beautiful and very accomplished, Amasis conceived the design of sending her to Cyrus, under the pretense that she was the daughter whom Cyrus had demanded. He accordingly brought her forth, provided her with the most costly and splendid dresses, loaded her with presents, ordered a large retinue to attend her, and sent her forth to Persia.

Resentment of Cassandane.

Threats of Cambyses.

Cyrus was at first very much pleased with his new bride. Nitetis became, in fact, his principal favorite; though, of course, his other wife, whose name was Cassandane, and her children, Cambyses and Smerdis, were jealous of her, and hated her. One day, a Persian lady was visiting at the court, and as she was standing near Cassandane, and saw her two sons, who were then tall and handsome young men, she expressed her admiration of them, and said to Cassandane, "How proud and happy you must be!" "No," said Cassandane; "on the contrary, I am very miserable; for, though I am the mother of these children, the king neglects and despises me. All his kindness is bestowed on this Egyptian woman." Cambyses, who heard this conversation, sympathized deeply with Cassandane in her resentment. "Mother," said he, "be patient, and I will avenge you. As soon as I am king, I will go to Egypt and turn the whole country upside down."

Future conquests.

In fact, the tendency which there was in the mind of Cambyses to look upon Egypt as the first field of war and conquest for him, so soon as he should succeed to the throne, was encouraged by the influence of his father; for Cyrus, although he was much captivated by the charms of the lady whom the King of Egypt had sent him, was greatly incensed against the king for having practiced upon him such a deception. Besides, all the important countries in Asia were already included within the Persian dominions. It was plain that if any future progress were to be made in extending the empire, the regions of Europe and Africa must be the theatre of it. Egypt seemed the most accessible and vulnerable point beyond the confines of Asia; and thus, though Cyrus himself, being advanced somewhat in years, and interested, moreover, in other projects, was not prepared to undertake an enterprise into Africa himself, he was very willing that such plans should be cherished by his son.

Temperament and character of Cambyses.

Impetuosity of Cambyses.

Cambyses was an ardent, impetuous, and self-willed boy, such as the sons of rich and powerful men are very apt to become. They imbibe, by a sort of sympathy, the ambitious and aspiring spirit of their fathers; and as all their childish caprices and passions are generally indulged, they never learn to submit to control. They become vain, self-conceited, reckless, and cruel. The conqueror who founds an empire, although even his character generally deteriorates very seriously toward the close of his career, still usually knows something of moderation and generosity. His son, however, who inherits

his father's power, seldom inherits the virtues by which the power was acquired. These truths, which we see continually exemplified all around us, on a small scale, in the families of the wealthy and the powerful, were illustrated most conspicuously, in the view of all mankind, in the case of Cyrus and Cambyses. The father was prudent, cautious, wise, and often generous and forbearing. The son grew up headstrong, impetuous, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable. He had the most lofty ideas of his own greatness and power, and he felt a supreme contempt for the rights, and indifference to the happiness of all the world besides. His history gives us an illustration of the worst which the principle of hereditary sovereignty can do, as the best is exemplified in the case of Alfred of England.

Preparations for the Egyptian war.

Cambyses, immediately after his father's death, began to make arrangements for the Egyptian invasion. The first thing to be determined was the mode of transporting his armies thither. Egypt is a long and narrow valley, with the rocks and deserts of Arabia on one side, and those of Sahara on the other. There is no convenient mode of access to it except by sea, and Cambyses had no naval force sufficient for a maritime expedition.

Desertion of Phanes.

His narrow escape.

While he was revolving the subject in his mind, there arrived in his capital of Susa, where he was then residing, a deserter from the army of Amasis in Egypt. The name of this deserter was Phanes. He was a Greek, having been the commander of a body of Greek troops who were employed by Amasis as auxiliaries in his army. He had had a quarrel with Amasis, and had fled to Persia, intending to join Cambyses in the expedition which he was contemplating, in order to revenge himself on the Egyptian king. Phanes said, in telling his story, that he had had a very narrow escape from Egypt; for, as soon as Amasis had heard that he had fled, he dispatched one of his swiftest vessels, a galley of three banks of oars, in hot pursuit of the fugitive. The galley overtook the vessel in which Phanes had taken passage just as it was landing in Asia Minor. The Egyptian officers seized it and made Phanes prisoner. They immediately began to make their preparations for the return voyage, putting Phanes, in the mean time, under the charge of guards, who were instructed to keep him very safely. Phanes, however, cultivated a good understanding with his guards, and presently invited them to drink wine with him. In the end, he got them intoxicated, and while they were in that state he made his escape from them, and then, traveling with great secrecy and caution until he was beyond their reach, he succeeded in making his way to Cambyses in Susa.

Information given by Phanes.

Treaty with the Arabian king.

Phanes gave Cambyses a great deal of information in respect to the geography of Egypt, the proper points of attack, the character and resources of the king, and communicated, likewise, a great many other particulars which it was very important that Cambyses should know. He recommended that Cambyses should proceed to Egypt by land, through Arabia; and that, in order to secure a safe passage, he should send first to the King of the Arabs, by a formal embassy, asking permission to cross his territories with an army, and engaging the Arabians to aid him, if possible, in the transit. Cambyses did this. The Arabs were very willing to join in any projected hostilities against the Egyptians; they offered Cambyses a free passage, and agreed to aid his army on their march. To the faithful fulfillment of these stipulations the Arab chief bound himself by a treaty, executed with the most solemn forms and ceremonies.

Plan for providing water.

Account of Herodotus.

The great difficulty to be encountered in traversing the deserts which Cambyses would have to cross on his way to Egypt was the want of water. To provide for this necessity, the king of the Arabs sent a vast number of camels into the desert, laden with great sacks or bags full of water. These camels were sent forward just before the army of Cambyses came on, and they deposited their supplies along the route at the points where they would be most needed. Herodotus, the Greek traveler, who made a journey into Egypt not a great many years after these transactions, and who wrote subsequently a full description of what he saw and heard there, gives an account of another method by which the Arab king was said to have conveyed water into the desert, and that was by a canal or pipe, made of the skins of oxen, which he laid along the ground, from a certain river of his dominions, to a distance of twelve days' journey over the sands! This story Herodotus says he did not believe, though elsewhere in the course of his history he gravely relates, as true history, a thousand tales infinitely more improbable than the idea of a leathern pipe or hose like this to serve for a conduit of water.

A great battle.
Defeat of the Egyptians.

By some means or other, at all events, the Arab chief provided supplies of water in the desert for Cambyses's army, and the troops made the passage safely. They arrived, at length, on the frontiers of Egypt. Here they found that Amasis, the king, was dead, and Psammenitus, his son, had succeeded him. Psammenitus came forward to meet the invaders. A great battle was fought. The Egyptians were routed. Psammenitus fled up the Nile to the city of Memphis, taking with him such broken remnants of his army as he could get together after the battle, and feeling extremely incensed and exasperated against the invader. In fact, Cambyses had now no excuse or pretext whatever for waging such a war against Egypt. The monarch who had deceived his father was dead, and there had never been any cause of complaint against his son or against the Egyptian people. Psammenitus, therefore, regarded the invasion of Egypt by Cambyses as a wanton and wholly unjustifiable aggression, and he determined, in his own mind, that such invaders deserved no mercy, and that he would show them none. Soon after this, a galley on the river, belonging to Cambyses, containing a crew of two hundred men, fell into his hands. The Egyptians, in their rage, tore these Persians all to pieces. This exasperated Cambyses in his turn, and the war went on, attended by the most atrocious cruelties on both sides.

Inhuman conduct of Cambyses.

In fact, Cambyses, in this Egyptian campaign, pursued such a career of inhuman and reckless folly, that people at last considered him insane. He began with some small semblance of moderation, but he proceeded, in the end, to the perpetration of the most terrible excesses of violence and wrong.

His treatment of Psammenitus.
The train of captive maidens.

As to his moderation, his treatment of Psammenitus personally is almost the only instance that we can record. In the course of the war, Psammenitus and all his family fell into Cambyses's hands as captives. A few days afterward, Cambyses conducted the unhappy king without the gates of the city to exhibit a spectacle to him. The spectacle was that of his beloved daughter, clothed in the garments of a slave, and attended by a company of other maidens, the daughters of the nobles and other persons of distinction belonging to his court, all going down to the river, with heavy jugs, to draw water. The fathers of all these hapless maidens had been brought out with Psammenitus to witness the degradation and misery of their children. The maidens cried and sobbed aloud as they went along, overwhelmed with shame and terror. Their fathers manifested the utmost agitation and distress. Cambyses stood smiling by, highly enjoying the spectacle. Psammenitus alone appeared unmoved. He gazed on the scene silent, motionless, and with a countenance which indicated no active suffering; he seemed to be in a state of stupefaction and despair. Cambyses was disappointed, and

his pleasure was marred at finding that his victim did not feel more acutely the sting of the torment with which he was endeavoring to goad him.

The young men.
Scenes of distress and suffering.
Composure of Psammenitus.

When this train had gone by, another came. It was a company of young men, with halters about their necks, going to execution. Cambyses had ordered that for every one of the crew of his galley that the Egyptians had killed, ten Egyptians should be executed. This proportion would require two thousand victims, as there had been two hundred in the crew. These victims were to be selected from among the sons of the leading families; and their parents, after having seen their delicate and gentle daughters go to their servile toil, were now next to behold their sons march in a long and terrible array to execution. The son of Psammenitus was at the head of the column. The Egyptian parents who stood around Psammenitus wept and lamented aloud, as one after another saw his own child in the train. Psammenitus himself, however, remained as silent and motionless, and with a countenance as vacant as before. Cambyses was again disappointed. The pleasure which the exhibition afforded him was incomplete without visible manifestations of suffering in the victim for whose torture it was principally designed.

After this train of captives had passed, there came a mixed collection of wretched and miserable men, such as the siege and sacking of a city always produces in countless numbers. Among these was a venerable man whom Psammenitus recognized as one of his friends. He had been a man of wealth and high station; he had often been at the court of the king, and had been entertained at his table. He was now, however, reduced to the last extremity of distress, and was begging of the people something to keep him from starving. The sight of this man in such a condition seemed to awaken the king from his blank and death-like despair. He called his old friend by name in a tone of astonishment and pity, and burst into tears.

Feelings of the father.
His explanation of them.

Cambyses, observing this, sent a messenger to Psammenitus to inquire what it meant. "He wishes to know," said the messenger, "how it happens that you could see your own daughter set at work as a slave, and your son led away to execution unmoved, and yet feel so much commiseration for the misfortunes of a stranger." We might suppose that any one possessing the ordinary susceptibilities of the human soul would have understood without an explanation the meaning of this, though it is not surprising that such a heartless monster as Cambyses did not comprehend it. Psammenitus sent him word that he could not help weeping for his friend, but that his distress and anguish on account of his children were too great for tears.

Cambyses relents.

The Persians who were around Cambyses began now to feel a strong sentiment of compassion for the unhappy king, and to intercede with Cambyses in his favor. They begged him, too, to spare Psammenitus's son. It will interest those of our readers who have perused our history of Cyrus to know that Crœsus, the captive king of Lydia, whom they will recollect to have been committed to Cambyses's charge by his father, just before the close of his life, when he was setting forth on his last fatal expedition, and who accompanied Cambyses on this invasion of Egypt, was present on this occasion, and was one of the most earnest interceders in Psammenitus's favor. Cambyses allowed himself to be persuaded. They sent off a messenger to order the execution of the king's son to be stayed; but he arrived too late. The unhappy prince had already fallen. Cambyses was so far appeased by the influence of these facts, that he abstained from doing Psammenitus or his family any further injury.

His treatment of the body of Amasis.

He, however, advanced up the Nile, ravaging and plundering the country as he went on, and at length, in the course of his conquests, he gained possession of the tomb in which the embalmed body of Amasis was deposited. He ordered this body to be taken out of its sarcophagus, and treated with every mark of ignominy. His soldiers, by his orders, beat it with rods, as if it could still feel, and goaded it, and cut it with swords. They pulled the hair out of the head by the roots, and loaded the lifeless form with every conceivable mark of insult and ignominy. Finally, Cambyses ordered the mutilated remains that were left to be burned, which was a procedure as abhorrent to the ideas and feelings of the Egyptians as could possibly be devised.

Cambyses's desecrations.

The sacred bull Apis.

Cambyses took every opportunity to insult the religious, or as, perhaps, we ought to call them, the superstitious feelings of the Egyptians. He broke into their temples, desecrated their altars, and subjected every thing which they held most sacred to insult and ignominy. Among their objects of religious veneration was the sacred bull called Apis. This animal was selected from time to time, from the country at large, by the priests, by means of certain marks which they pretended to discover upon its body, and which indicated a divine and sacred character. The sacred bull thus found was kept in a magnificent temple, and attended and fed in a most sumptuous manner. In serving him, the attendants used vessels of gold.

Cambyses stabs the sacred bull.

Cambyses arrived at the city where Apis was kept at a time when the priests were celebrating some sacred occasion with festivities and rejoicings. He was himself then returning from an unsuccessful expedition which he had made, and, as he entered the town, stung with vexation and anger at his defeat, the gladness and joy which the Egyptians manifested in their ceremonies served only to irritate him, and to make him more angry than ever. He killed the priests who were officiating. He then demanded to be taken into the edifice to see the sacred animal, and there, after insulting the feelings of the worshipers in every possible way by ridicule and scornful words, he stabbed the innocent bull with his dagger. The animal died of the wound, and the whole country was filled with horror and indignation. The people believed that this deed would most assuredly bring down upon the impious perpetrator of it the judgments of heaven.

His mad expeditions.

The sand storm.

Cambyses organized, while he was in Egypt, several mad expeditions into the surrounding countries. In a fit of passion, produced by an unsatisfactory answer to an embassy, he set off suddenly, and without any proper preparation, to march into Ethiopia. The provisions of his army were exhausted before he had performed a fifth part of the march. Still, in his infatuation, he determined to go on. The soldiers subsisted for a time on such vegetables as they could find by the way; when these failed, they slaughtered and ate their beasts of burden; and finally, in the extremity of their famine, they began to kill and devour one another; then, at length, Cambyses concluded to return. He sent off, too, at one time, a large army across the desert toward the Temple of Jupiter Ammon, without any of the necessary precautions for such a march. This army never reached their destination, and they never returned. The people of the Oasis said that they were overtaken by a sand storm in the desert, and were all overwhelmed.

Cambyses a wine-bibber.

Brutal act of Cambyses.

There was a certain officer in attendance on Cambyses named Prexaspes. He was a sort of confidential friend and companion of the king; and his son, who was a fair, and graceful, and accomplished youth, was the king's cup-bearer, which was an office of great consideration and honor. One day Cambyses asked Prexaspes what the Persians generally thought of him. Prexaspes replied that they thought and spoke well of him in all respects but one. The king wished to know what the exception was. Prexaspes rejoined, that it was the general opinion that he was too much addicted to wine. Cambyses was offended at this reply; and, under the influence of the feeling, so wholly unreasonable and absurd, which so often leads men to be angry with the innocent medium through which there comes to them any communication which they do not like, he determined to punish Prexaspes for his freedom. He ordered his son, therefore, the cup-bearer, to take his place against the wall on the other side of the room. "Now," said he, "I will put what the Persians say to the test." As he said this, he took up a bow and arrow which were at his side, and began to fit the arrow to the string. "If," said he, "I do not shoot him exactly through the heart, it shall prove that the Persians are right. If I do, then they are wrong, as it will show that I do not drink so much as to make my hand unsteady." So saying, he drew the bow, the arrow flew through the air and pierced the poor boy's breast. He fell, and Cambyses coolly ordered the attendants to open the body, and let Prexaspes see whether the arrow had not gone through the heart.

He is deemed insane.

These, and a constant succession of similar acts of atrocious and reckless cruelty and folly, led the world to say that Cambyses was insane.

Chapter II. The End of Cambyses

B.C. 523-522

Cambyses's profligate conduct.
He marries his own sisters.

Among the other acts of profligate wickedness which have blackened indelibly and forever Cambyses's name, he married two of his own sisters, and brought one of them with him to Egypt as his wife. The natural instincts of all men, except those whose early life has been given up to the most shameless and dissolute habits of vice, are sufficient to preserve them from such crimes as these. Cambyses himself felt, it seems, some misgivings when contemplating the first of these marriages; and he sent to a certain council of judges, whose province it was to interpret the laws, asking them their opinion of the rightfulness of such a marriage. Kings ask the opinion of their legal advisers in such cases, not because they really wish to know whether the act in question is right or wrong, but because, having themselves determined upon the performance of it, they wish their counselors to give it a sort of legal sanction, in order to justify the deed, and diminish the popular odium which it might otherwise incur.

Consultation of the Persian judges.
Their opinion.

The Persian judges whom Cambyses consulted on this occasion understood very well what was expected of them. After a grave deliberation, they returned answer to the king that, though they could find no law allowing a man to marry his sister, they found many which authorized a king of Persia to do whatever he thought best. Cambyses accordingly carried his plan into execution. He married first the older sister, whose name was Atossa. Atossa became subsequently a personage of great historical distinction. The daughter of Cyrus, the wife of Darius, and the mother of Xerxes, she was the link that bound together the three most magnificent potentates of the whole Eastern world. How far these sisters were willing participators in the guilt of their incestuous marriages we can not now know. The one who went with Cambyses into Egypt was of a humane, and gentle, and timid disposition, being in these respects wholly unlike her brother; and it may be that she merely yielded, in the transaction of her marriage, to her brother's arbitrary and imperious will.

Smerdis.
Jealousy of Cambyses.
The two magi.

Besides this sister, Cambyses had brought his brother Smerdis with him into Egypt. Smerdis was younger than Cambyses, but he was superior to him in strength and personal accomplishments. Cambyses was very jealous of this superiority. He did not dare to leave his brother in Persia, to manage the government in his stead during his absence, lest he should take advantage of the temporary power thus committed to his hands, and usurp the throne altogether. He decided, therefore, to bring Smerdis with him into Egypt, and to leave the government of the state in the hands of a regency composed of two *magi*. These magi were public officers of distinction, but, having no hereditary claims to the crown, Cambyses thought there would be little danger of their attempting to usurp it. It happened, however, that the name of one of these magi was Smerdis. This coincidence between the magian's name and that of the prince led, in the end, as will presently be seen, to very important consequences.

Cambyses suspicious.

The uneasiness and jealousy which Cambyses felt in respect to his brother was not wholly allayed by the arrangement which he thus made for keeping him in his army, and so under his own personal observation and command. Smerdis evinced, on various occasions, so much strength and skill, that Cambyses feared his influence among the officers and soldiers, and was rendered continually watchful, suspicious, and afraid. A circumstance at last occurred which excited his jealousy more than ever, and he determined to send Smerdis home again to Persia. The circumstance was this:

He plans an invasion of Ethiopia.

After Cambyses had succeeded in obtaining full possession of Egypt, he formed, among his other wild and desperate schemes, the design of invading the territories of a nation of Ethiopians who lived in the interior of Africa, around and beyond the sources of the Nile. The Ethiopians were celebrated for their savage strength and bravery. Cambyses wished to obtain information respecting them and their country before setting out on his expedition against them, and he determined to send spies into their country to obtain it. But, as Ethiopia was a territory so remote, and as its institutions and customs, and the language, the dress, and the manners of its inhabitants were totally different from those of all the other nations of the earth, and were almost wholly unknown to the Persian army, it was impossible to send Persians in disguise, with any hope that they could enter and explore the country without being discovered. It was very doubtful, in fact, whether, if such spies were to be sent, they could succeed in reaching Ethiopia at all.

Island of Elephantine.
The Ichthyophagi.
Classes of savage nations.

Now there was, far up the Nile, near the cataracts, at a place where the river widens and forms a sort of bay, a large and fertile island called Elephantine, which was inhabited by a half-savage tribe called the Ichthyophagi. They lived mainly by fishing on the river, and, consequently, they had many boats, and were accustomed to make long excursions up and down the stream. Their name was, in fact, derived from their occupation. It was a Greek word, and might be translated "Fishermen."¹ The manners and customs of half-civilized or savage nations depend entirely, of course, upon the modes in which they procure their subsistence. Some depend on hunting wild beasts, some on rearing flocks and herds of tame animals, some on cultivating the ground, and some on fishing in rivers or in the sea. These four different modes of procuring food result in as many totally diverse modes of life: it is a curious fact, however, that while a nation of hunters differs very essentially from a nation of herdsmen or of fishermen, though they may live, perhaps, in the same neighborhood with them, still, all nations of hunters, however widely they may be separated in geographical position, very strongly resemble one another in character, in customs, in institutions, and in all the usages of life. It is so, moreover, with all the other types of national constitution mentioned above. The Greeks observed these characteristics of the various savage tribes with which they became acquainted, and whenever they met with a tribe that lived by fishing, they called them Ichthyophagi.

Embassadors sent to Ethiopia.

Cambyses sent to the Ichthyophagi of the island of Elephantine, requiring them to furnish him with a number of persons acquainted with the route to Ethiopia and with the Ethiopian language, that he might send them as an embassy. He also provided some presents to be sent as a token of friendship to the Ethiopian king. The presents were, however, only a pretext, to enable the ambassadors, who

¹ Literally, fish-eaters.

were, in fact, spies, to go to the capital and court of the Ethiopian monarch in safety, and bring back to Cambyses all the information which they should be able to obtain.

The presents.

The presents consisted of such toys and ornaments as they thought would most please the fancy of a savage king. There were some purple vestments of a very rich and splendid dye, and a golden chain for the neck, golden bracelets for the wrists, an alabaster box of very precious perfumes, and other similar trinkets and toys. There was also a large vessel filled with wine.

The Ichthyophagi took these presents, and set out on their expedition. After a long and toilsome voyage and journey, they came to the country of the Ethiopians, and delivered their presents, together with the message which Cambyses had intrusted to them. The presents, they said, had been sent by Cambyses as a token of his desire to become the friend and ally of the Ethiopian king.

The Ethiopian king detects the imposture.

The Ethiopian king's opinion of Cambyses's presents.

The king, instead of being deceived by this hypocrisy, detected the imposture at once. He knew very well, he said, what was the motive of Cambyses in sending such an embassy to him, and he should advise Cambyses to be content with his own dominions, instead of planning aggressions of violence, and schemes and stratagems of deceit against his neighbors, in order to get possession of theirs. He then began to look at the presents which the ambassadors had brought, which, however, he appeared very soon to despise. The purple vest first attracted his attention. He asked whether that was the true, natural color of the stuff, or a false one. The messengers told him that the linen was dyed, and began to explain the process to him. The mind of the savage potentate, however, instead of being impressed, as the messengers supposed he would have been through their description, with a high idea of the excellence and superiority of Persian art, only despised the false show of what he considered an artificial and fictitious beauty. "The beauty of Cambyses's dresses," said he, "is as deceitful, it seems, as the fair show of his professions of friendship." As to the golden bracelets and necklaces, the king looked upon them with contempt. He thought that they were intended for fetters and chains, and said that, however well they might answer among the effeminate Persians, they were wholly insufficient to confine such sinews as he had to deal with. The wine, however, he liked. He drank it with great pleasure, and told the Ichthyophagi that it was the only article among all their presents that was worth receiving.

The Ethiopian bow.

In return for the presents which Cambyses had sent him, the King of the Ethiopians, who was a man of prodigious size and strength, took down his bow and gave it to the Ichthyophagi, telling them to carry it to Cambyses as a token of his defiance, and to ask him to see if he could find a man in all his army who could bend it. "Tell Cambyses," he added, "that when his soldiers are able to bend such bows as that, it will be time for him to think of invading the territories of the Ethiopians; and that, in the mean time, he ought to consider himself very fortunate that the Ethiopians were not grasping and ambitious enough to attempt the invasion of his."

Return of the Ichthyophagi.

When the Ichthyophagi returned to Cambyses with this message, the strongest men in the Persian camp were of course greatly interested in examining and trying the bow. Smerdis was the only one that could be found who was strong enough to bend it; and he, by the superiority to the others which he thus evinced, gained great renown. Cambyses was filled with jealousy and anger. He determined to send Smerdis back again to Persia. "It will be better," thought he to himself, "to incur whatever danger there may be of his exciting revolt at home, than to have him present in my court, subjecting me to continual mortification and chagrin by the perpetual parade of his superiority."

Jealousy of Cambyses.
He orders Smerdis to be murdered.

His mind was, however, not at ease after his brother had gone. Jealousy and suspicion in respect to Smerdis perplexed his waking thoughts and troubled his dreams. At length, one night, he thought he saw Smerdis seated on a royal throne in Persia, his form expanded supernaturally to such a prodigious size that he touched the heavens with his head. The next day, Cambyses, supposing that the dream portended danger that Smerdis would be one day in possession of the throne, determined to put a final and perpetual end to all these troubles and fears, and he sent for an officer of his court, Prexaspes – the same whose son he shot through the heart with an arrow, as described in the last chapter – and commanded him to proceed immediately to Persia, and there to find Smerdis, and kill him. The murder of Prexaspes's son, though related in the last chapter as an illustration of Cambyses's character, did not actually take place till after Prexaspes returned from this expedition.

Prexaspes went to Persia, and executed the orders of the king by the assassination of Smerdis. There are different accounts of the mode which he adopted for accomplishing his purpose. One is, that he contrived some way to drown him in the sea; another, that he poisoned him; and a third, that he killed him in the forests, when he was out on a hunting excursion. At all events, the deed was done, and Prexaspes went back to Cambyses, and reported to him that he had nothing further to fear from his brother's ambition.

Cambyses grows more cruel.
Twelve noblemen buried alive.
Cambyses's cruelty to his sister.

In the mean time, Cambyses went on from bad to worse in his government, growing every day more despotic and tyrannical, and abandoning himself to fits of cruelty and passion which became more and more excessive and insane. At one time, on some slight provocation, he ordered twelve distinguished noblemen of his court to be buried alive. It is astonishing that there can be institutions and arrangements in the social state which will give one man such an ascendancy over others that such commands can be obeyed. On another occasion, Cambyses's sister and wife, who had mourned the death of her brother Smerdis, ventured a reproach to Cambyses for having destroyed him. She was sitting at table, with some plant or flower in her hand, which she slowly picked to pieces, putting the fragments on the table. She asked Cambyses whether he thought the flower looked fairest and best in fragments, or in its original and natural integrity. "It looked best, certainly," Cambyses said, "when it was whole." "And yet," said she, "you have begun to take to pieces and destroy our family, as I have destroyed this flower." Cambyses sprang upon his unhappy sister, on hearing this reproof, with the ferocity of a tiger. He threw her down and leaped upon her. The attendants succeeded in rescuing her and bearing her away; but she had received a fatal injury. She fell immediately into a premature and unnatural sickness, and died.

The venerable Crœsus.

These fits of sudden and terrible passion to which Cambyses was subject, were often followed, when they had passed by, as is usual in such cases, with remorse and misery; and sometimes the officers of Cambyses, anticipating a change in their master's feelings, did not execute his cruel orders, but concealed the object of his blind and insensate vengeance until the paroxysm was over. They did this once in the case of Crœsus. Crœsus, who was now a venerable man, advanced in years, had been for a long time the friend and faithful counselor of Cambyses's father. He had known Cambyses himself from his boyhood, and had been charged by his father to watch over him and counsel him, and aid him, on all occasions which might require it, with his experience and wisdom. Cambyses, too, had been solemnly charged by his father Cyrus, at the last interview that he had with him before

his death, to guard and protect Crœsus, as his father's ancient and faithful friend, and to treat him, as long as he lived, with the highest consideration and honor.

His advice to Cambyses.

Under these circumstances, Crœsus considered himself justified in remonstrating one day with Cambyses against his excesses and his cruelty. He told him that he ought not to give himself up to the control of such violent and impetuous passions; that, though his Persian soldiers and subjects had borne with him thus far, he might, by excessive oppression and cruelty, exhaust their forbearance and provoke them to revolt against him, and that thus he might suddenly lose his power, through his intemperate and inconsiderate use of it. Crœsus apologized for offering these counsels, saying that he felt bound to warn Cambyses of his danger, in obedience to the injunctions of Cyrus, his father.

Cambyses's rage at Crœsus.

He attempts to kill him.

Cambyses fell into a violent passion at hearing these words. He told Crœsus that he was amazed at his presumption in daring to offer him advice, and then began to load his venerable counselor with the bitterest invectives and reproaches. He taunted him with his own misfortunes, in losing, as he had done, years before, his own kingdom of Lydia, and then accused him of having been the means, through his foolish counsels, of leading his father, Cyrus, into the worst of the difficulties which befell him toward the close of his life. At last, becoming more and more enraged by the reaction upon himself of his own angry utterance, he told Crœsus that he had hated him for a long time, and for a long time had wished to punish him; "and now," said he, "you have given me an opportunity." So saying, he seized his bow, and began to fit an arrow to the string. Crœsus fled. Cambyses ordered his attendants to pursue him, and when they had taken him, to kill him. The officers knew that Cambyses would regret his rash and reckless command as soon as his anger should have subsided, and so, instead of slaying Crœsus, they concealed him. A few days after, when the tyrant began to express his remorse and sorrow at having destroyed his venerable friend in the heat of passion, and to mourn his death, they told him that Crœsus was still alive. They had ventured, they said, to save him, till they could ascertain whether it was the king's real and deliberate determination that he must die. The king was overjoyed to find Crœsus still alive, but he would not forgive those who had been instrumental in saving him. He ordered every one of them to be executed.

The declaration of the oracle.

Ecbatane, Susa, and Babylon.

Cambyses was the more reckless and desperate in these tyrannical cruelties because he believed that he possessed a sort of charmed life. He had consulted an oracle, it seems, in Media, in respect to his prospects of life, and the oracle had informed him that he would die at Ecbatane. Now Ecbatane was one of the three great capitals of his empire, Susa and Babylon being the others. Ecbatane was the most northerly of these cities, and the most remote from danger. Babylon and Susa were the points where the great transactions of government chiefly centered, while Ecbatane was more particularly the private residence of the kings. It was their refuge in danger, their retreat in sickness and age. In a word, Susa was their seat of government, Babylon their great commercial emporium, but Ecbatane was their home.

And thus as the oracle, when Cambyses inquired in respect to the circumstances of his death, had said that it was decreed by the fates that he should die at Ecbatane, it meant, as he supposed, that he should die in peace, in his bed, at the close of the usual period allotted to the life of man. Considering thus that the fates had removed all danger of a sudden and violent death from his path, he abandoned himself to his career of vice and folly, remembering only the substance of the oracle, while the particular form of words in which it was expressed passed from his mind.

Cambyses returns northward.

He enters Syria.

A herald proclaims Smerdis.

At length Cambyses, after completing his conquests in Egypt, returned to the northward along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, until he came into Syria. The province of Galilee, so often mentioned in the sacred Scriptures, was a part of Syria. In traversing Galilee at the head of the detachment of troops that was accompanying him, Cambyses came, one day, to a small town, and encamped there. The town itself was of so little importance that Cambyses did not, at the time of his arriving at it, even know its name. His encampment at the place, however, was marked by a very memorable event, namely, he met with a herald here, who was traveling through Syria, saying that he had been sent from Susa to proclaim to the people of Syria that Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, had assumed the throne, and to enjoin upon them all to obey no orders except such as should come from him!

Cambyses had supposed that Smerdis was dead. Prexaspes, when he had returned from Susa, had reported that he had killed him. He now, however, sent for Prexaspes, and demanded of him what this proclamation could mean. Prexaspes renewed, and insisted upon, his declaration that Smerdis was dead. He had destroyed him with his own hands, and had seen him buried. "If the dead can rise from the grave," added Prexaspes, "then Smerdis may perhaps, raise a revolt and appear against you; but not otherwise."

The herald seized.

Prexaspes then recommended that the king should send and seize the herald, and inquire particularly of him in respect to the government in whose name he was acting. Cambyses did so. The herald was taken and brought before the king. On being questioned whether it was true that Smerdis had really assumed the government and commissioned him to make proclamation of the fact, he replied that it was so. He had not seen Smerdis himself, he said, for he kept himself shut up very closely in his palace; but he was informed of his accession by one of the magians whom Cambyses had left in command. It was by him, he said, that he had been commissioned to proclaim Smerdis as king.

Probable explanation.

Rage of Cambyses.

Prexaspes then said that he had no doubt that the two magians whom Cambyses had left in charge of the government had contrived to seize the throne. He reminded Cambyses that the name of one of them was Smerdis, and that probably that was the Smerdis who was usurping the supreme command. Cambyses said that he was convinced that this supposition was true. His dream, in which he had seen a vision of Smerdis, with his head reaching to the heavens, referred, he had no doubt, to the magian Smerdis, and not to his brother. He began bitterly to reproach himself for having caused his innocent brother to be put to death; but the remorse which he thus felt for his crime, in assassinating an imaginary rival, soon gave way to rage and resentment against the real usurper. He called for his horse, and began to mount him in hot haste, to give immediate orders, and make immediate preparations for marching to Susa.

Cambyses mortally wounded.

As he bounded into the saddle, with his mind in this state of reckless desperation, the sheath, by some accident or by some carelessness caused by his headlong haste, fell from his sword, and the naked point of the weapon pierced his thigh. The attendants took him from his horse, and conveyed him again to his tent. The wound, on examination, proved to be a very dangerous one, and the strong passions, the vexation, the disappointment, the impotent rage, which were agitating the mind of the patient, exerted an influence extremely unfavorable to recovery. Cambyses, terrified at the prospect of death, asked what was the name of the town where he was lying. They told him it was Ecbatane.

His remorse and despair.

He had never thought before of the possibility that there might be some other Ecbatane besides his splendid royal retreat in Media; but now, when he learned that was the name of the place where he was then encamped, he felt sure that his hour was come, and he was overwhelmed with remorse and despair.

He suffered, too, inconceivable pain and anguish from his wound. The sword had pierced to the bone, and the inflammation which had supervened was of the worst character. After some days, the acuteness of the agony which he at first endured passed gradually away, though the extent of the injury resulting from the wound was growing every day greater and more hopeless. The sufferer lay, pale, emaciated, and wretched, on his couch, his mind, in every interval of bodily agony, filling up the void with the more dreadful sufferings of horror and despair.

Cambyses calls his nobles about him.

His dying declaration.

At length, on the twentieth day after his wound had been received, he called the leading nobles of his court and officers of his army about his bedside, and said to them that he was about to die, and that he was compelled, by the calamity which had befallen him, to declare to them what he would otherwise have continued to keep concealed. The person who had usurped the throne under the name of Smerdis, he now said, was not, and could not be, his brother Smerdis, the son of Cyrus. He then proceeded to give them an account of the manner in which his fears in respect to his brother had been excited by his dream, and of the desperate remedy that he had resorted to in ordering him to be killed. He believed, he said, that the usurper was Smerdis the magian, whom he had left as one of the regents when he set out on his Egyptian campaign. He urged them, therefore, not to submit to his sway, but to go back to Media, and if they could not conquer him and put him down by open war, to destroy him by deceit and stratagem, or in any way whatever by which the end could be accomplished. Cambyses urged this with so much of the spirit of hatred and revenge beaming in his hollow and glassy eye as to show that sickness, pain, and the approach of death, which had made so total a change in the wretched sufferer's outward condition, had altered nothing within.

Death of Cambyses.

Very soon after making this communication to his nobles, Cambyses expired.

His dying declaration discredited.

It will well illustrate the estimate which those who knew him best, formed of this great hero's character, to state, that those who heard this solemn declaration did not believe one word of it from beginning to end. They supposed that the whole story which the dying tyrant had told them, although he had scarcely breath enough left to tell it, was a fabrication, dictated by his fraternal jealousy and hate. They believed that it was really the true Smerdis who had been proclaimed king, and that Cambyses had invented, in his dying moments, the story of his having killed him, in order to prevent the Persians from submitting peaceably to his reign.

Chapter III. Smerdis the Magian

B.C. 520

Usurpation of the magians.
Circumstances favoring it.

Cambyses and his friends had been right in their conjectures that it was Smerdis the magian who had usurped the Persian throne. This Smerdis resembled, it was said, the son of Cyrus in his personal appearance as well as in name. The other magian who had been associated with him in the regency when Cambyses set out from Persia on his Egyptian campaign was his brother. His name was Patizithes. When Cyrus had been some time absent, these magians, having in the mean time, perhaps, heard unfavorable accounts of his conduct and character, and knowing the effect which such wanton tyranny must have in alienating from him the allegiance of his subjects, conceived the design of taking possession of the empire in their own name. The great distance of Cambyses and his army from home, and his long-continued absence, favored this plan. Their own position, too, as they were already in possession of the capitals and the fortresses of the country, aided them; and then the name of Smerdis, being the same with that of the brother of Cambyses, was a circumstance that greatly promoted the success of the undertaking. In addition to all these general advantages, the cruelty of Cambyses was the means of furnishing them with a most opportune occasion for putting their plans into execution.

Murder of Smerdis not known.
He is supposed to be alive.

The reader will recollect that, as was related in the last chapter, Cambyses first sent his brother Smerdis home, and afterward, when alarmed by his dream, he sent Prexaspes to murder him. Now the return of Smerdis was publicly and generally known, while his assassination by Prexaspes was kept a profound secret. Even the Persians connected with Cambyses's court in Egypt had not heard of the perpetration of this crime, until Cambyses confessed it on his dying bed, and even then, as was stated in the last chapter, they did not believe it. It is not probable that it was known in Media and Persia; so that, after Prexaspes accomplished his work, and returned to Cambyses with the report of it, it was probably generally supposed that his brother was still alive, and was residing somewhere in one or another of the royal palaces.

Precautions taken by Smerdis.
Effect of Cambyses's measures.

Such royal personages were often accustomed to live thus, in a state of great seclusion, spending their time in effeminate pleasures within the walls of their palaces, parks, and gardens. When the royal Smerdis, therefore, secretly and suddenly disappeared, it would be very easy for the magian Smerdis, with the collusion of a moderate number of courtiers and attendants, to take his place, especially if he continued to live in retirement, and exhibited himself as little as possible to public view. Thus it was that Cambyses himself, by the very crimes which he committed to shield himself from all danger of a revolt, opened the way which specially invited it, and almost insured its success. Every particular step that he took, too, helped to promote the end. His sending Smerdis home; his waiting an interval, and then sending Prexaspes to destroy him; his ordering his assassination to be secret – these, and all the other attendant circumstances, were only so many preliminary steps, preparing the way for the

success of the revolution which was to accomplish his ruin. He was, in a word, his own destroyer. Like other wicked men, he found, in the end, that the schemes of wickedness which he had malignantly aimed at the destruction of others, had been all the time slowly and surely working out his own.

Opinion in regard to Smerdis.
Acquiescence of the people.

The people of Persia, therefore, were prepared by Cambyses's own acts to believe that the usurper Smerdis was really Cyrus's son, and, next to Cambyses, the heir to the throne. The army of Cambyses, too, in Egypt, believed the same. It was natural that they should do so for they placed no confidence whatever in Cambyses's dying declarations; and since intelligence, which seemed to be official, came from Susa declaring that Smerdis was still alive, and that he had actually taken possession of the throne, there was no apparent reason for doubting the fact. Besides, Prexaspes, as soon as Cambyses was dead, considered it safer for him to deny than to confess having murdered the prince. He therefore declared that Cambyses's story was false, and that he had no doubt that Smerdis, the monarch in whose name the government was administered at Susa, was the son of Cyrus, the true and rightful heir to the throne. Thus all parties throughout the empire acquiesced peaceably in what they supposed to be the legitimate succession.

Dangerous situation of Smerdis.
Arrangement with Patizithes.

In the mean time, the usurper had placed himself in an exceedingly dizzy and precarious situation, and one which it would require a great deal of address and skillful management to sustain. The plan arranged between himself and his brother for a division of the advantages which they had secured by their joint and common cunning was, that Smerdis was to enjoy the ease and pleasure, and Patizithes the substantial power of the royalty which they had so stealthily seized. This was the safest plan. Smerdis, by living secluded, and devoting himself to retired and private pleasures, was the more likely to escape public observation; while Patizithes, acting as his prime minister of state, could attend councils, issue orders, review troops, dispatch embassies, and perform all the other outward functions of supreme command, with safety as well as pleasure. Patizithes seems to have been, in fact, the soul of the whole plan. He was ambitious and aspiring in character, and if he could only himself enjoy the actual exercise of royal power, he was willing that his brother should enjoy the honor of possessing it. Patizithes, therefore, governed the realm, acting, however, in all that he did, in Smerdis's name.

Smerdis lives in retirement.
Special grounds of apprehension.

Smerdis, on his part, was content to take possession of the palaces, the parks, and the gardens of Media and Persia, and to live in them in retired and quiet luxury and splendor. He appeared seldom in public, and then only under such circumstances as should not expose him to any close observation on the part of the spectators. His figure, air, and manner, and the general cast of his countenance, were very much like those of the prince whom he was attempting to personate. There was one mark, however, by which he thought that there was danger that he might be betrayed, and that was, his ears had been cut off. This had been done many years before, by command of Cyrus, on account of some offense of which he had been guilty. The marks of the mutilation could, indeed, on public occasions, be concealed by the turban, or helmet, or other head-dress which he wore; but in private there was great danger either that the loss of the ears, or the studied effort to conceal it, should be observed. Smerdis was, therefore, very careful to avoid being seen in private, by keeping himself closely secluded. He shut himself up in the apartments of his palace at Susa, within the citadel, and never invited the Persian nobles to visit him there.

Cambyses's wives.

Among the other means of luxury and pleasure which Smerdis found in the royal palaces, and which he appropriated to his own enjoyment, were Cambyses's wives. In those times, Oriental princes and potentates – as is, in fact, the case at the present day, in many Oriental countries – possessed a great number of wives, who were bound to them by different sorts of matrimonial ties, more or less permanent, and bringing them into relations more or less intimate with their husband and sovereign. These wives were in many respects in the condition of slaves: in one particular they were especially so, namely, that on the death of a sovereign they descended, like any other property, to the heir, who added as many of them as he pleased to his own seraglio. Until this was done, the unfortunate women were shut up in close seclusion on the death of their lord, like mourners who retire from the world when suffering any great and severe bereavement.

Smerdis appropriates them.

The wives of Cambyses were appropriated by Smerdis to himself on his taking possession of the throne and hearing of Cambyses's death. Among them was Atossa, who has already been mentioned as the daughter of Cyrus, and, of course, the sister of Cambyses as well as his wife. In order to prevent these court ladies from being the means, in any way, of discovering the imposture which he was practicing, the magian continued to keep them all closely shut up in their several separate apartments, only allowing a favored few to visit him, one by one, in turn, while he prevented their having any communication with one another.

Phædyma.

Measures of Otanes.

The name of one of these ladies was Phædyma. She was the daughter of a Persian noble of the highest rank and influence, named Otanes. Otanes, as well as some other nobles of the court, had observed and reflected upon the extraordinary circumstances connected with the accession of Smerdis to the throne, and the singular mode of life that he led in secluding himself, in a manner so extraordinary for a Persian monarch, from all intercourse with his nobles and his people. The suspicions of Otanes and his associates were excited, but no one dared to communicate his thoughts to the others. At length, however, Otanes, who was a man of great energy as well as sagacity and discretion, resolved that he would take some measures to ascertain the truth.

Otanes's communications with his daughter.

Her replies.

He first sent a messenger to Phædyma, his daughter, asking of her whether it was really Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, who received her when she went to visit the king. Phædyma, in return, sent her father word that she did not know, for she had never seen Smerdis, the son of Cyrus, before the death of Cambyses. She therefore could not say, of her own personal knowledge, whether the king was the genuine Smerdis or not. Otanes then sent to Phædyma a second time, requesting her to ask the queen Atossa. Atossa was the sister of Smerdis the prince, and had known him from his childhood. Phædyma sent back word to her father that she could not speak to Atossa, for she was kept closely shut up in her own apartments, without the opportunity to communicate with any one. Otanes then sent a third time to his daughter, telling her that there was one remaining mode by which she might ascertain the truth, and that was, the next time that she visited the king, to feel for his ears when he was asleep. If it was Smerdis the magian, she would find that he had none. He urged his daughter to do this by saying that, if the pretended king was really an impostor, the imposture ought to be made known, and that she, being of noble birth, ought to have the courage and energy to assist in discovering it. To this Phædyma replied that she would do as her father desired, though she knew that she hazarded her life in the attempt. "If he has no ears," said she, "and if I awaken him in attempting to feel for them, he will kill me; I am sure that he will kill me on the spot."

Phædyma discovers the deception.

The next time that it came to Phædyma's turn to visit the king, she did as her father had requested. She passed her hand very cautiously beneath the king's turban, and found that his ears had been cut off close to his head. Early in the morning she communicated the knowledge of the fact to her father.

Otanes and the six nobles.

Arrival of Darius.

Otanes immediately made the case known to two of his friends, Persian nobles, who had, with him, suspected the imposture, and had consulted together before in respect to the means of detecting it. The question was, what was now to be done. After some deliberation, it was agreed that each of them should communicate the discovery which they had made to one other person, such as each should select from among the circle of his friends as the one on whose resolution, prudence, and fidelity he could most implicitly rely. This was done, and the number admitted to the secret was thus increased to six. At this juncture it happened that Darius, the son of Hystaspes, the young man who has already been mentioned as the subject of Cyrus's dream, came to Susa. Darius was a man of great prominence and popularity. His father, Hystaspes, was at that time the governor of the province of Persia, and Darius had been residing with him in that country. As soon as the six conspirators heard of his arrival, they admitted him to their councils, and thus their number was increased to seven.

Secret consultations.

Various opinions.

They immediately began to hold secret consultations for the purpose of determining how it was best to proceed, first binding themselves by the most solemn oaths never to betray one another, however their undertaking might end. Darius told them that he had himself discovered the imposture and usurpation of Smerdis, and that he had come from Persia for the purpose of slaying him; and that now, since it appeared that the secret was known to so many, he was of opinion that they ought to act at once with the utmost decision. He thought there would be great danger in delay.

Otanes, on the other hand, thought that they were not yet ready for action. They must first increase their numbers. Seven persons were too few to attempt to revolutionize an empire. He commended the courage and resolution which Darius displayed, but he thought that a more cautious and deliberate policy would be far more likely to conduct them to a safe result.

Views of Darius.

Darius replied that the course which Otanes recommended would certainly ruin them. "If we make many other persons acquainted with our plans," said he, "there will be some, notwithstanding all our precautions, who will betray us, for the sake of the immense rewards which they well know they would receive in that case from the king. No," he added, "we must act ourselves, and alone. We must do nothing to excite suspicion, but must go at once into the palace, penetrate boldly into Smerdis's presence, and slay him before he has time to suspect our designs."

"But we can not get into his presence," replied Otanes. "There are guards stationed at every gate and door, who will not allow us to pass. If we attempt to kill them, a tumult will be immediately raised, and the alarm given, and all our designs will thus be baffled."

"There will be little difficulty about the guards," said Darius. "They know us all, and, from deference to our rank and station, they will let us pass without suspicion, especially if we act boldly and promptly, and do not give them time to stop and consider what to do. Besides, I can say that I have just arrived from Persia with important dispatches for the king, and that I must be admitted immediately into his presence. If a falsehood must be told, so let it be. The urgency of the crisis demands and sanctions it."

Apology for a falsehood.

It may seem strange to the reader, considering the ideas and habits of the times, that Darius should have even thought it necessary to apologize to his confederates for his proposal of employing falsehood in the accomplishment of their plans; and it is, in fact, altogether probable that the apology which he is made to utter is his historian's, and not his own.

Opinion of Gobryas.

The other conspirators had remained silent during this discussion between Darius and Otanes; but now a third, whose name was Gobryas, expressed his opinion in favor of the course which Darius recommended. He was aware, he said, that, in attempting to force their way into the king's presence and kill him by a sudden assault, they exposed themselves to the most imminent danger; but it was better for them to die in the manly attempt to bring back the imperial power again into Persian hands, where it properly belonged, than to acquiesce any further in its continuance in the possession of the ignoble Median priests who had so treacherously usurped it.

To this counsel they all finally agreed, and began to make arrangements for carrying their desperate enterprise into execution.

Uneasiness of the magi.

Situation of Prexaspes.

In the mean time, very extraordinary events were transpiring in another part of the city. The two magi, Smerdis the king and Patizithes his brother, had some cause, it seems, to fear that the nobles about the court, and the officers of the Persian army, were not without suspicions that the reigning monarch was not the real son of Cyrus. Rumors that Smerdis had been killed by Prexaspes, at the command of Cambyses, were in circulation. These rumors were contradicted, it is true, in private, by Prexaspes, whenever he was forced to speak of the subject; but he generally avoided it; and he spoke, when he spoke at all, in that timid and undecided tone which men usually assume when they are persisting in a lie. In the mean time, the gloomy recollections of his past life, the memory of his murdered son, remorse for his own crime in the assassination of Smerdis, and anxiety on account of the extremely dangerous position in which he had placed himself by his false denial of it, all conspired to harass his mind with perpetual restlessness and misery, and to make life a burden.

Measures of the magi.

An assembly of the people.

In order to do something to quiet the suspicions which the magi feared were prevailing, they did not know how extensively, they conceived the plan of inducing Prexaspes to declare in a more public and formal manner what he had been asserting timidly in private, namely, that Smerdis had not been killed. They accordingly convened an assembly of the people in a court-yard of the palace, or perhaps took advantage of some gathering casually convened, and proposed that Prexaspes should address them from a neighboring tower. Prexaspes was a man of high rank and of great influence, and the magi thought that his public espousal of their cause, and his open and decided contradiction of the rumor that he had killed Cambyses's brother, would fully convince the Persians that it was really the rightful monarch that had taken possession of the throne.

Decision of Prexaspes.

His speech from the tower.

Death of Prexaspes.

But the strength even of a strong man, when he has a lie to carry, soon becomes very small. That of Prexaspes was already almost exhausted and gone. He had been wavering and hesitating before, and this proposal, that he should commit himself so formally and solemnly, and in so public a manner, to statements wholly and absolutely untrue, brought him to a stand. He decided, desperately, in his

own mind, that he would go on in his course of falsehood, remorse, and wretchedness no longer. He, however, pretended to accede to the propositions of the magi. He ascended the tower, and began to address the people. Instead, however, of denying that he had murdered Smerdis, he fully confessed to the astonished audience that he had really committed that crime; he openly denounced the reigning Smerdis as an impostor, and called upon all who heard him to rise at once, destroy the treacherous usurper, and vindicate the rights of the true Persian line. As he went on, with vehement voice and gestures, in this speech, the utterance of which he knew sealed his own destruction, he became more and more excited and reckless. He denounced his hearers in the severest language if they failed to obey his injunctions, and imprecated upon them, in that event, all the curses of Heaven. The people listened to this strange and sudden phrensy of eloquence in utter amazement, motionless and silent; and before they or the officers of the king's household who were present had time even to consider what to do, Prexaspes, coming abruptly to the conclusion of his harangue, threw himself headlong from the parapet of the tower, and came down among them, lifeless and mangled, on the pavement below.

The conspirators.

Of course, all was now tumult and commotion in the court-yard, and it happened to be just at this juncture that the seven conspirators came from the place of their consultation to the palace, with a view of executing their plans. They were soon informed of what had taken place. Otanes was now again disposed to postpone their attempt upon the life of the king. The event which had occurred changed, he said, the aspect of the subject, and they must wait until the tumult and excitement should have somewhat subsided. But Darius was more eager than ever in favor of instantaneous action. He said that there was not a moment to be lost; for the magi, so soon as they should be informed of the declarations and of the death of Prexaspes, would be alarmed, and would take at once the most effectual precautions to guard against any sudden assault or surprise.

The omen.

These arguments, at the very time in which Darius was offering them with so much vehemence and earnestness, were strengthened by a very singular sort of confirmation; for while the conspirators stood undetermined, they saw a flock of birds moving across the sky, which, on their more attentively regarding them, proved to be seven hawks pursuing two vultures. This they regarded an omen, intended to signify to them, by a divine intimation, that they ought to proceed. They hesitated, therefore, no longer.

The conspirators enter the palace.

Combat with the magi.

They went together to the outer gates of the palace. The action of the guards who were stationed there was just what Darius had predicted that it would be. Awed by the imposing spectacle of the approach of seven nobles of the highest distinction, who were advancing, too, with an earnest and confident air, as if expecting no obstacle to their admission, they gave way at once, and allowed them to enter. The conspirators went on until they came to the inner apartments, where they found eunuchs in attendance at the doors. The eunuchs resisted, and demanded angrily why the guards had let the strangers in. "Kill them," said the conspirators, and immediately began to cut them down. The magi were within, already in consternation at the disclosures of Prexaspes, of which they had just been informed. They heard the tumult and the outcries of the eunuchs at the doors, and seized their arms, the one a bow and the other a spear. The conspirators rushed in. The bow was useless in the close combat which ensued, and the magian who had taken it turned and fled. The other defended himself with his spear for a moment, and wounded severely two of his assailants. The wounded conspirators fell. Three others of the number continued the unequal combat with the armed magian, while Darius and Gobryas rushed in pursuit of the other.

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