

JACOB ABBOTT

CYRUS THE
GREAT

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Cyrus the Great

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Jacob Abbott

Cyrus the Great Makers of History

PREFACE

One special object which the author of this series has had in view, in the plan and method which he has followed in the preparation of the successive volumes, has been to adapt them to the purposes of text-books in schools. The study of a *general compend* of history, such as is frequently used as a text-book, is highly useful, if it comes in at the right stage of education, when the mind is sufficiently matured, and has acquired sufficient preliminary knowledge to understand and appreciate so condensed a generalization as a summary of the whole history of a nation contained in an ordinary volume must necessarily be. Without this degree of maturity of mind, and this preparation, the study of such a work will be, as it too frequently is, a mere mechanical committing to memory of names, and dates, and phrases, which awaken no interest, communicate no ideas, and impart no useful knowledge to the mind.

A class of ordinary pupils, who have not yet become much acquainted with history, would, accordingly, be more benefited by having their attention concentrated, at first, on detached and separate topics, such as those which form the subjects, respectively, of these volumes. By studying thus fully the history of individual monarchs, or the narratives of single events, they can go more fully into detail; they conceive of the transactions described as realities; their reflecting and reasoning powers are occupied on what they read; they take notice of the motives of conduct, of the gradual development of character, the good or ill desert of actions, and of the connection of causes and consequences, both in respect to the influence of wisdom and virtue on the one hand, and, on the other, of folly and crime. In a word, their *minds* and *hearts* are occupied instead of merely their memories. They reason, they sympathize, they pity, they approve, and they condemn. They enjoy the real and true pleasure which constitutes the charm of historical study for minds that are mature; and they acquire a taste for truth instead of fiction, which will tend to direct their reading into proper channels in all future years.

The use of these works, therefore, as text-books in classes, has been kept continually in mind in the preparation of them. The running index on the tops of the pages is intended to serve instead of questions. These captions can be used in their present form as *topics*, in respect to which, when announced in the class, the pupils are to repeat substantially what is said on the page; or, on the other hand, questions in form, if that mode is preferred, can be readily framed from them by the teacher. In all the volumes, a very regular system of division is observed, which will greatly facilitate the assignment of lessons.

Chapter I. Herodotus and Xenophon

B.C. 550-401

The Persian monarchy

Singular principle of human nature

Cyrus was the founder of the ancient Persian empire – a monarchy, perhaps, the most wealthy and magnificent which the world has ever seen. Of that strange and incomprehensible principle of human nature, under the influence of which vast masses of men, notwithstanding the universal instinct of aversion to control, combine, under certain circumstances, by millions and millions, to maintain, for many successive centuries, the representatives of some one great family in a condition of exalted, and absolute, and utterly irresponsible ascendancy over themselves, while they toil for them, watch over them, submit to endless and most humiliating privations in their behalf, and commit, if commanded to do so, the most inexcusable and atrocious crimes to sustain the demigods they have thus made in their lofty estate, we have, in the case of this Persian monarchy, one of the most extraordinary exhibitions.

Grandeur of the Persian monarchy

Its origin

The Persian monarchy appears, in fact, even as we look back upon it from this remote distance both of space and of time, as a very vast wave of human power and grandeur. It swelled up among the populations of Asia, between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, about five hundred years before Christ, and rolled on in undiminished magnitude and glory for many centuries. It bore upon its crest the royal line of Astyages and his successors. Cyrus was, however, the first of the princes whom it held up conspicuously to the admiration of the world and he rode so gracefully and gallantly on the lofty crest that mankind have given him the credit of raising and sustaining the magnificent billow on which he was borne. How far we are to consider him as founding the monarchy, or the monarchy as raising and illustrating him, will appear more fully in the course of this narrative.

The republics of Greece

Written characters Greek and Persian

Preservation of the Greek language

Cotemporaneous with this Persian monarchy in the East, there flourished in the West the small but very efficient and vigorous republics of Greece. The Greeks had a written character for their language which could be easily and rapidly executed, while the ordinary language of the Persians was scarcely written at all. There was, it is true, in this latter nation, a certain learned character, which was used by the priests for their mystic records, and also for certain sacred books which constituted the only national archives. It was, however, only slowly and with difficulty that this character could be penned, and, when penned, it was unintelligible to the great mass of the population. For this reason, among others, the Greeks wrote narratives of the great events which occurred in their day, which narratives they so embellished and adorned by the picturesque lights and shades in which their genius enabled them to present the scenes and characters described as to make them universally admired, while the surrounding nations produced nothing but formal governmental records, not worth to the community at large the toil and labor necessary to decipher them and make them intelligible. Thus the Greek writers became the historians, not only of their own republics, but also of all the nations around them; and with such admirable genius and power did they fulfill this function, that, while the records of all other nations cotemporary with them have been almost entirely neglected and forgotten, the language of the Greeks has been preserved among mankind, with infinite labor and toil, by successive generations of scholars, in every civilized nation, for two thousand years, solely in order that men may continue to read these tales.

Herodotus and Xenophon

Two Greek historians have given us a narrative of the events connected with the life of Cyrus – Herodotus and Xenophon. These writers disagree very materially in the statements which they make, and modern readers are divided in opinion on the question which to believe. In order to present this question fairly to the minds of our readers, we must commence this volume with some account of these two authorities, whose guidance, conflicting as it is, furnishes all the light which we have to follow.

Herodotus was a philosopher and scholar. Xenophon was a great general. The one spent his life in solitary study, or in visiting various countries in the pursuit of knowledge; the other distinguished himself in the command of armies, and in distant military expeditions, which he conducted with great energy and skill. They were both, by birth, men of wealth and high station, so that they occupied, from the beginning, conspicuous positions in society; and as they were both energetic and enterprising in character, they were led, each, to a very romantic and adventurous career, the one in his travels, the other in his campaigns, so that their personal history and their exploits attracted great attention even while they lived.

Birth of Herodotus

Education of the Greeks

How public affairs were discussed

Literary entertainments

Herodotus's early love of knowledge

Herodotus was born in the year 484 before Christ, which was about fifty years after the death of the Cyrus whose history forms the subject of this volume. He was born in the Grecian state of Caria, in Asia Minor, and in the city of Halicarnassus. Caria, as may be seen from the map at the commencement of this volume, was in the southwestern part of Asia Minor, near the shores of the Ægean Sea. Herodotus became a student at a very early age. It was the custom in Greece, at that time, to give to young men of his rank a good intellectual education. In other nations, the training of the young men, in wealthy and powerful families, was confined almost exclusively to the use of arms, to horsemanship, to athletic feats, and other such accomplishments as would give them a manly and graceful personal bearing, and enable them to excel in the various friendly contests of the public games, as well as prepare them to maintain their ground against their enemies in personal combats on the field of battle. The Greeks, without neglecting these things, taught their young men also to read and to write, explained to them the structure and the philosophy of language, and trained them to the study of the poets, the orators, and the historians which their country had produced. Thus a general taste for intellectual pursuits and pleasures was diffused throughout the community. Public affairs were discussed, before large audiences assembled for the purpose, by orators who felt a great pride and pleasure in the exercise of the power which they had acquired of persuading, convincing, or exciting the mighty masses that listened to them; and at the great public celebrations which were customary in those days, in addition to the wrestlings, the races, the games, and the military spectacles, there were certain literary entertainments provided, which constituted an essential part of the public pleasures. Tragedies were acted, poems recited, odes and lyrics sung, and narratives of martial enterprises and exploits, and geographical and historical descriptions of neighboring nations, were read to vast throngs of listeners, who, having been accustomed from infancy to witness such performances, and to hear them applauded, had learned to appreciate and enjoy them. Of course, these literary exhibitions would make impressions, more or less strong, on different minds, as the mental temperaments and characters of individuals varied. They seem to have exerted a very powerful influence on the mind of Herodotus in his early years. He was inspired, when very young, with a great zeal and ardor for the attainment of knowledge; and as he advanced toward maturity, he began to be ambitious of making new discoveries, with a view of communicating to his countrymen, in these great public assemblies, what he should thus acquire. Accordingly, as soon as he arrived at a suitable age, he resolved to set out upon a tour into foreign countries, and to bring back a report of what he should see and hear.

Intercourse of nations

Military expeditions

Plan of Herodotus's tour

The intercourse of nations was, in those days, mainly carried on over the waters of the Mediterranean Sea; and in times of peace, almost the only mode of communication was by the ships and the caravans of the merchants who traded from country to country, both by sea and on the land. In fact, the knowledge which one country possessed of the geography and the manners and customs of another, was almost wholly confined to the reports which these merchants circulated. When military expeditions invaded a territory, the commanders, or the writers who accompanied them, often wrote descriptions of the scenes which they witnessed in their campaigns, and described briefly the countries through which they passed. These cases were, however, comparatively rare; and yet, when they occurred, they furnished accounts better authenticated, and more to be relied upon, and expressed, moreover, in a more systematic and regular form, than the reports of the merchants, though the information which was derived from both these sources combined was very insufficient, and tended to excite more curiosity than it gratified. Herodotus, therefore, conceived that, in thoroughly exploring the countries on the shores of the Mediterranean and in the interior of Asia, examining their geographical position, inquiring into their history, their institutions, their manners, customs, and laws, and writing the results for the entertainment and instruction of his countrymen, he had an ample field before him for the exercise of all his powers.

Herodotus visits Egypt

He went first to Egypt. Egypt had been until that time, closely shut up from the rest of mankind by the jealousy and watchfulness of the government. But now, on account of some recent political changes, which will be hereafter more particularly alluded to, the way was opened for travelers from other countries to come in. Herodotus was the first to avail himself of this opportunity. He spent some time in the country, and made himself minutely acquainted with its history, its antiquities, its political and social condition at the time of his visit, and with all the other points in respect to which he supposed that his countrymen would wish to be informed. He took copious notes of all that he saw. From Egypt he went westward into Libya, and thence he traveled slowly along the whole southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea as far as to the Straits of Gibraltar, noting, with great care, every thing which presented itself to his own personal observation, and availing himself of every possible source of information in respect to all other points of importance for the object which he had in view.

Libya and the Straits of Gibraltar

Route of Herodotus in Asia

His return to Greece

The Straits of Gibraltar were the ends of the earth toward the westward in those ancient days, and our traveler accordingly, after reaching them, returned again to the eastward. He visited Tyre, and the cities of Phœnicia, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and thence went still farther eastward to Assyria and Babylon. It was here that he obtained the materials for what he has written in respect to the Medes and Persians, and to the history of Cyrus. After spending some time in these countries, he went on by land still further to the eastward, into the heart of Asia. The country of Scythia was considered as at "the end of the earth" in this direction. Herodotus penetrated for some distance into the almost trackless wilds of this remote land, until he found that he had gone as far from the great center of light and power on the shores of the Ægean Sea as he could expect the curiosity of his countrymen to follow him. He passed thence round toward the north, and came down through the countries north of the Danube into Greece, by way of the Epirus and Macedon. To make such a journey as this was, in fact, in those days, almost to explore the whole known world.

Doubts as to the extent of Herodotus's tour

His history "adorned."

Herodotus's credibility questioned

Sources of bias

It ought, however, here to be stated, that many modern scholars, who have examined, with great care, the accounts which Herodotus has given of what he saw and heard in his wanderings, doubt very seriously whether his journeys were really as extended as he pretends. As his object was to read what he was intending to write at great public assemblies in Greece, he was, of course, under every possible inducement to make his narrative as interesting as possible, and not to detract at all from whatever there might be extraordinary either in the extent of his wanderings or in the wonderfulness of the objects and scenes which he saw, or in the romantic nature of the adventures which he met with in his protracted tour. Cicero, in lauding him as a writer, says that he was the first who evinced the power to *adorn* a historical narrative. Between adorning and *embellishing*, the line is not to be very distinctly marked; and Herodotus has often been accused of having drawn more from his fancy than from any other source, in respect to a large portion of what he relates and describes. Some do not believe that he ever even entered half the countries which he professes to have thoroughly explored, while others find, in the minuteness of his specifications, something like conclusive proof that he related only what he actually saw. In a word, the question of his credibility has been discussed by

successive generations of scholars ever since his day, and strong parties have been formed who have gone to extremes in the opinions they have taken; so that, while some confer upon him the title of the father of *history*, others say it would be more in accordance with his merits to call him the father of *lies*. In controversies like this, and, in fact, in all controversies, it is more agreeable to the mass of mankind to take sides strongly with one party or the other, and either to believe or disbelieve one or the other fully and cordially. There is a class of minds, however, more calm and better balanced than the rest, who can deny themselves this pleasure, and who see that often, in the most bitter and decided controversies, the truth lies between. By this class of minds it has been generally supposed that the narratives of Herodotus are substantially true, though in many cases highly colored and embellished, or, as Cicero called it, adorned, as, in fact, they inevitably must have been under the circumstances in which they were written.

Samos

Patmos

We can not follow minutely the circumstances of the subsequent life of Herodotus. He became involved in some political disturbances and difficulties in his native state after his return, in consequence of which he retired, partly a fugitive and partly an exile, to the island of Samos, which is at a little distance from Caria, and not far from the shore. Here he lived for some time in seclusion, occupied in writing out his history. He divided it into nine books, to which, respectively, the names of the nine Muses were afterward given, to designate them. The island of Samos, where this great literary work was performed, is very near to Patmos, where, a few hundred years later, the Evangelist John, in a similar retirement, and in the use of the same language and character, wrote the Book of Revelation.

The Olympiads

When a few of the first books of his history were completed, Herodotus went with the manuscript to Olympia, at the great celebration of the 81st Olympiad. The Olympiads were periods recurring at intervals of about four years. By means of them the Greeks reckoned their time. The Olympiads were celebrated as they occurred, with games, shows, spectacles, and parades, which were conducted on so magnificent a scale that vast crowds were accustomed to assemble from every part of Greece to witness and join in them. They were held at Olympia, a city on the western side of Greece. Nothing now remains to mark the spot but some acres of confused and unintelligible ruins.

Herodotus at Olympia

History received with applause

The personal fame of Herodotus and of his travels had preceded him, and when he arrived at Olympia he found the curiosity and eagerness of the people to listen to his narratives extreme. He read copious extracts from his accounts, so far as he had written them, to the vast assemblies which convened to hear him, and they were received with unbounded applause; and inasmuch as these assemblies comprised nearly all the statesmen, the generals, the philosophers, and the scholars of Greece, applause expressed by them became at once universal renown. Herodotus was greatly

gratified at the interest which his countrymen took in his narratives, and he determined thenceforth to devote his time assiduously to the continuation and completion of his work.

Herodotus at Athens

It was twelve years, however, before his plan was finally accomplished. He then repaired to Athens, at the time of a grand festive celebration which was held in that city, and there he appeared in public again, and read extended portions of the additional books that he had written. The admiration and applause which his work now elicited was even greater than before. In deciding upon the passages to be read, Herodotus selected such as would be most likely to excite the interest of his Grecian hearers, and many of them were glowing accounts of Grecian exploits in former wars which had been waged in the countries which he had visited. To expect that, under such circumstances, Herodotus should have made his history wholly impartial, would be to suppose the historian not human.

His literary fame

The Athenians were greatly pleased with the narratives which Herodotus thus read to them of their own and of their ancestors' exploits. They considered him a national benefactor for having made such a record of their deeds, and, in addition to the unbounded applause which they bestowed upon him, they made him a public grant of a large sum of money. During the remainder of his life Herodotus continued to enjoy the high degree of literary renown which his writings had acquired for him – a renown which has since been extended and increased, rather than diminished, by the lapse of time.

Birth of Xenophon

Cyrus the Younger

As for Xenophon, the other great historian of Cyrus, it has already been said that he was a military commander, and his life was accordingly spent in a very different manner from that of his great competitor for historic fame. He was born at Athens, about thirty years after the birth of Herodotus, so that he was but a child while Herodotus was in the midst of his career. When he was about twenty-two years of age, he joined a celebrated military expedition which was formed in Greece, for the purpose of proceeding to Asia Minor to enter into the service of the governor of that country. The name of this governor was Cyrus; and to distinguish him from Cyrus the Great, whose history is to form the subject of this volume, and who lived about one hundred and fifty years before him, he is commonly called Cyrus the Younger.

Ambition of Cyrus

He attempts to assassinate his brother

Rebellion of Cyrus

This expedition was headed by a Grecian general named Clearchus. The soldiers and the subordinate officers of the expedition did not know for what special service it was designed, as Cyrus had a treasonable and guilty object in view, and he kept it accordingly concealed, even from the agents who were to aid him in the execution of it. His plan was to make war upon and dethrone his brother Artaxerxes, then king of Persia, and consequently his sovereign. Cyrus was a very young man, but he was a man of a very energetic and accomplished character, and of unbounded ambition. When his father died, it was arranged that Artaxerxes, the older son, should succeed him. Cyrus was extremely unwilling to submit to this supremacy of his brother. His mother was an artful and unprincipled woman, and Cyrus, being the youngest of her children, was her favorite. She encouraged him in his ambitious designs; and so desperate was Cyrus himself in his determination to accomplish them, that it is said he attempted to assassinate his brother on the day of his coronation. His attempt was discovered, and it failed. His brother, however, instead of punishing him for the treason, had the generosity to pardon him, and sent him to his government in Asia Minor. Cyrus immediately turned all his thoughts to the plan of raising an army and making war upon his brother, in order to gain forcible possession of his throne. That he might have a plausible pretext for making the necessary military preparations, he pretended to have a quarrel with one of his neighbors, and wrote, hypocritically, many letters to the king, affecting solicitude for his safety, and asking aid. The king was thus deceived, and made no preparations to resist the force which Cyrus was assembling, not having the remotest suspicion that its destiny was Babylon.

The Greek auxiliaries

The auxiliary army which came from Greece to enter into Cyrus's service under these circumstances, consisted of about thirteen thousand men. He had, it was said, a hundred thousand men besides; but so celebrated were the Greeks in those days for their courage, their discipline, their powers of endurance, and their indomitable tenacity and energy, that Cyrus very properly considered this corps as the flower of his army. Xenophon was one of the younger Grecian generals. The army crossed the Hellespont, and entered Asia Minor, and, passing across the country, reached at last the famous pass of Cilicia, in the southwestern part of the country – a narrow defile between the mountains and the sea, which opens the only passage in that quarter toward the Persian regions beyond. Here the suspicions which the Greeks had been for some time inclined to feel, that they were going to make war upon the Persian monarch himself, were confirmed, and they refused to proceed. Their unwillingness, however, did not arise from any compunctions of conscience about the guilt of treason, or the wickedness of helping an ungrateful and unprincipled wretch, whose forfeited life had once been given to him by his brother, in making war upon and destroying his benefactor. Soldiers have never, in any age of the world, any thing to do with compunctions of conscience in respect to the work which their commanders give them to perform. The Greeks were perfectly willing to serve in this or in any other undertaking; but, since it was rebellion and treason that was asked of them, they

considered it as specially hazardous, and so they concluded that they were entitled to extra pay. Cyrus made no objection to this demand; an arrangement was made accordingly, and the army went on.

Artaxerxes assembles his army

The battle

Cyrus slain

Artaxerxes assembled suddenly the whole force of his empire on the plains of Babylon – an immense army, consisting, it is said, of over a million of men. Such vast forces occupy, necessarily, a wide extent of country, even when drawn up in battle array. So great, in fact, was the extent occupied in this case, that the Greeks, who conquered all that part of the king's forces which was directly opposed to them, supposed, when night came, at the close of the day of battle, that Cyrus had been every where victorious; and they were only undeceived when, the next day, messengers came from the Persian camp to inform them that Cyrus's whole force, excepting themselves, was defeated and dispersed, and that Cyrus himself was slain, and to summon them to surrender at once and unconditionally to the conquerors.

Murder of the Greek generals

Critical situation of the Greeks

The Greeks refused to surrender. They formed themselves immediately into a compact and solid body, fortified themselves as well as they could in their position, and prepared for a desperate defense. There were about ten thousand of them left, and the Persians seem to have considered them too formidable to be attacked. The Persians entered into negotiations with them, offering them certain terms on which they would be allowed to return peaceably into Greece. These negotiations were protracted from day to day for two or three weeks, the Persians treacherously using toward them a friendly tone, and evincing a disposition to treat them in a liberal and generous manner. This threw the Greeks off their guard, and finally the Persians contrived to get Clearchus and the leading Greek generals into their power at a feast, and then they seized and murdered them, or, as they would perhaps term it, *executed* them as rebels and traitors. When this was reported in the Grecian camp, the whole army was thrown at first into the utmost consternation. They found themselves two thousand miles from home, in the heart of a hostile country, with an enemy nearly a hundred times their own number close upon them, while they themselves were without provisions, without horses, without money; and there were deep rivers, and rugged mountains, and every other possible physical obstacle to be surmounted, before they could reach their own frontiers. If they surrendered to their enemies, a hopeless and most miserable slavery was their inevitable doom.

Xenophon's proposal

Retreat of the Ten Thousand

Under these circumstances, Xenophon, according to his own story, called together the surviving officers in the camp, urged them not to despair, and recommended that immediate measures should be taken for commencing a march toward Greece. He proposed that they should elect commanders to take the places of those who had been killed, and that, under their new organization, they should immediately set out on their return. These plans were adopted. He himself was chosen as the commanding general, and under his guidance the whole force was conducted safely through the countless difficulties and dangers which beset their way, though they had to defend themselves, at every step of their progress, from an enemy so vastly more numerous than they, and which was hanging on their flanks and on their rear, and making the most incessant efforts to surround and capture them. This retreat occupied two hundred and fifteen days. It has always been considered as one of the greatest military achievements that has ever been performed. It is called in history the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. Xenophon acquired by it a double immortality. He led the army, and thus attained to a military renown which will never fade; and he afterward wrote a narrative of the exploit, which has given him an equally extended and permanent literary fame.

Xenophon's retirement

Xenophon's writings

Some time after this, Xenophon returned again to Asia as a military commander, and distinguished himself in other campaigns. He acquired a large fortune, too, in these wars, and at length retired to a villa, which he built and adorned magnificently, in the neighborhood of Olympia, where Herodotus had acquired so extended a fame by reading his histories. It was probably, in some degree, through the influence of the success which had attended the labors of Herodotus in this field, that Xenophon was induced to enter it. He devoted the later years of his life to writing various historical memoirs, the two most important of which that have come down to modern times are, first, the narrative of his own expedition, under Cyrus the Younger, and, secondly, a sort of romance or tale founded on the history of Cyrus the Great. This last is called the *Cyropædia*; and it is from this work, and from the history written by Herodotus, that nearly all our knowledge of the great Persian monarch is derived.

Credibility of Herodotus and Xenophon

Importance of the story

Object of this work

The question how far the stories which Herodotus and Xenophon have told us in relating the history of the great Persian king are true, is of less importance than one would at first imagine; for the case is one of those numerous instances in which the narrative itself, which genius has written, has had far greater influence on mankind than the events themselves exerted which the narrative professes to record. It is now far more important for us to know what the story is which has for eighteen hundred years been read and listened to by every generation of men, than what the actual events were in which the tale thus told had its origin. This consideration applies very extensively to history, and especially to ancient history. The events themselves have long since ceased to be of any great interest or importance to readers of the present day; but the *accounts*, whether they are fictitious or real, partial or impartial, honestly true or embellished and colored, since they have been so widely circulated in every age and in every nation, and have impressed themselves so universally and so permanently in the mind and memory of the whole human race, and have penetrated into and colored the literature of every civilized people, it becomes now necessary that every well-informed man should understand. In a word, the real Cyrus is now a far less important personage to mankind than the Cyrus of Herodotus and Xenophon, and it is, accordingly, their story which the author proposes to relate in this volume. The reader will understand, therefore, that the end and aim of the work is not to guarantee an exact and certain account of Cyrus as he actually lived and acted, but only to give a true and faithful summary of the story which for the last two thousand years has been in circulation respecting him among mankind.

Chapter II. The Birth of Cyrus

B.C. 599-588

The three Asiatic empires

Marriage of Cambyses

There are records coming down to us from the very earliest times of three several kingdoms situated in the heart of Asia-Assyria, Media, and Persia, the two latter of which, at the period when they first emerge indistinctly into view, were more or less connected with and dependent upon the former. Astyages was the King of Media; Cambyses was the name of the ruling prince or magistrate of Persia. Cambyses married Mandane, the daughter of Astyages, and Cyrus was their son. In recounting the circumstances of his birth, Herodotus relates, with all seriousness, the following very extraordinary story:

Story of Mandane

Dream of Astyages

While Mandane was a maiden, living at her father's palace and home in Media, Astyages awoke one morning terrified by a dream. He had dreamed of a great inundation, which overwhelmed and destroyed his capital, and submerged a large part of his kingdom. The great rivers of that country were liable to very destructive floods, and there would have been nothing extraordinary or alarming in the king's imagination being haunted, during his sleep, by the image of such a calamity, were it not that, in this case, the deluge of water which produced such disastrous results seemed to be, in some mysterious way, connected with his daughter, so that the dream appeared to portend some great calamity which was to originate in her. He thought it perhaps indicated that after her marriage she should have a son who would rebel against him and seize the supreme power, thus overwhelming his kingdom as the inundation had done which he had seen in his dream.

To guard against this imagined danger, Astyages determined that his daughter should not be married in Media, but that she should be provided with a husband in some foreign land, so as to be taken away from Media altogether. He finally selected Cambyses, the king of Persia, for her husband. Persia was at that time a comparatively small and circumscribed dominion, and Cambyses, though he seems to have been the supreme ruler of it, was very far beneath Astyages in rank and power. The distance between the two countries was considerable, and the institutions and customs of the people of Persia were simple and rude, little likely to awaken or encourage in the minds of their princes any treasonable or ambitious designs. Astyages thought, therefore, that in sending Mandane there to be the wife of the king, he had taken effectual precautions to guard against the danger portended by his dream.

Astyages' second dream

Its interpretation

Mandane was accordingly married, and conducted by her husband to her new home. About a year afterward her father had another dream. He dreamed that a vine proceeded from his daughter, and, growing rapidly and luxuriantly while he was regarding it, extended itself over the whole land. Now the vine being a symbol of beneficence and plenty, Astyages might have considered this vision as an omen of good; still, as it was good which was to be derived in some way from his daughter, it naturally awakened his fears anew that he was doomed to find a rival and competitor for the possession of his kingdom in Mandane's son and heir. He called together his soothsayers, related his dream to them, and asked for their interpretation. They decided that it meant that Mandane would have a son who would one day become a king.

Astyages was now seriously alarmed, and he sent for Mandane to come home, ostensibly because he wished her to pay a visit to her father and to her native land, but really for the purpose of having her in his power, that he might destroy her child so soon as one should be born.

Birth of Cyrus

Mandane came to Media, and was established by her father in a residence near his palace, and such officers and domestics were put in charge of her household as Astyages could rely upon to do whatever he should command. Things being thus arranged, a few months passed away, and then Mandane's child was born.

Astyages determines to destroy him

Immediately on hearing of the event, Astyages sent for a certain officer of his court, an unscrupulous and hardened man, who possessed, as he supposed, enough of depraved and reckless resolution for the commission of any crime, and addressed him as follows:

Harpagus

The king's command to him

"I have sent for you, Harpagus, to commit to your charge a business of very great importance. I confide fully in your principles of obedience and fidelity, and depend upon your doing, yourself, with your own hands, the work that I require. If you fail to do it, or if you attempt to evade it by putting it off upon others, you will suffer severely. I wish you to take Mandane's child to your own house and put him to death. You may accomplish the object in any mode you please, and you may arrange the circumstances of the burial of the body, or the disposal of it in any other way, as you think best; the essential thing is, that you see to it, yourself, that the child is killed."

Harpagus replied that whatever the king might command it was his duty to do, and that, as his master had never hitherto had occasion to censure his conduct, he should not find him wanting now. Harpagus then went to receive the infant. The attendants of Mandane had been ordered to deliver it to

him. Not at all suspecting the object for which the child was thus taken away, but naturally supposing, on the other hand, that it was for the purpose of some visit, they arrayed their unconscious charge in the most highly-wrought and costly of the robes which Mandane, his mother, had for many months been interested in preparing for him, and then gave him up to the custody of Harpagus, expecting, doubtless, that he would be very speedily returned to their care.

Distress of Harpagus

His consultation with his wife

Although Harpagus had expressed a ready willingness to obey the cruel behest of the king at the time of receiving it, he manifested, as soon as he received the child, an extreme degree of anxiety and distress. He immediately sent for a herdsman named Mitridates to come to him. In the mean time, he took the child home to his house, and in a very excited and agitated manner related to his wife what had passed. He laid the child down in the apartment, leaving it neglected and alone, while he conversed with his wife in a harried and anxious manner in respect to the dreadful situation in which he found himself placed. She asked him what he intended to do. He replied that he certainly should not, himself, destroy the child. "It is the son of Mandane," said he. "She is the king's daughter. If the king should die, Mandane would succeed him, and then what terrible danger would impend over me if she should know me to have been the slayer of her son!" Harpagus said, moreover, that he did not dare absolutely to disobey the orders of the king so far as to save the child's life, and that he had sent for a herdsman, whose pastures extended to wild and desolate forests and mountains – the gloomy haunts of wild beasts and birds of prey – intending to give the child to him, with orders to carry it into those solitudes and abandon it there. His name was Mitridates.

The herdsman

While they were speaking this herdsman came in. He found Harpagus and his wife talking thus together, with countenances expressive of anxiety and distress, while the child, uneasy under the confinement and inconveniences of its splendid dress, and terrified at the strangeness of the scene and the circumstances around it, and perhaps, moreover, experiencing some dawning and embryo emotions of resentment at being laid down in neglect, cried aloud and incessantly. Harpagus gave the astonished herdsman his charge. He, afraid, as Harpagus had been in the presence of Astyages, to evince any hesitation in respect to obeying the orders of his superior, whatever they might be, took up the child and bore it away.

He conveys the child to his hut

The herdsman's wife

He carried it to his hut. It so happened that his wife, whose name was Spaco, had at that very time a new-born child, but it was dead. Her dead son had, in fact, been born during the absence of Mitridates. He had been extremely unwilling to leave his home at such a time, but the summons of Harpagus must, he knew, be obeyed. His wife, too, not knowing what could have occasioned so sudden and urgent a call, had to bear, all the day, a burden of anxiety and solicitude in respect to her husband, in addition to her disappointment and grief at the loss of her child. Her anxiety and

grief were changed for a little time into astonishment and curiosity at seeing the beautiful babe, so magnificently dressed, which her husband brought to her, and at hearing his extraordinary story.

Conversation in the hut

He said that when he first entered the house of Harpagus and saw the child lying there, and heard the directions which Harpagus gave him to carry it into the mountains and leave it to die, he supposed that the babe belonged to some of the domestics of the household, and that Harpagus wished to have it destroyed in order to be relieved of a burden. The richness, however, of the infant's dress, and the deep anxiety and sorrow which was indicated by the countenances and by the conversation of Harpagus and his wife, and which seemed altogether too earnest to be excited by the concern which they would probably feel for any servant's offspring, appeared at the time, he said, inconsistent with that supposition, and perplexed and bewildered him. He said, moreover, that in the end, Harpagus had sent a man with him a part of the way when he left the house, and that this man had given him a full explanation of the case. The child was the son of Mandane, the daughter of the king, and he was to be destroyed by the orders of Astyages himself, for fear that at some future period he might attempt to usurp the throne.

Entreaties of the herdsman's wife to save the child's life

They who know any thing of the feelings of a mother under the circumstances in which Spaco was placed, can imagine with what emotions she received the little sufferer, now nearly exhausted by abstinence, fatigue, and fear, from her husband's hands, and the heartfelt pleasure with which she drew him to her bosom, to comfort and relieve him. In an hour she was, as it were, herself his mother, and she began to plead hard with her husband for his life.

Mitridates said that the child could not possibly be saved. Harpagus had been most earnest and positive in his orders, and he was coming himself to see that they had been executed. He would demand, undoubtedly, to see the body of the child, to assure himself that it was actually dead. Spaco, instead of being convinced by her husband's reasoning, only became more and more earnest in her desires that the child might be saved. She rose from her couch and clasped her husband's knees, and begged him with the most earnest entreaties and with many tears to grant her request. Her husband was, however, inexorable. He said that if he were to yield, and attempt to save the child from its doom, Harpagus would most certainly know that his orders had been disobeyed, and then their own lives would be forfeited, and the child itself sacrificed after all, in the end.

Spaco substitutes her dead child for Cyrus

The thought then occurred to Spaco that her own dead child might be substituted for the living one, and be exposed in the mountains in its stead. She proposed this plan, and, after much anxious doubt and hesitation, the herdsman consented to adopt it. They took off the splendid robes which adorned the living child, and put them on the corpse, each equally unconscious of the change. The little limbs of the son of Mandane were then more simply clothed in the coarse and scanty covering which belonged to the new character which he was now to assume, and then the babe was restored to its place in Spaco's bosom. Mitridates placed his own dead child, completely disguised as it was by the royal robes it wore, in the little basket or cradle in which the other had been brought, and, accompanied by an attendant, whom he was to leave in the forest to keep watch over the body, he went away to seek some wild and desolate solitude in which to leave it exposed.

The artifice successful

The body buried

Three days passed away, during which the attendant whom the herdsman had left in the forest watched near the body to prevent its being devoured by wild beasts or birds of prey, and at the end of that time he brought it home. The herdsman then went to Harpagus to inform him that the child was dead, and, in proof that it was really so, he said that if Harpagus would come to his hut he could see the body. Harpagus sent some messenger in whom he could confide to make the observation. The herdsman exhibited the dead child to him, and he was satisfied. He reported the result of his mission to Harpagus, and Harpagus then ordered the body to be buried. The child of Mandane, whom we may call Cyrus, since that was the name which he subsequently received, was brought up in the herdsman's hut, and passed every where for Spaco's child.

Remorse of Astyages

Harpagus, after receiving the report of his messenger, then informed Astyages that his orders had been executed, and that the child was dead. A trusty messenger, he said, whom he had sent for the purpose, had seen the body. Although the king had been so earnest to have the deed performed, he found that, after all, the knowledge that his orders had been obeyed gave him very little satisfaction. The fears, prompted by his selfishness and ambition, which had led him to commit the crime, gave place, when it had been perpetrated, to remorse for his unnatural cruelty. Mandane mourned incessantly the death of her innocent babe, and loaded her father with reproaches for having destroyed it, which he found it very hard to bear. In the end, he repented bitterly of what he had done.

The secret of the child's preservation remained concealed for about ten years. It was then discovered in the following manner:

Boyhood of Cyrus

Cyrus a king among the boys

Cyrus, like Alexander, Cæsar, William the Conqueror, Napoleon, and other commanding minds, who obtained a great ascendancy over masses of men in their maturer years, evinced his dawning superiority at a very early period of his boyhood. He took the lead of his playmates in their sports, and made them submit to his regulations and decisions. Not only did the peasants' boys in the little hamlet where his reputed father lived thus yield the precedence to him, but sometimes, when the sons of men of rank and station came out from the city to join them in their plays, even then Cyrus was the acknowledged head. One day the son of an officer of King Astyages's court – his father's name was Artembaris – came out, with other boys from the city, to join these village boys in their sports. They were playing *king*. Cyrus was the king. Herodotus says that the other boys *chose* him as such. It was, however, probably such a sort of choice as that by which kings and emperors are made among men, a yielding more or less voluntary on the part of the subjects to the resolute and determined energy with which the aspirant places himself upon the throne.

A quarrel

During the progress of the play, a quarrel arose between Cyrus and the son of Artembaris. The latter would not obey, and Cyrus beat him. He went home and complained bitterly to his father. The father went to Astyages to protest against such an indignity offered to his son by a peasant boy, and demanded that the little tyrant should be punished. Probably far the larger portion of intelligent readers of history consider the whole story as a romance; but if we look upon it as in any respect true, we must conclude that the Median monarchy must have been, at that time, in a very rude and simple condition indeed, to allow of the submission of such a question as this to the personal adjudication of the reigning king.

However this may be, Herodotus states that Artembaris went to the palace of Astyages, taking his son with him, to offer proofs of the violence of which the herdsman's son had been guilty, by showing the contusions and bruises that had been produced by the blows. "Is this the treatment," he asked, indignantly, of the king, when he had completed his statement, "that my boy is to receive from the son of one of your slaves?"

Cyrus summoned into the presence of Astyages

Astyages seemed to be convinced that Artembaris had just cause to complain, and he sent for Mitridates and his son to come to him in the city. When they arrived, Cyrus advanced into the presence of the king with that courageous and manly bearing which romance writers are so fond of ascribing to boys of noble birth, whatever may have been the circumstances of their early training. Astyages was much struck with his appearance and air. He, however, sternly laid to his charge the accusation which Artembaris had brought against him. Pointing to Artembaris's son, all bruised and swollen as he was, he asked, "Is that the way that you, a mere herdsman's boy, dare to treat the son of one of my nobles?"

The little prince looked up into his stern judge's face with an undaunted expression of countenance, which, considering the circumstances of the case, and the smallness of the scale on which this embryo heroism was represented, was partly ludicrous and partly sublime.

Cyrus's defense

"My lord," said he, "what I have done I am able to justify. I did punish this boy, and I had a right to do so. I was king, and he was my subject, and he would not obey me. If you think that for this I deserve punishment myself, here I am; I am ready to suffer it."

Astonishment of Astyages

If Astyages had been struck with the appearance and manner of Cyrus at the commencement of the interview, his admiration was awakened far more strongly now, at hearing such words, uttered, too, in so exalted a tone, from such a child. He remained a long time silent. At last he told Artembaris and his son that they might retire. He would take the affair, he said, into his own hands, and dispose of it in a just and proper manner. Astyages then took the herdsman aside, and asked him, in an earnest tone, whose boy that was, and where he had obtained him.

The discovery

Mitridates was terrified. He replied, however, that the boy was his own son, and that his mother was still living at home, in the hut where they all resided. There seems to have been something, however, in his appearance and manner, while making these assertions, which led Astyages not to believe what he said. He was convinced that there was some unexplained mystery in respect to the origin of the boy, which the herdsman was willfully withholding. He assumed a displeased and threatening air, and ordered in his guards to take Mitridates into custody. The terrified herdsman then said that he would explain all, and he accordingly related honestly the whole story.

Mingled feelings of Astyages

Inhuman monsters

Astyages was greatly rejoiced to find that the child was alive. One would suppose it to be almost inconsistent with this feeling that he should be angry with Harpagus for not having destroyed it. It would seem, in fact, that Harpagus was not amenable to serious censure, in any view of the subject, for he had taken what he had a right to consider very effectual measures for carrying the orders of the king into faithful execution. But Astyages seems to have been one of those inhuman monsters which the possession and long-continued exercise of despotic power have so often made, who take a calm, quiet, and deliberate satisfaction in torturing to death any wretched victim whom they can have any pretext for destroying, especially if they can invent some new means of torment to give a fresh piquancy to their pleasure. These monsters do not act from passion. Men are sometimes inclined to palliate great cruelties and crimes which are perpetrated under the influence of sudden anger, or from the terrible impulse of those impetuous and uncontrollable emotions of the human soul which, when once excited, seem to make men insane; but the crimes of a tyrant are not of this kind. They are the calm, deliberate, and sometimes carefully economized gratifications of a nature essentially malign.

Astyages determines to punish Harpagus

When, therefore, Astyages learned that Harpagus had failed of literally obeying his command to destroy, with his own hand, the infant which had been given him, although he was pleased with the consequences which had resulted from it, he immediately perceived that there was another pleasure besides that he was to derive from the transaction, namely, that of gratifying his own imperious and ungovernable will by taking vengeance on him who had failed, even in so slight a degree, of fulfilling its dictates. In a word, he was glad that the child was saved, but he did not consider that that was any reason why he should not have the pleasure of punishing the man who saved him.

Interview between Artyages and Harpagus

Explanation of Harpagus

Thus, far from being transported by any sudden and violent feeling of resentment to an inconsiderate act of revenge, Astyages began, calmly and coolly, and with a deliberate malignity more

worthy of a demon than of a man, to consider how he could best accomplish the purpose he had in view. When, at length, his plan was formed, he sent for Harpagus to come to him. Harpagus came. The king began the conversation by asking Harpagus what method he had employed for destroying the child of Mandane, which he, the king, had delivered to him some years before. Harpagus replied by stating the exact truth. He said that, as soon as he had received the infant, he began immediately to consider by what means he could effect its destruction without involving himself in the guilt of murder; that, finally, he had determined upon employing the herdsman Mitridates to expose it in the forest till it should perish of hunger and cold; and, in order to be sure that the king's behest was fully obeyed, he charged the herdsman, he said, to keep strict watch near the child till it was dead, and then to bring home the body. He had then sent a confidential messenger from his own household to see the body and provide for its interment. He solemnly assured the king, in conclusion, that this was the real truth, and that the child was actually destroyed in the manner he had described.

Dissimulation of Astyages

He proposes an entertainment

The king then, with an appearance of great satisfaction and pleasure, informed Harpagus that the child had not been destroyed after all, and he related to him the circumstances of its having been exchanged for the dead child of Spaco, and brought up in the herdsman's hut. He informed him, too, of the singular manner in which the fact that the infant had been preserved, and was still alive, had been discovered. He told Harpagus, moreover, that he was greatly rejoiced at this discovery. "After he was dead, as I supposed," said he, "I bitterly repented of having given orders to destroy him. I could not bear my daughter's grief, or the reproaches which she incessantly uttered against me. But the child is alive, and all is well; and I am going to give a grand entertainment as a festival of rejoicing on the occasion."

Astyages invites Harpagus to a grand entertainment

Astyages then requested Harpagus to send his son, who was about thirteen years of age, to the palace, to be a companion to Cyrus, and, inviting him very specially to come to the entertainment, he dismissed him with many marks of attention and honor. Harpagus went home, trembling at the thought of the imminent danger which he had incurred, and of the narrow escape by which he had been saved from it. He called his son, directed him to prepare himself to go to the king, and dismissed him with many charges in respect to his behavior, both toward the king and toward Cyrus. He related to his wife the conversation which had taken place between himself and Astyages, and she rejoiced with him in the apparently happy issue of an affair which might well have been expected to have been their ruin.

Horrible revenge

The sequel of the story is too horrible to be told, and yet too essential to a right understanding of the influences and effects produced on human nature by the possession and exercise of despotic and irresponsible power to be omitted. Harpagus came to the festival. It was a grand entertainment. Harpagus was placed in a conspicuous position at the table. A great variety of dishes were brought in and set before the different guests, and were eaten without question. Toward the close of the feast, Astyages asked Harpagus what he thought of his fare. Harpagus, half terrified with some

mysterious presentiment of danger, expressed himself well pleased with it. Astyages then told him there was plenty more of the same kind, and ordered the attendants to bring the basket in. They came accordingly, and uncovered a basket before the wretched guest, which contained, as he saw when he looked into it, the head, and hands, and feet of his son. Astyages asked him to help himself to whatever part he liked!

Action of Harpagus

The most astonishing part of the story is yet to be told. It relates to the action of Harpagus in such an emergency. He looked as composed and placid as if nothing unusual had occurred. The king asked him if he knew what he had been eating. He said that he did; and that whatever was agreeable to the will of the king was always pleasing to him!!

It is hard to say whether despotic power exerts its worst and most direful influences on those who wield it, or on those who have it to bear; on its masters, or on its slaves.

Astyages becomes uneasy

After the first feelings of pleasure which Astyages experienced in being relieved from the sense of guilt which oppressed his mind so long as he supposed that his orders for the murder of his infant grandchild had been obeyed, his former uneasiness lest the child should in future years become his rival and competitor for the possession of the Median throne, which had been the motive originally instigating him to the commission of the crime, returned in some measure again, and he began to consider whether it was not incumbent on him to take some measures to guard against such a result. The end of his deliberations was, that he concluded to send for the magi, or soothsayers, as he had done in the case of his dream, and obtain their judgment on the affair in the new aspect which it had now assumed.

The magi again consulted

Advice of the magi

When the magi had heard the king's narrative of the circumstances under which the discovery of the child's preservation had been made, through complaints which had been preferred against him on account of the manner in which he had exercised the prerogatives of a king among his playmates, they decided at once that Astyages had no cause for any further apprehensions in respect to the dreams which had disturbed him previous to his grandchild's birth. "He has been a king," they said, "and the danger is over. It is true that he has been a monarch only in play, but that is enough to satisfy and fulfill the presages of the vision. Occurrences very slight and trifling in themselves are often found to accomplish what seemed of very serious magnitude and moment, as portended. Your grandchild has been a king, and he will never reign again. You have, therefore, no further cause to fear, and may send him to his parents in Persia with perfect safety."

Astyages adopts it

The king determined to adopt this advice. He ordered the soothsayers, however, not to remit their assiduity and vigilance, and if any signs or omens should appear to indicate approaching danger, he charged them to give him immediate warning. This they faithfully promised to do. They felt, they

said, a personal interest in doing it; for Cyrus being a Persian prince, his accession to the Median throne would involve the subjection of the Medes to the Persian dominion, a result which they wished in every account to avoid. So, promising to watch vigilantly for every indication of danger, they left the presence of the king. The king then sent for Cyrus.

Cyrus sets out for Persia

It seems that Cyrus, though astonished at the great and mysterious changes which had taken place in his condition, was still ignorant of his true history. Astyages now told him that he was to go into Persia. "You will rejoin there," said he, "your true parents, who, you will find, are of very different rank in life from the herdsman whom you have lived with thus far. You will make the journey under the charge and escort of persons that I have appointed for the purpose. They will explain to you, on the way, the mystery in which your parentage and birth seems to you at present enveloped. You will find that I was induced many years ago, by the influence of an untoward dream, to treat you injuriously. But all has ended well, and you can now go in peace to your proper home."

His parents' joy

As soon as the preparations for the journey could be made, Cyrus set out, under the care of the party appointed to conduct him, and went to Persia. His parents were at first dumb with astonishment, and were then overwhelmed with gladness and joy at seeing their much-loved and long-lost babe reappear, as if from the dead, in the form of this tall and handsome boy, with health, intelligence, and happiness beaming in his countenance. They overwhelmed him with caresses, and the heart of Mandane, especially, was filled with pride and pleasure.

As soon as Cyrus became somewhat settled in his new home, his parents began to make arrangements for giving him as complete an education as the means and opportunities of those days afforded.

Life at Cambyses's court

Instruction of the young men

Xenophon, in his narrative of the early life of Cyrus, gives a minute, and, in some respects, quite an extraordinary account of the mode of life led in Cambyses's court. The sons of all the nobles and officers of the court were educated together, within the precincts of the royal palaces, or, rather, they spent their time together there, occupied in various pursuits and avocations, which were intended to train them for the duties of future life, though there was very little of what would be considered, in modern times, as education. They were not generally taught to read, nor could they, in fact, since there were no books, have used that art if they had acquired it. The only intellectual instruction which they seem to have received was what was called learning justice. The boys had certain teachers, who explained to them, more or less formally, the general principles of right and wrong, the injunctions and prohibitions of the laws, and the obligations resulting from them, and the rules by which controversies between man and man, arising in the various relations of life, should be settled. The boys were also trained to apply these principles and rules to the cases which occurred among themselves, each acting as judge in turn, to discuss and decide the questions that arose from time to time, either from real transactions as they occurred, or from hypothetical cases invented to put their powers to the test. To stimulate the exercise of their powers, they were rewarded when they decided right, and punished

when they decided wrong. Cyrus himself was punished on one occasion for a wrong decision, under the following circumstances:

Cyrus a judge

His decision in that capacity

Cyrus punished

A bigger boy took away the coat of a smaller boy than himself, because it was larger than his own, and gave him his own smaller coat instead. The smaller boy complained of the wrong, and the case was referred to Cyrus for his adjudication. After hearing the case, Cyrus decided that each boy should keep the coat that fitted him. The teacher condemned this as a very unjust decision. "When you are called upon," said he, "to consider a question of what fits best, then you should determine as you have done in this case; but when you are appointed to decide whose each coat is, and to adjudge it to the proper owner, then you are to consider what constitutes right possession, and whether he who takes a thing by force from one who is weaker than himself, should have it, or whether he who made it or purchased it should be protected in his property. You have decided against law, and in favor of violence and wrong." Cyrus's sentence was thus condemned, and he was punished for not reasoning more soundly.

Manly exercises

Hunting excursions

The boys at this Persian court were trained to many manly exercises. They were taught to wrestle and to run. They were instructed in the use of such arms as were employed in those times, and rendered dexterous in the use of them by daily exercises. They were taught to put their skill in practice, too, in hunting excursions, which they took, by turns, with the king, in the neighboring forest and mountains. On these occasions, they were armed with a bow, and a quiver of arrows, a shield, a small sword or dagger which was worn at the side in a sort of scabbard, and two javelins. One of these was intended to be thrown, the other to be retained in the hand, for use in close combat, in case the wild beast, in his desperation, should advance to a personal re-encounter. These hunting expeditions were considered extremely important as a part of the system of youthful training. They were often long and fatiguing. The young men became inured, by means of them, to toil, and privation, and exposure. They had to make long marches, to encounter great dangers, to engage in desperate conflicts, and to submit sometimes to the inconveniences of hunger and thirst, as well as exposure to the extremes of heat and cold, and to the violence of storms. All this was considered as precisely the right sort of discipline to make them good soldiers in their future martial campaigns.

Personal appearance of Cyrus

Disposition and character of Cyrus

A universal favorite

Cyrus was not, himself, at this time, old enough to take a very active part in these severer services, as they belonged to a somewhat advanced stage of Persian education, and he was yet not quite twelve years old. He was a very beautiful boy, tall and graceful in form and his countenance was striking and expressive. He was very frank and open in his disposition and character, speaking honestly, and without fear, the sentiments of his heart, in any presence and on all occasions. He was extremely kind hearted, and amiable, too, in his disposition, averse to saying or doing any thing which could give pain to those around him. In fact, the openness and cordiality of his address and manners, and the unaffected ingenuousness and sincerity which characterized his disposition, made him a universal favorite. His frankness, his childish simplicity, his vivacity, his personal grace and beauty, and his generous and self-sacrificing spirit, rendered him the object of general admiration throughout the court, and filled Mandane's heart with maternal gladness and pride.

Chapter III. The Visit to Media

B.C. 587-584

Astyages sends for Cyrus

Cyrus goes to Media

When Cyrus was about twelve years old, if the narrative which Xenophon gives of his history is true, he was invited by his grandfather Astyages to make a visit to Media. As he was about ten years of age, according to Herodotus, when he was restored to his parents, he could have been residing only two years in Persia when he received this invitation. During this period, Astyages had received, through Mandane and others, very glowing descriptions of the intelligence and vivacity of the young prince, and he naturally felt a desire to see him once more. In fact, Cyrus's personal attractiveness and beauty, joined to a certain frank and noble generosity of spirit which he seems to have manifested in his earliest years, made him a universal favorite at home, and the reports of these qualities, and of the various sayings and doings on Cyrus's part, by which his disposition and character were revealed, awakened strongly in the mind of Astyages that kind of interest which a grandfather is always very prone to feel in a handsome and precocious grandchild.

Cyrus's reception

His astonishment

Sympathy with childhood

Pleasures of old age

As Cyrus had been sent to Persia as soon as his true rank had been discovered, he had had no opportunities of seeing the splendor of royal life in Media, and the manners and habits of the Persians were very plain and simple. Cyrus was accordingly very much impressed with the magnificence of the scenes to which he was introduced when he arrived in Media, and with the gayeties and luxuries, the pomp and display, and the spectacles and parades in which the Median court abounded. Astyages himself took great pleasure in witnessing and increasing his little grandson's admiration for these wonders. It is one of the most extraordinary and beautiful of the provisions which God has made for securing the continuance of human happiness to the very end of life, that we can renew, through sympathy with children, the pleasures which, for ourselves alone, had long since, through repetition and satiety, lost their charm. The rides, the walks, the flowers gathered by the road-side,

the rambles among pebbles on the beach, the songs, the games, and even the little picture-book of childish tales which have utterly and entirely lost their power to affect the mind even of middle life, directly and alone, regain their magic influence, and call up vividly all the old emotions, even to the heart of decrepit age, when it seeks these enjoyments in companionship and sympathy with children or grandchildren beloved. By giving to us this capacity for renewing our own sensitiveness to the impressions of pleasure through sympathy with childhood, God has provided a true and effectual remedy for the satiety and insensibility of age. Let any one who is in the decline of years, whose time passes but heavily away, and who supposes that nothing can awaken interest in his mind or give him pleasure, make the experiment of taking children to a ride or to a concert, or to see a menagerie or a museum, and he will find that there is a way by which he can again enjoy very highly the pleasures which he had supposed were for him forever exhausted and gone.

Character of Cyrus

This was the result, at all events, in the case of Astyages and Cyrus. The monarch took a new pleasure in the luxuries and splendors which had long since lost their charm for him, in observing their influence and effect upon the mind of his little grandson. Cyrus, as we have already said, was very frank and open in his disposition, and spoke with the utmost freedom of every thing that he saw. He was, of course, a privileged person, and could always say what the feeling of the moment and his own childish conceptions prompted, without danger. He had, however, according to the account which Xenophon gives, a great deal of good sense, as well as of sprightliness and brilliancy; so that, while his remarks, through their originality and point, attracted every one's attention, there was a native politeness and sense of propriety which restrained him from saying any thing to give pain. Even when he disapproved of and condemned what he saw in the arrangements of his grandfather's court or household, he did it in such a manner – so ingenuous, good-natured, and unassuming, that it amused all and offended none.

First interview with his grandfather

Dress of the king

In fact, on the very first interview which Astyages had with Cyrus, an instance of the boy's readiness and tact occurred, which impressed his grandfather very much in his favor. The Persians, as has been already remarked, were accustomed to dress very plainly, while, on the other hand, at the Median court the superior officers, and especially the king, were always very splendidly adorned. Accordingly, when Cyrus was introduced into his grandfather's presence, he was quite dazzled with the display. The king wore a purple robe, very richly adorned, with a belt and collars, which were embroidered highly, and set with precious stones. He had bracelets, too, upon his wrists, of the most costly character. He wore flowing locks of artificial hair, and his face was painted, after the Median manner. Cyrus gazed upon this gay spectacle for a few moments in silence, and then exclaimed, "Why, mother! what a handsome man my grandfather is!"

Cyrus's considerate reply

Such an exclamation, of course, made great amusement both for the king himself and for the others who were present; and at length Mandane, somewhat indiscreetly, it must be confessed, asked Cyrus which of the two he thought the handsomest, his father or his grandfather. Cyrus escaped from

the danger of deciding such a formidable question by saying that his father was the handsomest man in Persia, but his grandfather was the handsomest of all the Medes he had ever seen. Astyages was even more pleased by this proof of his grandson's adroitness and good sense than he had been with the compliment which the boy had paid to him; and thenceforward Cyrus became an established favorite, and did and said, in his grandfather's presence, almost whatever he pleased.

Habits of Cyrus

Horsemanship among the Persians

Cyrus learns to ride

His delights

Amusements with the boys

When the first childish feelings of excitement and curiosity had subsided, Cyrus seemed to attach very little value to the fine clothes and gay trappings with which his grandfather was disposed to adorn him, and to all the other external marks of parade and display, which were generally so much prized among the Medes. He was much more inclined to continue in his former habits of plain dress and frugal means than to imitate Median ostentation and luxury. There was one pleasure, however, to be found in Media, which in Persia he had never enjoyed, that he prized very highly. That was the pleasure of learning to ride on horseback. The Persians, it seems, either because their country was a rough and mountainous region, or for some other cause, were very little accustomed to ride. They had very few horses, and there were no bodies of cavalry in their armies. The young men, therefore, were not trained to the art of horsemanship. Even in their hunting excursions they went always on foot, and were accustomed to make long marches through the forests and among the mountains in this manner, loaded heavily, too, all the time, with the burden of arms and provisions which they were obliged to carry. It was, therefore, a new pleasure to Cyrus to mount a horse. Horsemanship was a great art among the Medes. Their horses were beautiful and fleet, and splendidly caparisoned. Astyages provided for Cyrus the best animals which could be procured, and the boy was very proud and happy in exercising himself in the new accomplishment which he thus had the opportunity to acquire. To ride is always a great source of pleasure to boys; but in that period of the world, when physical strength was so much more important and more highly valued than at present, horsemanship was a vastly greater source of gratification than it is now. Cyrus felt that he had, at a single leap, quadrupled his power, and thus risen at once to a far higher rank in the scale of being than he had occupied before; for, as soon as he had once learned to be at home in the saddle, and to subject the spirit and the power of his horse to his own will, the courage, the strength, and the speed of the animal became, in fact, almost personal acquisitions of his own. He felt, accordingly, when he was galloping over the plains, or pursuing deer in the park, or running over the racecourse with his companions, as if it was some newly-acquired strength and speed of his own that he was exercising, and which, by some magic power, was attended by no toilsome exertion, and followed by no fatigue.

The cup-bearer

The various officers and servants in Astyages's household, as well as Astyages himself, soon began to feel a strong interest in the young prince. Each took a pleasure in explaining to him what pertained to their several departments, and in teaching him whatever he desired to learn. The attendant highest in rank in such a household was the cup-bearer. He had the charge of the tables and the wine, and all the general arrangements of the palace seem to have been under his direction. The cup-bearer in Astyages's court was a Sacian. He was, however, less a friend to Cyrus than the rest. There was nothing within the range of his official duties that he could teach the boy; and Cyrus did not like his wine. Besides, when Astyages was engaged, it was the cup-bearer's duty to guard him from interruption, and at such times he often had occasion to restrain the young prince from the liberty of entering his grandfather's apartments as often as he pleased.

The entertainment

Cyrus's conversation

At one of the entertainments which Astyages gave in his palace, Cyrus and Mandane were invited; and Astyages, in order to gratify the young prince as highly as possible, set before him a great variety of dishes – meats, and sauces, and delicacies of every kind – all served in costly vessels, and with great parade and ceremony. He supposed that Cyrus would have been enraptured with the luxury and splendor of the entertainment. He did not, however, seem much pleased. Astyages asked him the reason, and whether the feast which he saw before him was not a much finer one than he had been accustomed to see in Persia. Cyrus said, in reply, that it seemed to him to be very troublesome to have to eat a little of so many separate things. In Persia they managed, he thought, a great deal better. "And how do you manage in Persia?" asked Astyages. "Why, in Persia," replied Cyrus, "we have plain bread and meat, and eat it when we are hungry; so we get health and strength, and have very little trouble." Astyages laughed at this simplicity, and told Cyrus that he might, if he preferred it, live on plain bread and meat while he remained in Media, and then he would return to Persia in as good health as he came.

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