

CYRUS



MAKERS OF HISTORY SERIES

BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. HERODOTUS AND XENOPHON	7
II. THE BIRTH OF CYRUS	15
III. THE VISIT TO MEDIA	27
IV. CROESUS	39
V. ACCESSION OF CYRUS TO THE THRONE.	49
VI. THE ORACLES	57
VII. THE CONQUEST OF LYDIA	65
VIII. THE CONQUEST OF BABYLON.	75
IX. THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS	85
X. THE STORY OF PANTHEA	93
XI. CONVERSATIONS	103
XII. THE DEATH OF CYRUS	113



HERODOTUS AND XENOPHON.



CYRUS was the founder of the ancient Persian Empire, perhaps the wealthiest the world has ever seen. This empire is an extraordinary example of that strange part of human nature which causes men to keep a royal family in total power over themselves for centuries, submit to endless humiliations on their behalf, and commit the most atrocious crimes at their command.

The Persian Empire was founded in western Asia between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, five hundred years before Christ. It grew for many centuries before Cyrus became ruler and made the kingdom so famous that mankind gave him credit for its entire creation.

At the same time as this Persian monarchy was rising in the East, the small but strong republics of Greece were flourishing in the West. The Greeks had an alphabet that was easy to learn and to write, while the Persians' written language was very slow and difficult and only used by

the priests for government records. The result was that the Greek writers became the historians of their own countries as well as the nations around them, because of how well they wrote about the great events of their day. Scholars have read their exciting histories for over two thousand years, and it is for this reason that the Greek language has survived.

Most of our knowledge of Cyrus and the Persian Empire comes from two of these Greek historians, named Herodotus and Xenophon. Herodotus was a philosopher and scholar who spent his life in study and travel, while Xenophon was a great general who gained fame in distant military expeditions. They were both born to wealthy families, both held high positions in society, and both led daring careers that made them famous while they were still alive. But despite these similarities, these two men wrote two very different, often conflicting accounts of the life of Cyrus.

Herodotus was born in the city of Halicarnassus on the shores of the Aegean Sea in 484 BC, about fifty years after the death of Cyrus. He became a student at a very early age. In other nations, the education of young men from important families was limited to the use of weapons and horses and other skills that would make them good warriors. The Greeks, however, also taught reading, writing, poetry, history, and oratory. As a result, a general taste for intelligent pursuits spread through their communities. Public affairs were discussed before large audiences. Tragedies, poems, and songs were considered an essential part of public entertainment because the people had learned from infancy to appreciate and enjoy them.

These literary exhibitions seem to have inspired Herodotus with a great desire for knowledge and discov-

eries which he could share with his countrymen in these great public assemblies. Accordingly, as soon as he was old enough, he set out upon a journey through foreign countries in order to bring back a report of everything he should see and hear.

In those days, almost all knowledge of other nations was limited to the reports of the merchants whose ships and caravans travelled back and forth around the Mediterranean Sea. Occasionally, the commander of a military expedition would write a description of the countries he passed through. These accounts were more clear and reliable than those of the merchants, but the information from these two sources put together often raised more questions than it answered. Herodotus, therefore, set about to explore all the countries on the Mediterranean and in central Asia, examine their geographical position, learn their history and customs, and write it all down for the entertainment and instruction of the Greeks.

He went to Egypt first. Only recently had Egypt begun allowing travelers from other countries to visit, and Herodotus was the first to take advantage of this opportunity. While there, he took many notes of what he saw and what he thought his countrymen would like to know. From Egypt he went west into Libya, and then travelled slowly along the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea as far as the Straits of Gibraltar, learning as much as he could and noting it all with great care.

The Straits of Gibraltar were believed to be the western end of the world in those days, and so Herodotus returned east after reaching them. He visited Tyre and Phoenicia on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and then continued east to Assyria and Babylon, where he learned all that he has written about the Medes, Persians, and the

history of Cyrus. He then went even further east by land into the heart of Asia. The country Scythia was considered the eastern end of the world, and so after exploring this land, he turned north and then west and came down through Epirus and Macedon back into Greece. He had explored almost the whole known world.

Herodotus is widely known as the Father of History, and many see the level of detail in his writing as a sign that he only described what he actually saw. Others believe that he drew more on his imagination than any other source and never even visited half the countries he claims to have seen. This group maintains that the Father of Lies would be a more appropriate title.

Of course, often in strong controversies of this kind, the truth lies somewhere in between the two sides. Cicero says that Herodotus was the first to beautify a historical narrative, and while there is a fine line between beautifying and embellishing, it seems likely that Herodotus' writings are mostly true, though highly colored and adorned in parts. His goal was, after all, to read them in front of a large audience of Greeks, and he was likely to make them as interesting as possible.

As a result of political turmoil in his home state, Herodotus was forced to go into exile on the island of Samos, where he lived alone while he wrote out his history. He divided it into nine books, which he later named after the nine Muses. The island of Samos is very near to Patmos, where John the Evangelist wrote the Book of Revelation in the same language a few hundred years later, while also in exile.

After completing the first few books of his history, Herodotus went with the manuscript to the celebration of the 81st Olympiad. The Olympiads were events used to

mark the passing of four years. These helped the Greeks keep track of time. They were celebrated with magnificent games, shows, and parades which vast crowds assembled from every part of Greece to witness and participate in. These celebrations were held at Olympia, a city in western Greece of which now only ruins are left.

Herodotus was already famous for his travels when he arrived at Olympia, and he found huge assemblies excited to hear him read large portions of his writings. Nearly all the politicians, generals, philosophers, and scholars of Greece were gathered there, and when they all applauded him, Herodotus' fame immediately grew to universal renown. Gratified at the interest his countrymen showed in his work, he at once resolved to devote all his time to completing it.

It took him twelve years to achieve this goal. He then returned to Athens during a grand festival and chose many stories to read that would be exciting to his Greek hearers—highly complimentary stories about Greek heroes and wars. The Athenians loved these tales about their ancestors' exploits. After receiving more applause than he ever had before, Herodotus was proclaimed a national benefactor and given a large public gift of money. Herodotus continued to enjoy this fame for his writing throughout the rest of his life—fame which has only been increased by the passing of time.

Because Xenophon, the other Greek historian who wrote about Cyrus, was a military commander, his life was spent very differently from Herodotus'. He was born in Athens, about thirty years after Herodotus, which meant that he was only a child while Herodotus was writing. When he was about twenty-two, he joined a military expedition to Asia Minor in order to enter the service of

the ruler of that country. This ruler is known as Cyrus the Younger, in order to distinguish him from Cyrus the Great, who had lived one hundred and fifty years earlier and who this book is about.

This expedition was led by a general named Clearchus. The soldiers and officers did not know that Cyrus the Younger planned to use them to capture the throne of Persia from his brother and king, Artaxerxes. Even though Cyrus was a young man, he was very ambitious and hated being ruled by his older brother. His mother encouraged his ambition, but when Cyrus attempted to assassinate his brother on the day of his coronation, Artaxerxes mercifully sent him to rule Asia Minor instead of punishing him for treason. Cyrus immediately began plotting how to take possession of his brother's throne in Babylon. Pretending to be afraid of a nearby country, he wrote to Artaxerxes, asking for soldiers, so that Artaxerxes did not suspect that the army Cyrus was building was intended to march on Babylon instead.

The army which came from Greece at this time to serve Cyrus consisted of about thirteen thousand men. Cyrus already had a hundred thousand soldiers, but the Greek warriors were so famous for their courage and their discipline, that Cyrus rightly considered them the pride of his army. Xenophon was one of the younger Greek generals. As they crossed the Hellespont and entered Asia Minor, they learned that Cyrus was going to use them to make war upon the king of Persia and so, with their suspicions confirmed, they refused to go any further—not because of any reluctance to help an ungrateful traitor destroy his own brother and benefactor, but because they felt they deserved extra pay since the work was so hazardous. Cyrus agreed, and the army went on.

Artaxerxes quickly gathered the whole force of his empire—an army consisting of over a million men. The force extended so far across the plains of Babylon, that it was only at nightfall after the battle that the Greek soldiers discovered that Cyrus' whole army had been defeated and that Cyrus was dead. Only the Greeks were left and they were commanded by Artaxerxes to surrender at once.

The Greeks refused to surrender and instead fortified themselves as well as they could and prepared for a desperate defense. There were still about ten thousand of them left and the Persians were afraid to attack them, so they instead began negotiations, pretending to be friendly and offering to allow them to return to Greece. Then, luring Clearchus and the leading Greek generals to a feast, the Persians seized and murdered them, calling it an execution of rebels and traitors. As soon as the Greek camp heard this, the whole army was thrown into dismay, for they were in a hostile country surrounded by an enemy a hundred times their size, without supplies, and with two thousand miles of rugged, difficult terrain between them and their home. And if they surrendered, they knew that they would all die in slavery.

Under these circumstances, Xenophon called together the surviving officers in the camp and recommended that they elect new commanders and immediately set out on a march for Greece. This plan was adopted. He was chosen as the new commanding general, and he led the whole force safely back through countless dangers, defending themselves every step of the way against the Persian army's attempts to surround and capture them. This retreat took two hundred and fifteen days. It is considered one of the world's greatest military achievements and is known as the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. Xenophon gained double

fame by this deed, for he not only led the army to safety, but he later wrote an account of the exploit and so acquired literary as well as military renown.

Some time after this, Xenophon returned again to Asia as a military commander and distinguished himself in other campaigns. He acquired a large fortune during these wars and eventually retired to a magnificent villa near Olympia, the same city where Herodotus had become famous for his histories. Here Xenophon spent the rest of his life writing historical memoirs, no doubt influenced by the success Herodotus himself had achieved. The two most important works by Xenophon that have survived to the present day are, first, his account of his expedition under Cyrus the Younger, and, second, a tale based on the history of Cyrus the Great. This second book is called the *Cyropaedia*. From it and from the history written by Herodotus, nearly all our knowledge of that great Persian monarch is derived.

Whether or not the stories which Herodotus and Xenophon have told us about Cyrus the Great are true is less important than you might think, for the stories have been so widely read that they have had a greater effect on the world than the events on which they are based ever did. In fact, they have become such a permanent part of the literature of mankind that the real Cyrus is now far less important than the Cyrus of Herodotus and Xenophon. The reader must understand therefore that the purpose of this book is not an exact account of Cyrus as he actually lived, but a faithful summary of his story as it has been told throughout the world for the last two thousand years, whether fictitious or real, partial or impartial, true or embellished.



THE BIRTH OF CYRUS.



WHEN Assyria, Media, and Persia first emerged in central Asia, the three nations were already closely connected. Cambyses, the ruler of Persia, married Mandane, the daughter of Astyages, the King of Media. Their son was Cyrus, and Herodotus tells the following extraordinary story regarding his birth: while Mandane was still living in Media, her father Astyages awoke one morning terrified by a dream. In his dream, a great flood had destroyed his capital and submerged a large part of the kingdom. This alone would not have been a strange dream, for the rivers in that country often flooded quite violently. What was strange was that the great flood in his vision seemed to be connected with his daughter, which Astyages took to be a sign that Mandane would cause a great disaster to befall Media. Perhaps she would have a son who would rebel against him and seize power, overwhelming him as the flood had done in his dream.