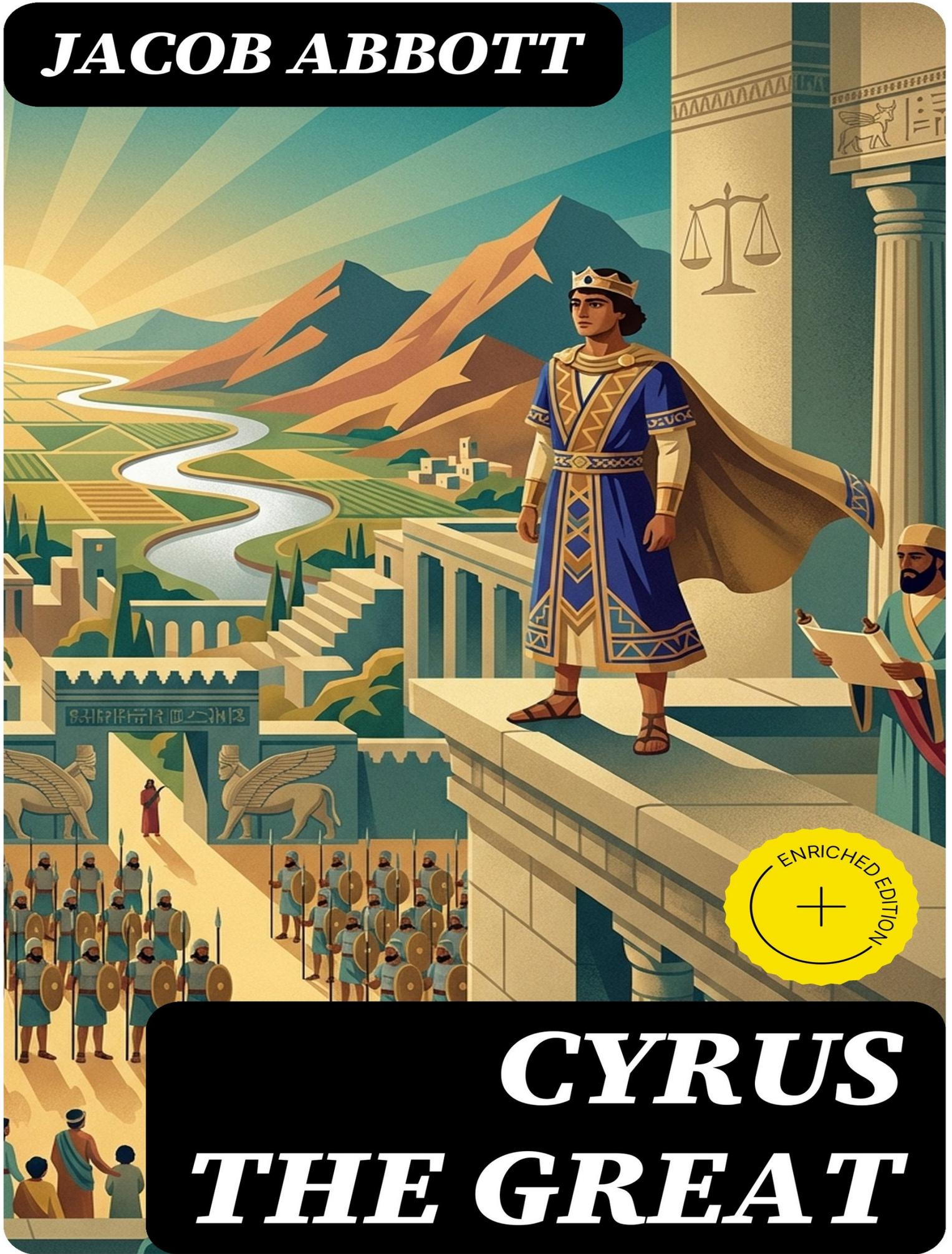


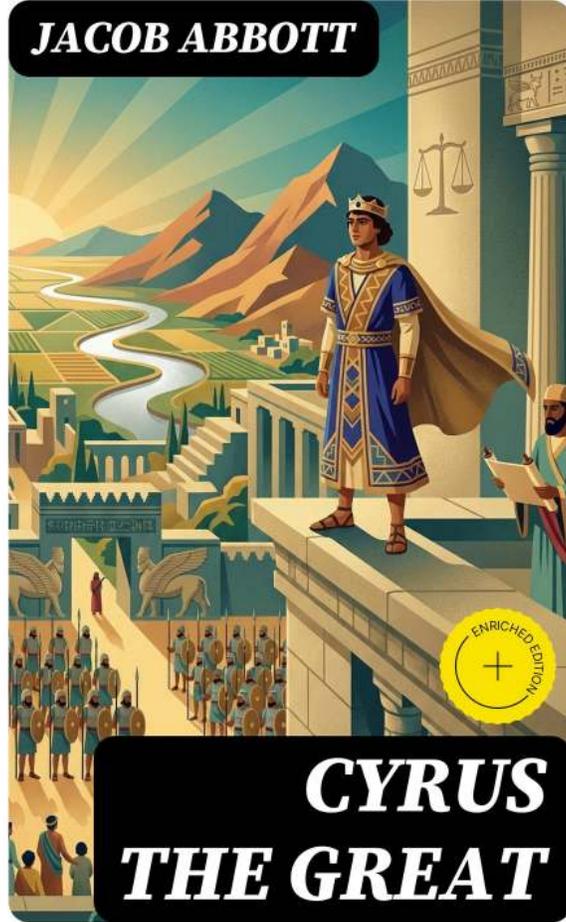
JACOB ABBOTT



ENRICHED EDITION
+

**CYRUS
THE GREAT**

JACOB ABBOTT



**CYRUS
THE GREAT**

Jacob Abbott

Cyrus the Great

Enriched edition. Makers of History

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Bryce Emerson

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Introduction

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At the heart of Jacob Abbott's *Cyrus the Great* lies the drama of how power is won, measured, and restrained, as a leader must convert the thunder of conquest into the quieter, harder labor of ruling justly over many peoples, balancing calculation with courage, ambition with forbearance, and the urgencies of war with the enduring demands of law, persuasion, and mercy, while the world around him—vast, intricate, and newly connected by his success—tests whether personal character, strategic insight, and political imagination can shape an empire that is more than the sum of its victories.

This volume is a work of narrative popular history and biography, set in the ancient Near East during the rise of the Persian dominion, and written in the mid-nineteenth century by the American author Jacob Abbott as part of his *Makers of History* series. Its historical canvas spans deserts, river valleys, and fortified cities where regional powers contended for influence, yet the book keeps its focus firmly on the figure whose name it bears. Abbott presents episodes from a distant era in a concise, accessible manner, aiming to explain people and motives as much as places and events, without the apparatus of modern academic history.

The premise is straightforward and compelling: the narrative follows the emergence of a leader from obscurity into authority, the forging of alliances, the testing of strength against neighboring powers, and the steady transformation of personal ambition into public order. Abbott guides the

reader through turning points with clear exposition, measured pacing, and a calm, instructive tone, pausing to summarize causes and consequences in plain language. The voice is that of a storyteller-teacher, more interested in moral and practical lessons than in exhaustive detail, so the book reads briskly while still supplying vivid scenes and explanations that make complex developments comprehensible.

Key themes organize the portrait that emerges. Abbott emphasizes the relationship between character and command, depicting patience, prudence, and resolve as forces that shape outcomes alongside battlefield prowess. He explores how leaders secure legitimacy, whether by keeping promises, administering justice, or articulating purposes that rally followers. The narrative also weighs negotiation against coercion, showing how diplomacy, symbols, and institutions can extend influence where arms alone would fail. Throughout, the book considers the challenge of uniting diverse communities under a single authority, raising questions about law, custom, and tolerance that matter as much to governance as any stratagem or siege.

For contemporary readers, the value of this account lies not in novel archival revelations, but in the clarity with which it presents enduring problems of leadership and collective life. The book invites reflection on how large enterprises are built and sustained, how trust is earned across cultural boundaries, and how restraint can be a form of strength. Its examples of coalition building, careful timing, and attention to morale will resonate with anyone concerned with institutions, whether civic, commercial, or educational. By framing success as a balance of vision, discipline, and empathy, Abbott offers a mirror in which modern ambitions can be judged.

Readers should also recognize the book's nineteenth-century perspective. Abbott writes with confidence and simplicity, organizing the past into coherent episodes and drawing practical morals, a method that reflects the educational aims of his era. He works from the historical traditions available to him, synthesizing them into a continuous story rather than interrogating them with modern critical apparatus. That approach yields lucidity and momentum, while occasionally smoothing uncertainties that today's scholarship might foreground. Approached with this understanding, the text becomes both a gateway to the figure it portrays and a document of how earlier generations taught history to a broad audience.

To read *Cyrus the Great* today is to encounter a carefully shaped narrative that invites engagement rather than passive reverence, asking the reader to trace causes, weigh choices, and consider consequences without requiring specialized knowledge. It opens a window onto a formative moment in world history while foregrounding questions about power and responsibility that never recede. As an introduction to the subject and a model of lucid storytelling, it rewards both first-time explorers of the ancient world and seasoned readers seeking perspective. Abbott's book endures because it treats empire not as spectacle alone, but as a demanding study in human conduct.

Synopsis

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Cyrus the Great, by Jacob Abbott, presents a biographical history of the founder of the Persian Empire within the author's Makers of History series. Abbott blends narrative drive with reflective commentary, drawing chiefly on classical historians and biblical references to trace Cyrus's ascent and statecraft. The book situates Cyrus amid contending Near Eastern kingdoms and the transition from Median domination to Persian preeminence. It emphasizes practical leadership, strategic patience, and humane policy as recurring motifs. While attentive to the romance of ancient tradition, Abbott signals where sources diverge, guiding readers through a clear sequence of events rather than offering antiquarian debate.

Abbott begins by sketching the geography and societies of the Iranian plateau, the pastoral habits of the early Persians, and their ties to the more established Medes. He recounts traditional stories surrounding Cyrus's birth and childhood, treating them as illustrative rather than definitive, and uses them to explain the discipline and resourcefulness prized in Persian life. The narrative introduces the Median court of Astyages, contrasting its opulence with the comparative austerity of Persian customs. Early episodes foreshadow Cyrus's aptitude for command, yet Abbott maintains a measured tone, presenting youthful anecdotes as part of a legendary backdrop to the historical career that follows.

From these origins the book moves to the political fissures that enable Cyrus's rise. Abbott describes grievances within

the Median hierarchy and shifting loyalties among tribal and provincial leaders, highlighting the figure of Harpagus in accounts of intrigue. Cyrus consolidates Persian allegiance, tests Median strength, and capitalizes on discontent to challenge Astyages. Through a sequence of campaigns and defections the balance of power tilts, bringing Media under Persian control. Abbott stresses the temperate handling of victory—an approach that wins cooperation as much as territory—and the importance of organization, supply, and measured ambition in replacing an older order without provoking ruinous backlash.

Attention then turns west to Lydia, ruled by Croesus and famed for wealth and alliances. Abbott outlines the strategic motives for confronting this power and the uncertainties of counsel that attend the decision. The narrative follows Cyrus through preparations and advances across Asia Minor, portraying methodical operations rather than rash assault. The fall of Sardis marks a decisive enlargement of Persian influence. Abbott lingers on contrasting images—fortune’s instability and disciplined prudence—while recounting traditional episodes that emphasize clemency toward a defeated monarch. The result is a portrait of conquest that aims to secure lasting settlement and revenue rather than transient triumph.

With Lydia subdued, the story advances to Babylon, renowned for its size, defenses, and riverine setting. Abbott describes the city’s formidable walls and the logistical problems they posed, then draws on classical accounts that ascribe to Cyrus an ingenious method for gaining entry. The capture is depicted not as a sack but as an ordered transition of authority. The narrative underscores policies of restraint, deference to local institutions, and the accommodation of subject peoples, including traditions that credit Cyrus with permitting displaced communities to

return to their homelands. Babylon's submission consolidates a vast, multiethnic empire, testing the emperor's capacity for governance as well as victory.

Abbott's middle chapters develop a study of rule: the balancing of Persian rigor with cosmopolitan tolerance; the use of local officials alongside trusted commanders; and the cultivation of loyalty through fairness, predictable tribute, and personal accessibility. He illustrates how measured mercy can strengthen control, yet notes that leniency requires firm discipline to be credible. Scenes of camp life, councils, and provincial settlements serve to translate abstract principles into practical administration. Throughout, Abbott contrasts spectacle with substance, asserting that stable institutions and steady habits, not pageantry, secure an empire that stretches across languages, climates, and traditions without erasing their distinct identities.

The closing portion follows later expeditions on distant frontiers and the strains inherent in sustaining a far-flung dominion, while acknowledging that ancient authorities diverge on certain episodes and on the manner of Cyrus's end. Abbott therefore privileges the broader arc: a leader who unites Persians and Medes, overcomes famed rivals, and governs with a policy that tempers force with forbearance. The book concludes by considering how this image, preserved through classical and biblical memory, shaped subsequent ideas of just kingship. In emphasizing character, prudence, and moderation, the narrative offers an enduring, accessible lens on power's responsibilities without reducing the past to legend or moral tale.

Historical Context

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Jacob Abbott's *Cyrus the Great* appeared in the mid-nineteenth century as part of the popular *Makers of History* series, written for general and youthful audiences. Working from classical historians and the Bible, Abbott shaped an instructive portrait of leadership grounded in character, prudence, and public virtue. His approach reflects the era's didactic historiography in the United States and Britain, where history served moral and civic education. Published before the great wave of Near Eastern archaeological discoveries had transformed Achaemenid studies, the book necessarily depends on Greek narrative traditions and scriptural testimony, filtering ancient events through accessible prose and a steady, exemplary tone.

The historical setting centers on the sixth century BCE, when the Iranian plateau, Mesopotamia, and western Anatolia hosted powerful, competing states. The Median kingdom dominated parts of Iran; the Neo-Babylonian Empire controlled the Tigris-Euphrates heartland; Lydia ruled wealthy Anatolian cities and pioneered stamped coinage. Trade routes linked the Aegean, Levant, and Central Asia. Royal courts oversaw taxation, diplomacy, and warfare, relying on fortified capitals, elite cavalry, and levied infantry. Customary vassalage and dynastic marriages structured interstate relations. It is within this interconnected political landscape that the Persians, long subordinate to Medes, emerged under the Achaemenid house to overturn regional hierarchies.

Persia's ruling family traced to Achaemenes, with later kings bearing names such as Teispes, Cyrus I, and Cambyses I. Their domain included Anshan in Elam, and they often acknowledged Median overlordship. Around 550 BCE, the balance shifted decisively: Cyrus II, later called the Great, consolidated Persian power and replaced Median supremacy, uniting Iranian peoples under his command. This transfer of hegemony reoriented alliances from the Zagros to the wider Near East, introducing a new imperial center based in Fars. Abbott situates Cyrus at the hinge of this transformation, emphasizing personal capacity amid structural change consistent with nineteenth-century biographical method.

Cyrus's reign intersected with strategic theaters beyond Iran. In Anatolia, the collapse of Lydian resistance opened western corridors and contact with Greek city-states. In Mesopotamia, the fall of Babylon in 539 BCE ended Neo-Babylonian rule and transferred immense resources and prestige to the Persians. Early imperial management drew on older Near Eastern practices—provincial oversight, tribute systems, and multilingual administration. Under later successors, especially Darius I, these practices matured into formal satrapies and extensive road networks. Abbott foregrounds Cyrus as founder of a vast polity, presenting the empire's breadth and order as the fruit of prudence, clemency, and strategic foresight.

The religious landscape of Cyrus's world was plural. Babylonian priesthoods maintained ancient cults; Judean exiles lived under Mesopotamian authority; many peoples honored local gods and civic temples. In cuneiform texts such as the Cyrus Cylinder and in Hebrew scriptures (notably Ezra and Isaiah), Cyrus is portrayed as a restorer of sanctuaries and communities, permitting displaced groups to return and rebuild. While modern debate nuances these

sources, they attest to a policy of accommodating local traditions. Abbott, writing before discovery of the Cylinder, draws heavily on the Biblical tradition to present Cyrus as benevolent toward subject peoples, a theme central to his narrative.

Sixth-century warfare combined maneuver and siegecraft. Cavalry and archers were decisive on open ground; engineers and sappers addressed walls and riverine defenses. Armies marched along established corridors linking Iran, Assyria, and Anatolia. Lydia's monetized economy, with electrum and later bimetallic coinage under Croesus, influenced exchanges across western Asia; Persian rulers later standardized coinage under Darius, integrating diverse markets. Elite and provincial elites negotiated obligations through tribute, levies, and grants of land or office. Abbott situates Cyrus's campaigns within this practical matrix of resources and logistics, stressing discipline, organization, and measured force rather than gratuitous destruction.

Ancient accounts of Cyrus differ in purpose and texture. Herodotus offers ethnographic narrative and dramatic episodes; Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* constructs an idealized, didactic prince; Ctesias provides variant traditions; Babylonian chronicles and astronomical diaries record terse, datable events, including the capture of Babylon in 539 BCE. Biblical texts frame Cyrus within Near Eastern politics and Judean restoration. When Abbott wrote, Greek and Biblical witnesses predominated in classrooms and libraries; cuneiform decipherment was only advancing, and key inscriptions had not yet been recovered. The book therefore reflects a classical-biblical synthesis, presenting Cyrus as both conqueror and exemplar of just rule.

Abbott's portrayal aligns with mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American values that equated legitimate power with moderation, clemency, and public utility. By emphasizing order, tolerance toward local customs, and the integration of far-flung peoples under stable institutions, the work implicitly critiques arbitrary despotism and valorizes prudent governance. Its biographical focus makes structural transformations legible through character, an approach intended to educate civic virtue. In retrospect, the narrative anticipated later discoveries that confirmed Cyrus's prominence, even as archaeology and philology have revised many details. The book remains a window onto how Victorians read antiquity to instruct modern readers about leadership and empire.

CYRUS THE GREAT

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PREFACE.

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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[1q]. 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.

ENGRAVINGS.

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CHAPTER I.

HERODOTUS AND XENOPHON.

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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[29]. 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.