

**JACOB  
ABBOTT**

**XERXES**



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# **Xerxes**

**Makers of History**

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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. 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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**Map of the Persian Empire**

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# **XERXES.**

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# CHAPTER I.

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# THE MOTHER OF XERXES.

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## B.C. 522-484

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Persian magnificence.

The name of Xerxes is associated in the minds of men with the idea of the highest attainable elevation of human magnificence and grandeur. This monarch was the sovereign of the ancient Persian empire when it was at the height of its prosperity and power. It is probable, however, that his greatness and fame lose nothing by the manner in which his story comes down to us through the Greek historians. The Greeks conquered Xerxes, and, in relating his history, they magnify the wealth, the power, and the resources of his empire, by way of exalting the greatness and renown of their own exploits in subduing him.

The mother of Xerxes.  
Cambyses.

The mother of Xerxes was Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus the Great, who was the founder of the Persian empire. Cyrus was killed in Scythia, a wild and barbarous region lying north of the Black and Caspian Seas. His son Cambyses succeeded him.

Ambition and selfishness of kings.

A kingdom, or an empire, was regarded, in ancient days, much in the light of an estate, which the sovereign held as a species of property, and which he was to manage mainly with a view to the promotion of his own personal aggrandizement and pleasure. A king or an emperor could have more palaces, more money, and more wives than other men; and if he was of an overbearing or ambitious spirit, he could march into his neighbors' territories, and after gratifying his love of adventure with various romantic exploits, and gaining great renown by his ferocious impetuosity in battle, he could end his expedition, perhaps, by adding his neighbors' palaces, and treasures, and wives to his own.

General influence exerted by great sovereigns upon the community.

Divine Providence, however, the mysterious power that overrules all the passions and impulses of men, and brings extended and general good out of local and particular evil, has made the ambition and the selfishness of princes the great means of preserving order and government among men. These great ancient despots, for example, would not have been able to collect their revenues, or enlist their armies, or procure supplies for their campaigns, unless their dominions were under a regular and complete system of social organization, such as should allow all the industrial pursuits of commerce and of agriculture, throughout the mass of the community, to go regularly on. Thus absolute monarchs, however ambitious, and selfish, and domineering in their characters, have a strong personal interest in the establishment of order and of justice between man and man throughout all the regions which are under their sway. In fact, the greater their ambition, their selfishness, and their pride, the stronger will this interest be; for, just in proportion as order, industry, and internal tranquillity prevail in a

country, just in that proportion can revenues be collected from it, and armies raised and maintained.

Labors of great conquerors.

Cæsar.

Darius.

William the Conqueror.

Napoleon.

It is a mistake, therefore, to suppose of the great heroes, and sovereigns, and conquerors that have appeared from time to time among mankind, that the usual and ordinary result of their influence and action has been that of disturbance and disorganization. It is true that a vast amount of disturbance and disorganization has often followed from the march of their armies, their sieges, their invasions, and the other local and temporary acts of violence which they commit; but these are the exceptions, not the rule. It must be that such things are exceptions, since, in any extended and general view of the subject, a much greater amount of social organization, industry, and peace is necessary to raise and maintain an army, than that army can itself destroy. The deeds of destruction which great conquerors perform attract more attention and make a greater impression upon mankind than the quiet, patient, and long-continued labors by which they perfect and extend the general organization of the social state. But these labors, though less noticed by men, have really employed the energies of great sovereigns in a far greater degree than mankind have generally imagined. Thus we should describe the work of Cæsar's life in a single word more truly by saying that he *organized* Europe, than that he conquered it. His bridges, his roads, his systems of jurisprudence, his coinage, his calendar, and other similar means and instruments of social arrangement, and facilities for promoting the pursuits of industry and peace, mark, far more properly, the real work which that great conqueror

performed among mankind, than his battles and his victories. Darius was, in the same way, the organizer of Asia. William the Conqueror completed, or, rather, advanced very far toward completing, the social organization of England; and even in respect to Napoleon, the true and proper memorial of his career is the successful working of the institutions, the systems, and the codes which he perfected and introduced into the social state, and not the brazen column, formed from captured cannon, which stands in the Place Vendôme.

Heroes and conquerors.  
The main spring of their actions.

These considerations, obviously true, though not always borne in mind, are, however, to be considered as making the characters of the great sovereigns, in a moral point of view, neither the worse nor the better. In all that they did, whether in arranging and systematizing the functions of social life, or in ruthless deeds of conquest and destruction, they were actuated, in a great measure, by selfish ambition. They arranged and organized the social state in order to form a more compact and solid pedestal for the foundation of their power. They maintained peace and order among their people, just as a master would suppress quarrels among his slaves, because peace among laborers is essential to productive results. They fixed and defined legal rights, and established courts to determine and enforce them; they protected property; they counted and classified men; they opened roads; they built bridges; they encouraged commerce; they hung robbers, and exterminated pirates—all, that the collection of their revenues and the enlistment of their armies might go on without hinderance or restriction. Many of them, indeed, may have been animated, in some degree, by a higher and nobler sentiment than this. Some may have felt a sort of

pride in the contemplation of a great, and prosperous, and wealthy empire, analogous to that which a proprietor feels in surveying a well-conditioned, successful, and productive estate. Others, like Alfred, may have felt a sincere and honest interest in the welfare of their fellow-men, and the promotion of human happiness may have been, in a greater or less degree, the direct object of their aim. Still, it can not be denied that a selfish and reckless ambition has been, in general, the main spring of action with heroes and conquerors, which, while it aimed only at personal aggrandizement, has been made to operate, through the peculiar mechanism of the social state which the Divine wisdom has contrived, as a means, in the main of preserving and extending peace and order among mankind, and not of destroying them.

Cyrus.  
Character and career of Cambyses.

But to return to Atossa. Her father Cyrus, who laid the foundation of the great Persian empire, was, for a hero and conqueror, tolerably considerate and just, and he desired, probably, to promote the welfare and happiness of his millions of subjects; but his son Cambyses, Atossa's brother, having been brought up in expectation of succeeding to vast wealth and power, and having been, as the sons of the wealthy and the powerful often are in all ages of the world, wholly neglected by his father during the early part of his life, and entirely unaccustomed to control, became a wild, reckless, proud, selfish, and ungovernable young man. His father was killed suddenly in battle, as has already been stated, and Cambyses succeeded him. Cambyses's career was short, desperate, and most tragical in its end.<sup>[A]</sup> In fact, he was one of the most savage, reckless, and abominable monsters that have ever lived.



### Wives of Cambyses.

It was the custom in those days for the Persian monarchs to have many wives, and, what is still more remarkable, whenever any monarch died, his successor inherited his predecessor's family as well as his throne. Cyrus had several children by his various wives. Cambyses and Smerdis were the only sons, but there were daughters, among whom Atossa was the most distinguished. The ladies of the court were accustomed to reside in different palaces, or in different suites of apartments in the same palace, so that they lived in a great measure isolated from each other. When Cambyses came to the throne, and thus entered into possession of his father's palaces, he saw and fell in love with one of his father's daughters. He wished to make her one of his wives. He was accustomed to the unrestricted indulgence of every appetite and passion, but he seems to have had some slight misgivings in regard to such a step as this. He consulted the Persian judges. They conferred upon the subject, and then replied that they had searched among the laws of the realm, and though they found no law allowing a man to marry his sister, they found many which authorized a Persian king to do whatever he pleased.

He marries his sister.

Cambyses therefore added the princess to the number of his wives, and not long afterward he married another of his father's daughters in the same way. One of these princesses was Atossa.

### Death of Cambyses.

Cambyses invaded Egypt, and in the course of his mad career in that country he killed his brother Smerdis and one of his sisters, and at length was killed himself. Atossa

escaped the dangers of this stormy and terrible reign, and returned safely to Susa after Cambyses's death.

Smerdis the magian.  
Cunning of Smerdis.

Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses, would have been Cambyses's successor if he had survived him; but he had been privately assassinated by Cambyses's orders, though his death had been kept profoundly secret by those who had perpetrated the deed. There was another Smerdis in Susa, the Persian capital, who was a magian—that is, a sort of priest—in whose hands, as regent, Cambyses had left the government while he was absent on his campaigns. This magian Smerdis accordingly conceived the plan of usurping the throne, as if he were Smerdis the prince, resorting to a great many ingenious and cunning schemes to conceal his deception. Among his other plans, one was to keep himself wholly sequestered from public view, with a few favorites, such, especially, as had not personally known Smerdis the prince. In the same manner he secluded from each other and from himself all who had known Smerdis, in order to prevent their conferring with one another, or communicating to each other any suspicions which they might chance to entertain. Such seclusion, so far as related to the ladies of the royal family, was not unusual after the death of a king, and Smerdis did not deviate from the ordinary custom, except to make the isolation and confinement of the princesses and queens more rigorous and strict than common. By means of this policy he was enabled to go on for some months without detection, living all the while in the greatest luxury and splendor, but at the same time in absolute seclusion, and in unceasing anxiety and fear.

His feeling of insecurity.

One chief source of his solicitude was lest he should be detected by means of his *ears*! Some years before, when he was in a comparatively obscure position, he had in some way or other offended his sovereign, and was punished by having his ears cut off. It was necessary, therefore, to keep the marks of this mutilation carefully concealed by means of his hair and his head-dress, and even with these precautions he could never feel perfectly secure.

Smerdis suspected.  
His imposture discovered.

At last one of the nobles of the court, a sagacious and observing man, suspected the imposture. He had no access to Smerdis himself, but his daughter, whose name was Phædyrna, was one of Smerdis's wives. The nobleman was excluded from all direct intercourse with Smerdis, and even with his daughter; but he contrived to send word to his daughter, inquiring whether her husband was the true Smerdis or not. She replied that she did not know, inasmuch as she had never seen any other Smerdis, if, indeed, there had been another. The nobleman then attempted to communicate with Atossa, but he found it impossible to do so. Atossa had, of course, known her brother well, and was on that very account very closely secluded by the magian. As a last resort, the nobleman sent to his daughter a request that she would watch for an opportunity to feel for her husband's ears while he was asleep. He admitted that this would be a dangerous attempt, but his daughter, he said, ought to be willing to make it, since, if her pretended husband were really an impostor, she ought to take even a stronger interest than others in his detection. Phædyrna was at first afraid to undertake so dangerous a commission; but she at length ventured to do so, and, by passing her hand under his turban one night, while he was sleeping on his couch, she found that the ears were gone.<sup>[B]</sup>

Death of Smerdis.  
Succession of Darius.

The consequence of this discovery was, that a conspiracy was formed to dethrone and destroy the usurper. The plot was successful. Smerdis was killed; his imprisoned queens were set free, and Darius was raised to the throne in his stead.

Atossa now, by that strange principle of succession which has been already alluded to, became the wife of Darius, and she figures frequently and conspicuously in history during his long and splendid reign.

Atossa's sickness.  
The Greek physician.

Her name is brought into notice in one case in a remarkable manner, in connection with an expedition which Darius sent on an exploring tour into Greece and Italy. She was herself the means, in fact, of sending the expedition. She was sick; and after suffering secretly and in silence as long as possible—the nature of her complaint being such as to make her unwilling to speak of it to others—she at length determined to consult a Greek physician who had been brought to Persia as a captive, and had acquired great celebrity at Susa by his medical science and skill. The physician said that he would undertake her case on condition that she would promise to grant him a certain request that he would make. She wished to know what it was beforehand, but the physician would not tell her. He said, however, that it was nothing that it would be in any way derogatory to her honor to grant him.

Atossa's promise.

On these conditions Atossa concluded to agree to the physician's proposals. He made her take a solemn oath that, if he cured her of her malady, she would do whatever he required of her, provided that it was consistent with honor and propriety. He then took her case under his charge, prescribed for her and attended her, and in due time she was cured. The physician then told her that what he wished her to do for him was to find some means to persuade Darius to send him home to his native land.

Atossa's conversation with Darius.

Atossa was faithful in fulfilling her promise. She took a private opportunity, when she was alone with Darius, to propose that he should engage in some plans of foreign conquest. She reminded him of the vastness of the military power which was at his disposal, and of the facility with which, by means of it, he might extend his dominions. She extolled, too, his genius and energy, and endeavored to inspire in his mind some ambitious desires to distinguish himself in the estimation of mankind by bringing his capacities for the performance of great deeds into action.

Darius listened to these suggestions of Atossa with interest and with evident pleasure. He said that he had been forming some such plans himself. He was going to build a bridge across the Hellespont or the Bosphorus, to unite Europe and Asia; and he was also going to make an incursion into the country of the Scythians, the people by whom Cyrus, his great predecessor, had been defeated and slain. It would be a great glory for him, he said, to succeed in a conquest in which Cyrus had so totally failed.

Success of her plans.

But these plans would not answer the purpose which Atossa had in view. She urged her husband, therefore, to postpone

his invasion of the Scythians till some future time, and first conquer the Greeks, and annex their territory to his dominions. The Scythians, she said, were savages, and their country not worth the cost of conquering it, while Greece would constitute a noble prize. She urged the invasion of Greece, too, rather than Scythia, as a personal favor to herself, for she had been wanting, she said, some slaves from Greece for a long time—some of the women of Sparta, of Corinth, and of Athens, of whose graces and accomplishments she had heard so much.

There was something gratifying to the military vanity of Darius in being thus requested to make an incursion to another continent, and undertake the conquest of the mightiest nation of the earth, for the purpose of procuring accomplished waiting-maids to offer as a present to his queen. He became restless and excited while listening to Atossa's proposals, and to the arguments with which she enforced them, and it was obvious that he was very strongly inclined to accede to her views. He finally concluded to send a commission into Greece to explore the country, and to bring back a report on their return; and as he decided to make the Greek physician the guide of the expedition, Atossa gained her end.

The expedition to Greece.  
Escape of the physician.

A full account of this expedition, and of the various adventures which the party met with on their voyage, is given in our history of Darius. It may be proper to say here, however, that the physician fully succeeded in his plans of making his escape. He pretended, at first, to be unwilling to go, and he made only the most temporary arrangements in respect to the conduct of his affairs while he should be gone, in order to deceive the king in regard to his intentions of not returning. The king, on his part, resorted to some

stratagems to ascertain whether the physician was sincere in his professions, but he did not succeed in detecting the artifice, and so the party went away. The physician never returned.

Atossa's four sons.  
Artobazanes.

Atossa had four sons. Xerxes was the eldest of them. He was not, however, the eldest of the sons of Darius, as there were other sons, the children of another wife, whom Darius had married before he ascended the throne. The oldest of these children was named Artobazanes. Artobazanes seems to have been a prince of an amiable and virtuous character, and not particularly ambitious and aspiring in his disposition, although, as he was the eldest son of his father, he claimed to be his heir. Atossa did not admit the validity of this claim, but maintained that the oldest of *her* children was entitled to the inheritance.

It became necessary to decide this question before Darius's death; for Darius, in the prosecution of a war in which he was engaged, formed the design of accompanying his army on an expedition into Greece, and, before doing this, he was bound, according to the laws and usages of the Persian realm, to regulate the succession.

Dispute about the succession.  
Xerxes and Artobazanes.

There immediately arose an earnest dispute between the friends and partisans of Artobazanes and Xerxes, each side urging very eagerly the claims of its own candidate. The mother and the friends of Artobazanes maintained that he was the oldest son, and, consequently, the heir. Atossa, on the other hand, contended that Xerxes was the grandson of