

ALEXANDER THE GREAT



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ALEXANDER'S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

B.C. 356-336

The briefness of Alexander's career.—His brilliant exploits.—Character of Alexander.—Mental and physical qualities.—Character of the Asiatic and European civilization.—Composition of Asiatic and European armies.—King Philip.—Extent of Macedon.—Olympias.—The young prince Alexander.—Ancient mode of warfare.—Ancient and modern military officers.—Alexander's nurse.—Alexander's education.—Lysimachus.—Homer.—Aristotle.—Alexander's copy of Homer.—Alexander's energy and ambition.—The Persian ambassadors.—Stories of the ambassadors.—Maturity of Alexander's mind.—Secret of Alexander's success.—The story of Bucephalus.—Philip condemns the horse.—Alexander desires to mount him.—Bucephalus calmed.—An exciting ride.—Sagacity of Bucephalus.—Becomes Alexander's favorite.—Fate of Bucephalus.—Alexander made regent.—Alexander's first battle.—Chæronea.—Alexander's impetuosity.—Philip repudiates Olympias.—Alexander's violent temper.—Philip's attempt on his son.—Philip's power.—His plans of conquest.—Alexander's impatience to reign.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT died when he was quite young. He was but thirty-two years of age when he ended his career, and as he was about twenty when he commenced it, it was only for a period of twelve years that he was actually engaged in performing the work of his life. Napoleon was nearly three times as long on the great field of human action.

Notwithstanding the briefness of Alexander's career, he ran through, during that short period, a very brilliant series of exploits, which were so bold, so romantic, and which led him into such adventures in scenes of the greatest magnificence and splendor, that all the world looked on with

astonishment then, and mankind have continued to read the story since, from age to age, with the greatest interest and attention.

The secret of Alexander's success was his character. He possessed a certain combination of mental and personal attractions, which in every age gives to those who exhibit it a mysterious and almost unbounded ascendancy over all within their influence. Alexander was characterized by these qualities in a very remarkable degree. He was finely formed in person, and very prepossessing in his manners. He was active, athletic, and full of ardor and enthusiasm in all that he did. At the same time, he was calm, collected, and considerate in emergencies requiring caution, and thoughtful and far-seeing in respect to the bearings and consequences of his acts. He formed strong attachments, was grateful for kindnesses shown to him, considerate in respect to the feelings of all who were connected with him in any way, faithful to his friends, and generous toward his foes. In a word, he had a noble character, though he devoted its energies unfortunately to conquest and war. He lived, in fact, in an age when great personal and mental powers had scarcely any other field for their exercise than this. He entered upon his career with great ardor, and the position in which he was placed gave him the opportunity to act in it with prodigious effect.

There were several circumstances combined, in the situation in which Alexander was placed, to afford him a great opportunity for the exercise of his vast powers. His native country was on the confines of Europe and Asia. Now Europe and Asia were, in those days, as now, marked and distinguished by two vast masses of social and civilized life, widely dissimilar from each other. The Asiatic side was occupied by the Persians, the Medes, and the Assyrians. The European side by the Greeks and Romans. They were separated from each other by the waters of the Hellespont, the Ægean Sea, and the Mediterranean, as will be seen by

the map. These waters constituted a sort of natural barrier, which kept the two races apart. The races formed, accordingly, two vast organizations, distinct and widely different from each other, and of course rivals and enemies.

It is hard to say whether the Asiatic or European civilization was the highest. The two were so different that it is difficult to compare them. On the Asiatic side there was wealth, luxury, and splendor; on the European, energy, genius, and force. On the one hand were vast cities, splendid palaces, and gardens which were the wonder of the world; on the other, strong citadels, military roads and bridges, and compact and well-defended towns. The Persians had enormous armies, perfectly provided for, with beautiful tents, horses elegantly caparisoned, arms and munitions of war of the finest workmanship, and officers magnificently dressed, and accustomed to a life of luxury and splendor. The Greeks and Romans, on the other hand, prided themselves on their compact bodies of troops, inured to hardship and thoroughly disciplined. Their officers gloried not in luxury and parade, but in the courage, the steadiness, and implicit obedience of their troops, and in their own science, skill, and powers of military calculation. Thus there was a great difference in the whole system of social and military organization in these two quarters of the globe.

Now Alexander was born the heir to the throne of one of the Grecian kingdoms. He possessed, in a very remarkable degree, the energy, and enterprise, and military skill so characteristic of the Greeks and Romans. He organized armies, crossed the boundary between Europe and Asia, and spent the twelve years of his career in a most triumphant military incursion into the very center and seat of Asiatic power, destroying the Asiatic armies, conquering the most splendid cities, defeating or taking captive the kings, and princes, and generals that opposed his progress. The whole world looked on with wonder to see such a course of conquest, pursued so successfully by so young a man, and

with so small an army, gaining continual victories, as it did, over such vast numbers of foes, and making conquests of such accumulated treasures of wealth and splendor.

The name of Alexander's father was Philip. The kingdom over which he reigned was called Macedon. Macedon was in the northern part of Greece. It was a kingdom about twice as large as the State of Massachusetts, and one third as large as the State of New York. The name of Alexander's mother was Olympias. She was the daughter of the King of Epirus, which was a kingdom somewhat smaller than Macedon, and lying westward of it. Both Macedon and Epirus will be found upon the map at the commencement of this volume. Olympias was a woman of very strong and determined character. Alexander seemed to inherit her energy, though in his case it was combined with other qualities of a more attractive character, which his mother did not possess.

He was, of course, as the young prince, a very important personage in his father's court. Every one knew that at his father's death he would become King of Macedon, and he was consequently the object of a great deal of care and attention. As he gradually advanced in the years of his boyhood, it was observed by all who knew him that he was endued with extraordinary qualities of mind and of character, which seemed to indicate, at a very early age, his future greatness.

Although he was a prince, he was not brought up in habits of luxury and effeminacy. This would have been contrary to all the ideas which were entertained by the Greeks in those days. They had then no fire-arms, so that in battle the combatants could not stand quietly, as they can now, at a distance from the enemy, coolly discharging musketry or cannon. In ancient battles the soldiers rushed toward each other, and fought hand to hand, in close combat, with swords, or spears, or other weapons requiring great personal strength, so that headlong bravery and

muscular force were the qualities which generally carried the day.

The duties of officers, too, on the field of battle, were very different then from what they are now. An officer now must be calm, collected, and quiet. His business is to plan, to calculate, to direct, and arrange. He has to do this sometimes, it is true, in circumstances of the most imminent danger, so that he must be a man of great self-possession and of undaunted courage. But there is very little occasion for him to exert any great physical force.

In ancient times, however, the great business of the officers, certainly in all the subordinate grades, was to lead on the men, and set them an example by performing themselves deeds in which their own great personal prowess was displayed. Of course it was considered extremely important that the child destined to be a general should become robust and powerful in constitution from his earliest years, and that he should be inured to hardship and fatigue. In the early part of Alexander's life this was the main object of attention.

The name of the nurse who had charge of our hero in his infancy was Lannice. She did all in her power to give strength and hardihood to his constitution, while, at the same time, she treated him with kindness and gentleness. Alexander acquired a strong affection for her, and he treated her with great consideration as long as he lived. He had a governor, also, in his early years, named Leonnatus, who had the general charge of his education. As soon as he was old enough to learn, they appointed him a preceptor also, to teach him such branches as were generally taught to young princes in those days. The name of this preceptor was Lysimachus.

They had then no printed books, but there were a few writings on parchment rolls which young scholars were taught to read. Some of these writings were treatises on philosophy, others were romantic histories, narrating the

exploits of the heroes of those days—of course, with much exaggeration and embellishment. There were also some poems, still more romantic than the histories, though generally on the same themes. The greatest productions of this kind were the writings of Homer, an ancient poet who lived and wrote four or five hundred years before Alexander's day. The young Alexander was greatly delighted with Homer's tales. These tales are narrations of the exploits and adventures of certain great warriors at the siege of Troy—a siege which lasted ten years—and they are written with so much beauty and force, they contain such admirable delineations of character, and such graphic and vivid descriptions of romantic adventures, and picturesque and striking scenes, that they have been admired in every age by all who have learned to understand the language in which they are written.

Alexander could understand them very easily, as they were written in his mother tongue. He was greatly excited by the narrations themselves, and pleased with the flowing smoothness of the verse in which the tales were told. In the latter part of his course of education he was placed under the charge of Aristotle, who was one of the most eminent philosophers of ancient times. Aristotle had a beautiful copy of Homer's poems prepared expressly for Alexander, taking great pains to have it transcribed with perfect correctness, and in the most elegant manner. Alexander carried this copy with him in all his campaigns. Some years afterward, when he was obtaining conquests over the Persians, he took, among the spoils of one of his victories, a very beautiful and costly casket, which King Darius had used for his jewelry or for some other rich treasures. Alexander determined to make use of this box as a depository for his beautiful copy of Homer, and he always carried it with him, thus protected, in all his subsequent campaigns.

Alexander was full of energy and spirit, but he was, at the same time, like all who ever become truly great, of a

reflective and considerate turn of mind. He was very fond of the studies which Aristotle led him to pursue, although they were of a very abstruse and difficult character. He made great progress in metaphysical philosophy and mathematics, by which means his powers of calculation and his judgment were greatly improved.

He early evinced a great degree of ambition. His father Philip was a powerful warrior, and made many conquests in various parts of Greece, though he did not cross into Asia. When news of Philip's victories came into Macedon, all the rest of the court would be filled with rejoicing and delight; but Alexander, on such occasions, looked thoughtful and disappointed, and complained that his father would conquer every country, and leave him nothing to do.

At one time some ambassadors from the Persian court arrived in Macedon when Philip was away. These ambassadors saw Alexander, of course, and had opportunities to converse with him. They expected that he would be interested in hearing about the splendors, and pomp, and parade of the Persian monarchy. They had stories to tell him about the famous hanging gardens, which were artificially constructed in the most magnificent manner, on arches raised high in the air; and about a vine made of gold, with all sorts of precious stones upon it instead of fruit, which was wrought as an ornament over the throne on which the King of Persia often gave audience; of the splendid palaces and vast cities of the Persians; and the banquets, and fêtes, and magnificent entertainments and celebrations which they used to have there. They found, however, to their surprise, that Alexander was not interested in hearing about any of these things. He would always turn the conversation from them to inquire about the geographical position of the different Persian countries, the various routes leading into the interior, the organization of the Asiatic armies, their system of military tactics, and,

especially, the character and habits of Artaxerxes, the Persian king.

The ambassadors were very much surprised at such evidences of maturity of mind, and of far-seeing and reflective powers on the part of the young prince. They could not help comparing him with Artaxerxes. "Alexander," said they, "is great, while our king is only rich." The truth of the judgment which these ambassadors thus formed in respect to the qualities of the young Macedonian, compared with those held in highest estimation on the Asiatic side, was fully confirmed in the subsequent stages of Alexander's career.

In fact, this combination of a calm and calculating thoughtfulness, with the ardor and energy which formed the basis of his character, was one great secret of Alexander's success. The story of Bucephalus, his famous horse, illustrates this in a very striking manner. This animal was a war-horse of very spirited character, which had been sent as a present to Philip while Alexander was young. They took the horse out into one of the parks connected with the palace, and the king, together with many of his courtiers, went out to view him. The horse pranced about in a very furious manner, and seemed entirely unmanageable. No one dared to mount him. Philip, instead of being gratified at the present, was rather disposed to be displeased that they had sent him an animal of so fiery and apparently vicious a nature that nobody dared to attempt to subdue him.

In the mean time, while all the other by-standers were joining in the general condemnation of the horse, Alexander stood quietly by, watching his motions, and attentively studying his character. He perceived that a part of the difficulty was caused by the agitations which the horse experienced in so strange and new a scene, and that he appeared, also, to be somewhat frightened by his own shadow, which happened at that time to be thrown very strongly and distinctly upon the ground. He saw other

indications, also, that the high excitement which the horse felt was not viciousness, but the excess of noble and generous impulses. It was courage, ardor, and the consciousness of great nervous and muscular power.

Philip had decided that the horse was useless, and had given orders to have him sent back to Thessaly, whence he came. Alexander was very much concerned at the prospect of losing so fine an animal. He begged his father to allow him to make the experiment of mounting him. Philip at first refused, thinking it very presumptuous for such a youth to attempt to subdue an animal so vicious that all his experienced horsemen and grooms condemned him; however, he at length consented. Alexander went up to the horse and took hold of his bridle. He patted him upon the neck, and soothed him with his voice, showing, at the same time, by his easy and unconcerned manner, that he was not in the least afraid of him. A spirited horse knows immediately when any one approaches him in a timid or cautious manner. He appears to look with contempt on such a master, and to determine not to submit to him. On the contrary, horses seem to love to yield obedience to man, when the individual who exacts the obedience possesses those qualities of coolness and courage which their instincts enable them to appreciate.

At any rate, Bucephalus was calmed and subdued by the presence of Alexander. He allowed himself to be caressed. Alexander turned his head in such a direction as to prevent his seeing his shadow. He quietly and gently laid off a sort of cloak which he wore, and sprang upon the horse's back. Then, instead of attempting to restrain him, and worrying and checking him by useless efforts to hold him in, he gave him the rein freely, and animated and encouraged him with his voice, so that the horse flew across the plains at the top of his speed, the king and the courtiers looking on, at first with fear and trembling, but soon afterward with feelings of the greatest admiration and pleasure. After the horse had

satisfied himself with his run it was easy to rein him in, and Alexander returned with him in safety to the king. The courtiers overwhelmed him with their praises and congratulations. Philip commended him very highly: he told him that he deserved a larger kingdom than Macedon to govern.

Alexander's judgment of the true character of the horse proved to be correct. He became very tractable and docile, yielding a ready submission to his master in every thing. He would kneel upon his fore legs at Alexander's command, in order that he might mount more easily. Alexander retained him for a long time, and made him his favorite war horse. A great many stories are related by the historians of those days of his sagacity and his feats of war. Whenever he was equipped for the field with his military trappings, he seemed to be highly elated with pride and pleasure, and at such times he would not allow any one but Alexander to mount him.

What became of him at last is not certainly known. There are two accounts of his end. One is, that on a certain occasion Alexander got carried too far into the midst of his enemies, on a battle field and that, after fighting desperately for some time, Bucephalus made the most extreme exertions to carry him away. He was severely wounded again and again, and though his strength was nearly gone, he would not stop, but pressed forward till he had carried his master away to a place of safety, and that then he dropped down exhausted, and died. It may be, however, that he did not actually die at this time, but slowly recovered; for some historians relate that he lived to be thirty years old—which is quite an old age for a horse—and that he then died. Alexander caused him to be buried with great ceremony, and built a small city upon the spot in honor of his memory. The name of this city was Bucephalia.

Alexander's character matured rapidly, and he began very early to act the part of a man. When he was only

sixteen years of age, his father, Philip, made him regent of Macedon while he was absent on a great military campaign among the other states of Greece. Without doubt Alexander had, in this regency, the counsel and aid of high officers of state of great experience and ability. He acted, however, himself, in this high position, with great energy and with complete success; and, at the same time, with all that modesty of deportment, and that delicate consideration for the officers under him—who, though inferior in rank, were yet his superiors in age and experience—which his position rendered proper, but which few persons so young as he would have manifested in circumstances so well calculated to awaken the feelings of vanity and elation.

Afterward, when Alexander was about eighteen years old, his father took him with him on a campaign toward the south, during which Philip fought one of his great battles at Chæronea, in Boeotia. In the arrangements for this battle, Philip gave the command of one of the wings of the army to Alexander, while he reserved the other for himself. He felt some solicitude in giving his young son so important a charge, but he endeavored to guard against the danger of an unfortunate result by putting the ablest generals on Alexander's side, while he reserved those on whom he could place less reliance for his own. Thus organized, the army went into battle.

Philip soon ceased to feel any solicitude for Alexander's part of the duty. Boy as he was, the young prince acted with the utmost bravery, coolness, and discretion. The wing which he commanded was victorious, and Philip was obliged to urge himself and the officers with him to greater exertions, to avoid being outdone by his son. In the end Philip was completely victorious, and the result of this great battle was to make his power paramount and supreme over all the states of Greece.

Notwithstanding, however, the extraordinary discretion and wisdom which characterized the mind of Alexander in

his early years, he was often haughty and headstrong, and in cases where his pride or his resentment were aroused, he was sometimes found very impetuous and uncontrollable. His mother Olympias was of a haughty and imperious temper, and she quarreled with her husband, King Philip; or, perhaps, it ought rather to be said that he quarreled with her. Each is said to have been unfaithful to the other, and, after a bitter contention, Philip repudiated his wife and married another lady. Among the festivities held on the occasion of this marriage, there was a great banquet, at which Alexander was present, and an incident occurred which strikingly illustrates the impetuosity of his character.

One of the guests at this banquet, in saying something complimentary to the new queen, made use of expressions which Alexander considered as in disparagement of the character of his mother and of his own birth. His anger was immediately aroused. He threw the cup from which he had been drinking at the offender's head. Attalus, for this was his name, threw his cup at Alexander in return; the guests at the table where they were sitting rose, and a scene of uproar and confusion ensued.

Philip, incensed at such an interruption of the order and harmony of the wedding feast, drew his sword and rushed toward Alexander but by some accident he stumbled and fell upon the floor. Alexander looked upon his fallen father with contempt and scorn, and exclaimed, "What a fine hero the states of Greece have to lead their armies—a man that can not get across the floor without tumbling down." He then turned away and left the palace. Immediately afterward he joined his mother Olympias, and went away with her to her native country, Epirus, where the mother and son remained for a time in a state of open quarrel with the husband and father.

In the mean time Philip had been planning a great expedition into Asia. He had arranged the affairs of his own kingdom, and had formed a strong combination among the