

HISTORY OF GREECE.

PART II.

CONTINUATION OF HISTORICAL GREECE.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FROM THE BATTLE OF MARATHON TO THE MARCH OF XERXES AGAINST GREECE.

IN the last chapter but one of the preceding volume, I described the Athenian victory at Marathon, the repulse of the Persian general Datis, and the return of his armament across the Ægean to the Asiatic coast. He had been directed to conquer both Eretria and Athens : an order which he had indeed executed in part with success, as the string of Eretrian prisoners brought to Susa attested—but which remained still unfulfilled in regard to the city principally obnoxious to Darius. Far from satiating his revenge upon Athens, the Persian monarch was compelled to listen to the tale of an ignominious defeat. His wrath against the Athenians rose to a higher pitch than ever, and he commenced vigorous preparations for a renewed attack

Resolutions
 of Darius
 to invade
 Greece a
 second
 time.
 His death.

upon them as well as upon Greece generally. Resolved upon assembling the entire force of his empire, he directed the various satraps and sub-governors throughout all Asia to provide troops, horses, and ships both of war and burthen. For no less than three years the empire was agitated by this immense levy, which Darius determined to conduct in person against Greece¹. Nor was his determination abated by a revolt of the Egyptians, which broke out about the time when his preparations were completed. He was on the point of undertaking simultaneously the two enterprises—the conquest of Greece and the reconquest of Egypt—when he was surprised by death, after a reign of thirty-six years. As a precaution previous to this intended march, he had nominated as successor Xerxes, his son by Atossa; for the ascendancy of that queen ensured to Xerxes the preference over his elder brother Artabazanes, son of Darius by a former wife, and born before the latter became king. The choice of the reigning monarch passed unquestioned, and Xerxes succeeded without opposition². It deserves to be remarked, that though

¹ Herodot. vii. 3, 4.

² Herodot. vii. 1–4. He mentions—simply as a report, and seemingly without believing it himself—that Demaratus the exiled king of Sparta was at Susa at the moment when Darius was about to choose a successor among his sons (this cannot consist with Ktesias, Persic. c. 23): and that he suggested to Xerxes a convincing argument by which to determine the mind of his father, urging the analogy of the law of regal succession at Sparta, whereby the son of a king, born after his father became king, was preferred to an elder son born before that event. The existence of such a custom at Sparta may well be doubted.

Some other anecdotes, not less difficult of belief than this, and alike calculated to bestow a factitious importance on Demaratus, will be noticed in the subsequent pages. The latter received from the Persian king the

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we shall meet with several acts of cruelty and atrocity perpetrated in the Persian regal family, there is nothing like that systematic fratricide which has been considered necessary to guarantee succession in Turkey and other Oriental empires.

The intense wrath against Athens, which had become the predominant sentiment in the mind of Darius, was yet unappeased at the time of his death, and it was fortunate for the Athenians that his crown now passed to a prince less obstinately hostile as well as in every respect inferior. Xerxes, personally the handsomest¹ and most stately man amid the immense crowd which he led against Greece, was in character timid and faint-hearted, over and above those defects of vanity, childish self-conceit, and blindness of appreciation, which he shared more or less with all the Persian kings. Yet we shall see that even under his conduct, the invasion of Greece was very near proving successful: and it might well have succeeded altogether, had he been either endued with the courageous temperament, or inflamed with the fierce animosity, of his father.

Succeeded
by his son
Xerxes.

On succeeding to the throne, Xerxes found the forces of the empire in active preparation, pur- grant of Pergamus and Teuthrania, with their land-revenues, which his descendants long afterwards continued to occupy (Xenoph. Hellen. iii. 1-6): and perhaps these descendants may have been among the persons from whom Herodotus derived his information respecting the expedition of Xerxes. See vii. 239.

B.C. 485.
Revolt and
reconquest
of Egypt
by the Per-
sians.

Plutarch (*De Fraternali Amore*, p. 488) gives an account in many respects different concerning the circumstances which determined the succession of Xerxes to the throne, in preference to his elder brother.

¹ Herod. vii. 187. The like personal beauty is ascribed to Darius Codomannus, the last of the Persian kings (Plutarch, *Alexand.* c. 21).

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suant to the orders of Darius ; except Egypt, which was in a state of revolt. His first necessity was to reconquer this country ; a purpose for which the great military power now in readiness was found amply sufficient. Egypt was subdued and reduced to a state of much harder dependence than before : we may presume that the tribute was increased, as well as the numbers of the Persian occupying force, maintained by contributions levied on the natives. Achæmenes, brother of Xerxes, was installed there as satrap.

Indifference of Xerxes to the invasion of Greece—persons who advised and instigated him—persuasions which they employed—prophecies produced by Onomakritus.

But Xerxes was not at first equally willing to prosecute the schemes of his deceased father against Greece. At least such is the statement of Herodotus ; who represents Mardonius as the grand instigator of the invasion, partly through thirst for warlike enterprise, partly from a desire to obtain the intended conquest as a satrapy for himself. Nor were there wanting Grecian counsellors to enforce his recommendation both by the promise of help and by the colour of religion. The great family of the Aleuadæ, belonging to Larissa and perhaps to other towns in Thessaly, were so eager in the cause that their principal members came to Susa to offer an easy occupation of that frontier territory of Hellas : while the exiled Peisistratids from Athens still persevered in striving to procure their own restoration at the tail of a Persian army. On the present occasion, they brought with them to Susa a new instrument, the holy mystic Onomakritus—a man who had acquired much reputation, not by prophesying himself, but by collecting, arranging, interpreting, and delivering out, prophetic verses

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passing under the name of the ancient seer or poet Musæus. Thirty years before, in the flourishing days of the Peisistratids, he had lived at Athens, enjoying the confidence of Hipparchus, and consulted by him as the expositor of these venerated documents. But having been detected by the poet Lasus of Hermione, in the very act of interpolating them with new matter of his own, Hipparchus banished him with indignation. The Peisistratids however, now in banishment themselves, forgot or forgave this offence, and carried Onomakritus with his prophecies to Susa, announcing him as a person of oracular authority, to assist in working on the mind of Xerxes. To this purpose his interpolations, or his omissions, were now directed: for when introduced to the Persian monarch, he recited emphatically various encouraging predictions wherein the bridging of the Hellespont, and the triumphant march of a barbaric host into Greece, appeared as predestined; while he carefully kept back all those of a contrary tenor, which portended calamity and disgrace. So at least Herodotus¹, strenuous in upholding the credit of Bakis, Musæus, and other Grecian prophets whose verses were in circulation, expressly assures us. The religious encouragements of Onomakritus, and the political cooperation proffered by the Aleuadæ, enabled

¹ Herodot. vii. 6; viii. 20, 96, 77. Ὀνομάκριτος—κατέλεγε τῶν χρησμῶν· εἰ μὲν τι ἐνέοι σφάλμα φέρον τῷ Πέρσῃ, τῶν μὲν ἔλεγε οὐδέν· ὁ δὲ τὰ εὐτυχέστατα ἐκλεγόμενος, ἔλεγε τὸν τε Ἑλλησποντον ὡς ζευχθῆναι χρέον εἶη ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς Πέρσεω, τὴν τε ἔλασιν ἐξηγόμενος, &c.

An intimation somewhat curious respecting this collection of prophecies; it was of an extremely varied character, and contained promises or threats to meet any emergency which might arise.

Mardonius effectually to overcome the reluctance of his master. Nor indeed was it difficult to show, according to the feelings then prevalent, that a new king of Persia was in honour obliged to enlarge the boundaries of the empire¹. The conquering impulse springing from the first founder was as yet unexhausted; the insults offered by the Athenians remained still unavenged: and in addition to this double stimulus to action, Mardonius drew a captivating picture of Europe as an acquisition—"it was the finest land in the world, produced every variety of fruit-bearing trees, and was too good a possession for any mortal man except the Persian kings²." Fifteen years before, the Milesian Aristagoras³, when entreating the Spartans to assist the Ionic revolt, had exaggerated the wealth and productiveness of Asia in contrast with the poverty of Greece—a contrast less widely removed from the truth, at that time, than the picture presented by Mardonius.

Xerxes resolves to invade Greece.

Having thus been persuaded to alter his original views, Xerxes convoked a meeting of the principal Persian counsellors, and announced to them his resolution to invade Greece, setting forth the mingled motives of revenge and aggrandizement which impelled him, and representing the conquest of Greece as carrying with it that of all Europe, so that the Persian empire would become coextensive with the æther of Zeus and the limits of the sun's course. On the occasion of this invasion, now announced

¹ Æschylus, Pers. 761.

² Herodot. vii. 5. ὡς ἡ Εὐρώπη περικαλλὴς χώρα, καὶ δένδρεα παντοῖα φέρει τὰ ἡμέρα, βασιλεῖι τε μόνῃ θνητῶν ἀξίη ἐκτῆσθαι—χώραν παμφωρωτέρην (vii. 8).

³ Herodot. v. 49.

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and about to take place, we must notice especially the historical manner and conception of our capital informant—Herodotus. The invasion of Greece by Xerxes, and the final repulse of his forces, constitute the entire theme of his three last books, and the principal object of his whole history, towards which the previous matter is intended to conduct. Amidst those prior circumstances, there are doubtless many which have a substantive importance and interest of their own, recounted at so much length that they appear coordinate and principal, so that the thread of the history is for a time put out of sight. Yet we shall find, if we bring together the larger divisions of his history, omitting the occasional prolixities of detail, that such thread is never lost in the historian's own mind: it may be traced by an attentive reader, from his preface and the statement immediately following it—of Croesus as the first barbaric conqueror of the Ionian Greeks—down to the full expansion of his theme, “*Græcia Barbariæ lento collisa duello,*” in the expedition of Xerxes. That expedition, as forming the consummation of his historical scheme, is not only related more copiously and continuously than any events preceding it, but is also ushered in with an unusual solemnity of religious and poetical accompaniment, so that the seventh Book of Herodotus reminds us in many points of the second Book of the *Iliad*: probably too, if the lost Grecian epics had reached us, we should trace many other cases in which the imagination of the historian has unconsciously assimilated itself to them. The Dream sent by the Gods to frighten Xerxes, when about to recede from

Historical
manner and
conception
of Hero-
dotus.

his project—as well as the ample catalogue of nations and eminent individuals embodied in the Persian host—have both of them marked parallels in the Iliad: and Herodotus seems to delight in representing to himself the enterprise against Greece as an antithesis to that of the Atreidæ against Troy. He enters into the internal feelings of Xerxes with as much familiarity as Homer into those of Agamemnon, and introduces “the counsel of Zeus” as not less direct, special, and overruling, than it appears in the Iliad and Odyssey¹: though the Godhead in Herodotus, compared with Homer, tends to become neuter instead of masculine or feminine, and retains only the jealous instincts of a ruler, apart from the appetites, lusts, and caprices of a man: acting moreover chiefly as a centralized, or at least as a homogeneous, force, in place of the discordant severalty of agents conspicuous in the Homeric theology. The religious idea, so often presented elsewhere in Herodotus—that the Godhead was jealous and hostile to excessive good fortune or immoderate desires in man,—is worked into his history of Xerxes as the ever-present moral and as the main cause of its disgraceful termination: for we shall discover as we proceed, that the historian, with that honourable frankness which Plutarch calls his “malignity,” neither ascribes to his countrymen credit greater than they deserve for personal valour, nor seeks to veil the many chances of defeat which their mismanagement laid open².

¹ Homer, Iliad, i. 3. Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή. Herodotus is characterized as Ὀμήρου ζηλωτής—Ὀμηρικώτατος (Dionys. Halic. ad Cn. Pompeium, p. 772, Reiske: Longinus De Sublim. p. 86, ed. Pearce).

² While Plutarch (if indeed the treatise de Herodoti Malignitate be

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I have already mentioned that Xerxes is described as having originally been averse to the enterprise, and only stimulated thereto by the persuasions of Mardonius: this was probably the genuine Persian belief, for the blame of so great a disaster would naturally be transferred from the monarch to some evil counsellor¹. As soon as Xerxes, yielding to persuasion, has announced, to the Persian chief men whom he had convoked, his resolution to bridge over the Hellespont and march to the conquest of Greece and Europe, Mardonius is repre-

Xerxes announces his project to an assembly of Persian counsellors—Mardonius and Artabanus—the evil and good genius.

the work of Plutarch) treats Herodotus as uncandid, malicious, corrupt, the calumniator of great men and glorious deeds—Dionysius of Halikarnassus on the contrary, with more reason, treats him as a pattern of excellent dispositions in an historian, contrasting him in this respect with Thucydides, to whom he imputes an unfriendly spirit in criticising Athens, arising from his long banishment: 'Ἡ μὲν Ἡροδότου διάθεσις ἐν ἅπασιν ἐπιεικής, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἀγαθοῖς συνηθρομένη, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖς συναλγούσα· ἡ δὲ Θουκυδίδου διάθεσις ἀθεκαστός τις καὶ πικρὰ, καὶ τῇ πατρίδι τῆς φυγῆς μνησικακοῦσα· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἁμαρτήματα ἐπέξέρχεται καὶ μάλα ἀκριβῶς, τῶν δὲ κατὰ νοῦν κερχωρηκότων καθάπαξ οὐ μέμνηται ἢ ὥσπερ ἠναγκασμένος. (Dionys. Hal. ad Cn. Pompeium de Præcip. Historicis Judic. p. 774, Reisk.)

Precisely the same fault which Dionysius here imputes to Thucydides (though in other places he acquits him, ἀπὸ παντὸς φθόνου καὶ πάσης κολακείας, p. 824), Plutarch and Dio cast far more harshly upon Herodotus. In neither case is the reproach deserved.

Both the moralists and the rhetoricians of ancient times were very apt to treat history, not as a series of true matters of fact, exemplifying the laws of human nature and society, and enlarging our knowledge of them for purposes of future inference—but as if it were a branch of fiction, so to be handled as to please our taste or improve our morality. Dionysius, blaming Thucydides for the choice of his subject, goes so far as to say that the Peloponnesian war, a period of ruinous discord in Greece, ought to have been left in oblivion and never to have passed into history (σιωπῇ καὶ λήθῃ παραδοθεῖς, ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιγιγνομένων ἡγηγήσθαι, *ibid.* p. 768)—and that especially Thucydides ought never to have thrown the blame of it upon his own city, since there were many other causes to which it might have been imputed (ἐτέραις ἔχοντα πολλάς ἀφορμαῖς περιάψαι τὰς αἰτίας, p. 770).

¹ Herodot. viii. 99. Μαρδόμιον ἐν αἰτίῃ τιθέντες: compare c. 100.

sented as expressing his warm concurrence in the project, extolling the immense force¹ of Persia and depreciating the Ionians in Europe (so he denominated them) as so poor and disunited that success was not only certain but easy. Against the rashness of this general—the evil genius of Xerxes—we find opposed the prudence and long experience of Artabanus, brother of the deceased Darius, and therefore uncle to the monarch. The age and relationship of this Persian Nestor emboldens him to undertake the dangerous task of questioning the determination which Xerxes, though professing to invite the opinions of others, had proclaimed as already settled in his own mind. The speech which Herodotus puts into the mouth of Artabanus is that of a thoughtful and religious Greek: it opens with the Grecian conception of the necessity of hearing and comparing opposite views, prior to any final decision—reproves Mardonius for falsely depreciating the Greeks and seducing his master into personal danger—sets forth the probability that the Greeks, if victorious at sea, would come and destroy the bridge by which Xerxes had crossed the Hellèspont—reminds the latter of the imminent hazard which Darius and his army had undergone in Scythia, from the destruction—averted only by Histiaëus and his influence—of the bridge over the Danube: such prudential suggestions being further strengthened by adverting to the jealous aversion of the Godhead towards overgrown human power².

The impatient monarch silences his uncle in a tone of insult and menace: nevertheless, in spite

¹ Herodot. vii. 9.

² Herodot. vii. 10.