

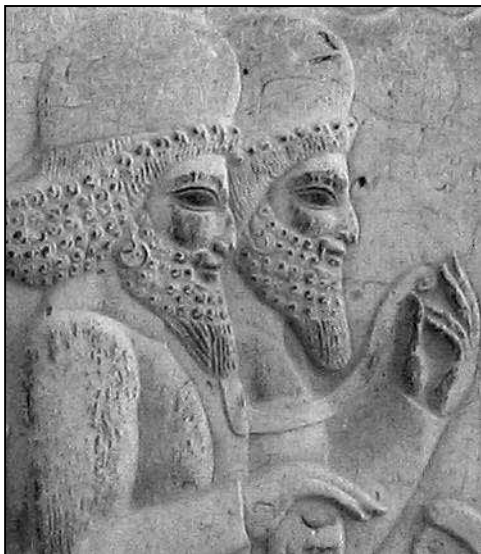
CXIX. THE COMING OF THE PERSIANS.

THE Babylonian Empire continued receiving tribute from its vassal nations, which it had inherited from the Assyrians, in the fifty-seven years that had passed since the fall of Nineveh. But at least two nations were not tributary, because they had helped Babylon in overthrowing the Assyrians. These two nations were Media, and Persia.

The Medians were descended from Madai the son of Japheth; and the Persians only record Japheth as their ancestor. As the ancient manners, customs, dress, and language of the Persians were so alike to the Medians, it has been assumed that they must have been closely related at one time.

In the early years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, the kings of these two nations made an alliance together. The king of Media gave his daughter to be the wife of the son of the king of Persia (600 BC). In that same year a new son was born to the Median king, whom the Greeks name Cyaxares (si-ak´ser-ees), but Da-ri´us according to the Hebrews.

In the year following this marriage, a son was born to the Median princess and the Persian prince, whom they named Cy´rus (599 BC). This was when Nebuchadnezzar took Jeconiah captive to Babylon. Thus it was that in the year the Jews suffered desolation at the hands of the Babylonians, God provided a savior for them, whose coming was foretold by the prophet Isaiah many years before (Is 44:28, 45:1).



Two Medians, from the palace at Persepolis.

When Cyrus was twelve years old, his grandfather, the king of Media, sent for him. The boy's first glimpse of the Median royal court, greatly enriched with wealth plundered from the sack of Nineveh, must have been a wonderful sight. For life in the Persian court was much plainer, and the luxuries which the Medians had learned from the Assyrians and Babylonians, were not so marked among the Persian nobility.

Thus Cyrus spent many happy years at his grandfather's court, learning hunting, warfare, and all the pursuits which occupied royal princes of this epoch. He especially reveled in horseback riding, for the Medians were well

known for their fine horses, and the Persians had very few. He furthermore developed a close friendship with the crown prince, who was Darius, his uncle—for Darius and Cyrus' mother both had the king of Media for their father—even though Darius was just one year older than Cyrus himself.

But Cyrus could not remain forever away from his home in Persia. Thus when he was seventeen, he was called home by his father the king, and spent the next ten years completing his schooling in all matters concerning Persian royalty (572 BC). Now you must not imagine that Cyrus' school work was anything like yours. He did not learn reading, writing, or arithmetic, for there were no books to read; and writing and arithmetic were tasks left for scribes, not deemed proper for kings.

Persian nobles learned justice: Persian law, the principles of right and wrong, and the rules by which disputes among men were decided. The students were given cases to judge, and if they decided these cases rightly, they were rewarded; but if wrongly, they were punished.

History tells us that Cyrus was only punished on one occasion. It seems a big boy took away the coat of a boy smaller than himself, because the big boy's own coat was small for him, while the smaller boy's coat was large for him. After hearing the case, Cyrus judged that each boy should keep the coat which best fitted him.

His teacher severely reprimanded him for this decision: "When you are called upon to judge what is most fitting, then you should determine as you have done in this case; but when you are called upon to judge proper ownership, then you should consider what constitutes right possession, and whether he who takes a thing by force from one who is weaker than himself, should have it; or whether he who owns it should be protected in his property. You have decided against law, and in favor of violence and wrong."



CXX. CYRUS' WARS.

THUS it was that when Cyrus was twenty-seven years old, he left his studies, and being now deemed a man according to Persian custom, took his place among the Persian court (572 BC). In due course of time, Cyrus' grandfather, the king of Media, died, and his uncle Darius became the new king (560 BC).