

QUINTUS CURTIUS RUFUS

VOL. I

B

SUMMARIES ^a

BOOK I

Many Greeks have written of the life and deeds of Alexander, who took from the Persians their empire and transferred it to Greece. Some of these were witnesses of his exploits, some even his companions and officers (Arr. i., praef.). Being eager for glory and for the perpetuation of his memory, he summoned some, for example Callisthenes of Olynthus, for the very purpose of transmitting his history to posterity (Justin xii. 6. 7). Besides the greatness of his exploits, the innate love of the Greeks for fable led some of them to record marvels rather than sober history. Ptolemy, who was afterwards king of Egypt, and Aristobulus seem to be the most trustworthy (Arr. l.c.). When they agree, I have preferred their account to that of the rest; when they differ, I have taken from the abundance of material those things which seemed nearest to the truth. This practice the Greeks who had some regard for the truth, after Alexander's day, seem to have followed, and lately Diodorus of Sicily.

Those of the Romans who have given attention to history, content with the affairs of their own nation, have neglected those of others; for the deeds of a victorious people furnished an abundance of material, which seemed

^a The Summaries of the lost Books I and II are based upon those in the editions of J. Freinshem, Strasburg, 1648 and 1670. Those of III-X are the translator's.

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likely to be more useful to their fellow-citizens. Nevertheless, I believe that I shall be free from reproach if I shall make known to my country that king who in the shortest time conquered the greatest extent of territory, and if I shall show that, in general, success corresponds with character, and that no good fortune is lasting which lacks virtue.

I find that Alexander possessed in abundance all the gifts of character and fortune with which a man fated to have a power so great ought to be endowed. He was the son of Philip and Olympias, of whom the former in a continuous series of wars had made the hitherto obscure people of Macedonia formidable to all men, prepared the foundation for works done after his time, made ready for an invasion of Persia, and through Parmenion had already opened Asia (Curt. vii. 1. 3). Alexander's birth was preceded and attended by portents. Many even believed that he was the son of Jupiter,^a who had assumed the form of a serpent and lain with Olympias (Plut. Alex. ii. 4; Justin xi. 11. 3). She, however, in a letter^b to her son (Gell. xiii. 4. 2) begged him not to expose her to Juno's hatred as her husband's paramour. On the night when he was born the temple of the Ephesian Diana was destroyed by fire (Cic. Nat. Deor. ii. 27. 69; Plut. Alex. iii. 3), which the Magi interpreted as meaning that a firebrand had appeared somewhere, by which the whole Orient would be destroyed. It happened that at the same time Philip subdued Potidaea, a colony of the Athenians, and received news both of the victory of one of his chariots at Olympia and of the defeat of the Illyrians in a great battle.

Alexander was born at the beginning of the sixth

^a *i.e.* Zeus; Freinshem has followed Curtius in using the Roman names.

^b The letter is of course not genuine.

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Olympiad after the one hundredth (356 B.C.) when Elpines was Archon at Athens, on the 21st day of July, the month which the Macedonians of that time called Lous (Plut. Alex. l.c. ; Gell. xvii. 21. 28). Philip, having the highest hopes of his son because of so many omens, directed all his thoughts to his education and care ; for, being a wise man and devoted to his country, he knew that all his toil would amount to nothing if he left an ignorant or slothful successor. There are among his letters, which are full of grace and of wisdom, one which he sent to Athens at that time addressed to Aristotle (Gell. ix. 3), reading about as follows^a : " Philip greets Aristotle. Know that a son is born to me. I thank the gods, not so much that he is born, as that it is his good fortune to be born in your lifetime. I hope that as a result of your training he will prove worthy of us and of succeeding to so great a kingdom. For I think it is better to lack children than to have begotten them for the dishonour of their ancestors."

And Philip was not mistaken ; the boy for a long time had Aristotle for his teacher and thus received the greatest help for doing such great deeds at the proper time. But this happened later ; meanwhile the child's teachers and guardians were Leonidas, a relative of Olympias, and Lysimachus, an Acarnanian. Philip, also an Acarnanian (Curt. iii. 6. 1), was joined with them, to look after his health ; to Hellanicê, the daughter of Dropides, a member of one of the best families of the Macedonians, was given the duties of a nurse approved by a good person and morals (Curt. viii. 1. 21 ; Arr. iv. 9. 1, who calls her Lanicê). From such care it resulted that within a few years he already gave promise of being the king which he afterwards became ; for his boyish frame foretold

^a The letter is of course not genuine.

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invincible strength, and signs of an indomitable spirit were far in advance of his time of life. Excelling in native grace of person, he scorned adornment, saying that anxious care for beauty was suitable for women, who were commended by no other endowment; that he would be sufficiently handsome if he should achieve virtue.

When he grew up, he was conspicuous for a well-proportioned body, strong and remarkably solid limbs, surpassing rather in strength than in beauty; for he was not tall (Curt. iii. 12. 6; v. 2. 13). His skin was white and fair, except for a handsome flush on his cheeks and also on his breast; his hair was golden and slightly curling; his nose was aquiline; his eyes did not match, for his left eye is said to have been grey and the other very black; and they had a kind of hidden power, so that those who looked at him felt veneration and sometimes dread. He was wonderfully swift of foot and his endurance of toil was beyond belief; by this he found safety in times of difficulty for himself and his army. He kept himself in such condition by frequent exercise that his breath and limbs had a pleasant odour, which even pervaded the garments which he wore (Plut. Alex. iv. 2). He took pains that the attractiveness of his face should not be marred by the work of inferior artists; Apelles alone had permission to paint his portrait, Pyrgoteles to represent him in marble, Polyclitus and Lysippus in bronze (Hor. Epist. ii. 1. 237 ff.). They say that his preceptor Leonidas had the fault of walking too rapidly and that Alexander contracted the habit from him; but I am inclined to attribute this characteristic rather to the nature of the man than to habit; for in one of rapid thought it was inevitable that the motions of his body should follow those of his mind. This his successors were so far from regarding as a defect that they imitated it, as well as the inclining of

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his neck towards his left shoulder (Plut. Alex. 4. 1), his steady gaze, and his high-pitched voice, since they could not imitate his mental qualities.

Although he was eager for praise, he did not seek it from any and every source, but rejoiced to be compared with the best (Plut. Alex. iv. 5). Therefore to those who said that since he excelled in running he ought to enter his name among the contestants in the Olympic Games, after the example of a king of the same name as himself (Justin vii. 2. 14), he replied: "I would do it, if I had kings as competitors" (Plut. Alex. 1.c.). Whenever Philip had been victorious in a famous battle or had reduced any powerful city and others rejoiced, he was heard to complain among his contemporaries that his father would leave nothing for him or for them to do when they had grown up (Plut. Alex. v. 2). Being most sparing of sleep, he had a device for aiding wakefulness. Holding in his grasp a silver ball, he stretched his arm over a bronze basin beside his couch, so that when the coming of sleep relaxed the tension of his muscles, the clang of the ball as it fell might awaken him (Amm. xvi. 5. 4). He worshipped the gods magnificently from his early youth and used incense so lavishly that Leonidas, who was austere and frugal, exclaimed: "Make offerings like these when you have subdued the region where such things grow." Mindful of these words, when he subdued^a incense-bearing Arabia he sent many talents' weight of perfumes to Leonidas (Plut. Alex. xxv. 4 f.) with instructions not to be too stingy thereafter in honouring the gods, since he knew that they repaid so generously gifts cheerfully offered.

The young prince early gave indications of a lofty spirit which would undertake great deeds. When he was

^a He never "subdued" Arabia. He made a "commando" raid on that country during the siege of Tyre (iv. 3. 1, 7).

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