

the most accurate information. Introductory to his principal subject he gives a short view of the Grecian history, from the departure of Xerxes, to the commencement of the war of Peloponnesus, which connects his history with that of Herodotus: but he brings down the detail of the war only to the twenty-first year. The history of the remaining six years was written by Theopompus and Xenophon.

Thucydides is deservedly esteemed for the authenticity of his facts, his impartiality, and fidelity. We are, indeed, involuntarily led from his narrative to favor the cause of his countrymen, the Athenians; of whom, however, it may be presumed, he had no reason to exaggerate the merits. The style of Thucydides is a contrast to that of Herodotus. The eloquence of the latter is copious and diffuse, and his expression, never rising to the elevated and magnificent, is chiefly remarkable for its simplicity and perspicuity. The former has a closeness and energy of style, which is equally lively and energetic.* Like Tacitus, he rises often to great sublimity of expression, and, like that author too, his diction is so compressed, that we find, often, as many ideas as there are words.† His narrative does not convey his meaning easily, and without effort. He makes the reader pause upon his sentences, and keeps his attention on the stretch to apprehend the full import of his expressions. That effort of attention, however, is always amply rewarded, by the wisdom and sagacity of his observations, the intimate knowledge he shows of his subject, and the perfect confidence which he inspires of his own candor and veracity.

There is no other among the Greek writers who has shone more in the department of history, than Xenophon. This author was about thirty years younger than Thucydides; contemporary with many of the most illustrious men of Greece; and educated in the school of Socrates. He accompanied the younger Cyrus in his war against his brother Artaxerxes, and in the latter part of that expedition, commanded the Greek army in the service of Cyrus. We know the fatal issue of that enterprise, in which Cyrus fell by the hand of his brother;—a just reward for his unnatural and criminal ambition.‡ The retreat of the ten thousand Greeks, under Xenophon, gave him great fame as an able commander, eminently endowed with persevering courage, fertile in resources,

* Densus et brevis, et semper instans sibi Thucydides: dulcis et candidus et fusus Herodotus; ille concitatus, hic remissis affectibus melior; ille concionibus, hic sermonibus: ille vi, hic voluptate.—*Quintil.* l. x. c. i.

† Thucydides omnes dicendi artificia meâ sententiâ facile vicit, ut verborum prope numerum sententiarum numero consequatur: ita porro verbis aptus et pressus, ut nescias utrum res oratione, an verba sententiis illustrentur.—*Cicero* lib. 2. De Orat.

‡ See supra, book ii. chap. 2.

and possessing that happy talent of address, and that popular eloquence, which are fitted for gaining the ready obedience and the confidence of an army. The narrative of this remarkable expedition, written by himself, has justly entitled him to a high rank among the historians of antiquity.* His historical, political, and philosophical works are numerous.† Among these, one of the most known, though certainly not of the highest merit, is the *Cyropædia*, or Education of Cyrus; a fanciful composition, which blends history and romance, and is equally unsatisfying in the one point of view as in the other. It is supposed that the author meant to exhibit the picture of an accomplished prince. But if that was his aim, to what purpose those frivolous and childish tales of the nursery, those insipid jests, and that endless verbiage and haranguing upon the most ordinary and trifling occasions?

Xenophon was a man of strict virtue and probity, of strong religious sentiments, referring all to the watchful administration of the Deity, but prone to the superstitious belief of auguries and omens. As a writer, in point of style, he is a model of easy, smooth, and unaffected composition; and his pure Attic dialect has infinite grace, and a singular perspicuity or transparency of expression, which presents the thought at once to the reader's mind, and leaves him no leisure to attend to the medium through which it is conveyed:—a supreme excellence of style, and rare, because ignorantly undervalued, in competition with point, brilliancy and rhetorical embellishment. *Quid ego commemorem* (says Quintilian) *Xenophontis jucunditatem illam in affectatam, sed quam nulla possit affectatio consequi — ut ipsæ finxisse sermonem Gratia videantur?* ‡

The three historians I have mentioned had the fortune to live in that age which witnessed the highest national glory of their country. But Greece, even in the days of her degeneracy as a nation, produced some historians of uncommon merit. Polybius lived in the second century before the birth of Christ; at the time when the only surviving spirit of the Greeks was that which animated the small states of Achaia. His father, a native of Megalopolis in Arcadia, was Prætor of the Achæan republic, and executed that important office with great honor. Polybius was trained from his youth to public affairs, for which his abilities emi-

* See supra, book ii. chap. 2.

† He wrote, besides the *Anabasis* and the *Cyropædia*, a continuation, in seven books, of the Greek history of Thucydides; a Panegyric on Agesilaus; two treatises on the Lacedæmonian and Athenian Republics; The Apology for Socrates; and four books of the *Memorabilia* of that philosopher; a treatise on Domestic Economy; The Banquet; Hiero, or the Economy of a Monarchy; besides some smaller essays on Imposts, Hunting, Horsemanship; and some Epistles of which we have only fragments.

‡ “Why should I mention that unaffected sweetness in Xenophon, which no affectation could ever reach — so that the Graces themselves seem to have modelled his composition?”

nently qualified him. He accompanied his father on an embassy to the court of the Ptolemies in Egypt, and afterwards went himself as ambassador to Rome, where he resided for several years. During that period he employed himself most assiduously in the study of the antiquities, laws, and customs of the Romans; and having permission from the senate to search into the records preserved in the capitol, obtained a more exact and profound acquaintance with the history and constitution of the Roman republic than any of its own citizens. It was probably by the advice of the great Scipio and Lælius, who were his intimate friends, that he formed the splendid design of composing a history of Rome, which should comprehend that of all the contemporary nations with which the affairs of the republic were connected. Preparatory, however, to this great undertaking, he resolved to travel into every country where lay the scene of any of those events he designed to record. In that view he visited most of the southern nations of Europe, a considerable part of Asia, and the coast of Africa. He explored himself the traces of Hannibal in his march across the Alps, and made himself acquainted with all the Gallic nations in their vicinity. In short, no writer was ever more scrupulous in the investigation of facts, or more perfectly acquainted with the scenes he had to describe. Thus his history is deservedly of the very highest authority among the compositions of the ancients. It is much to be lamented that so small a portion should remain of so valuable a work. Of forty books which he wrote, beginning from the commencement of the second Punic war, and carried down to the reduction of Macedonia into a Roman province, we have only the first five books entire, and extracts, or rather an abridgment, of the following twelve, with some detached fragments from the remaining books preserved by other writers. We see in every page of Polybius, the intelligent officer, the sagacious politician, and the man of probity and candor. He neither disguises the virtues of an enemy, nor palliates the faults of a friend. His description of military operations is clear and distinct, and his judgment is every where conspicuous in reasoning on the counsels which directed all public measures, and the causes which led to their success or failure. The style of Polybius has, indeed, no claim to the praise of eloquence. Dionysius of Halicarnassus reproaches him with carelessness in the choice of his expressions, and inattention to the rules of good writing: but he is every where perspicuous, and the sterling value of his matter abundantly compensates for his defects in point of rhetorical composition.

The next who deserves to be mentioned among the Greek historians of eminence, is Diodorus Siculus, who, in the latter period of the commonwealth and in the age of Augustus, composed at Rome his excellent General History, a work of thirty years' labor, of which only fifteen out of forty books have been preserved. The first five books relate to the fabulous periods, but record

likewise a great deal of curious historical matter relative to the antiquities of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, and Greeks. The next five books are wanting. The eleventh book begins with the expedition of Xerxes into Greece, and continues the Grecian history, and that of the contemporary nations, down to the age of Alexander the Great. The author is particularly ample on the affairs of the Romans and Carthaginians. The work of Diodorus appears to have been in great esteem with the writers of antiquity. The elder Pliny is high in his commendation; Justin Martyr ranks him among the most illustrious of the Greek historians; and Eusebius places greater weight on his authority than that of any other writer. The modern writers have blamed him for chronological inaccuracy. It is not to be denied that the History of Diodorus is replete with valuable matter, and that his style, though not to be compared to that of Xenophon or Thucydides, is pure, perspicuous, and free from all affectation.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus deserves to be ranked among the most eminent of the Greek writers of history, both in regard to the importance of his matter and the merit of his style, which, though deficient in simplicity, is often extremely eloquent. Dionysius came to Rome in the reign of Augustus, and continuing to reside there twenty-two years, employed that time in the most diligent research into the ancient records, in conversation with the most learned men of that age, and in the perusal of the older writers, whence he collected the materials of that most valuable work which he composed in twenty books, entitled *Roman Antiquities*.* Of these only the first eleven books have been preserved, in which the origin and foundation of the Roman state are treated with great amplitude, and the history of the republic brought down to the end of the decemvirate. He has been censured for dealing in the marvellous; but the censure applies equally to Livy, who has repeated the same stories, without, it is probable, either believing them himself or expecting his readers to do so. Those who write of the origin of nations have but scanty materials of genuine history, and are thus tempted to eke them out with the popular fables. And these it is sometimes important to know, as they have frequently given rise to ceremonies and customs both of a religious and civil nature, of which the origin may therefore be considered as belonging to authentic history. The point in which Dionysius is more justly to be blamed is his fondness for system, and the desire he has to persuade his readers of his own sagacity in discovering, as he imagines, a deep and refined policy in the founders of the Roman state, in all those constitutional regulations regarding the powers and rights of the

* He gives, in the Introduction to his work, an ample account of all the sources of information from which his history is compiled.

different orders, the functions of the magistrates, &c., which in reality could only have arisen gradually and progressively, as circumstances pointed out and required them. Of this error of Dionysius, I shall have another occasion to take some notice.

There are few of the ancient historians who deserve a higher rank in the estimation of the moderns than Arrian, whose history of the expedition of Alexander is the most authentic narrative we have of the exploits of that great conqueror, as he is also the best expositor of the real motives and designs of that extraordinary man, of whose policy such opposite judgments have been formed. The narrative of Arrian, as he informs us in his preface, is founded on the accounts given by two of Alexander's principal officers, Aristobulus and Ptolemy Lagus, afterwards the sovereign of Egypt. No historical record, therefore, has a better claim to the public faith. The brief account of India by Arrian, which includes the curious journal of Nearchus's voyage, is likewise extremely interesting and instructive. The style of Arrian formed on that of Xenophon, is a very happy imitation of that author's simplicity, purity, and precision. Arrian's merits are not solely those of an accurate and able historian; he was likewise a profound philosopher. It is to his writings that we owe all our knowledge of the sublime morality of Epictetus, of whom he was the favorite disciple, and has diligently recorded the philosophical lessons and maxims of his master. The short treatise entitled the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus, which is a complete epitome of the stoical morality, was written by Arrian, and, from its beautiful precision, is perhaps on the whole a more valuable memorial of that great philosopher than the four books which Arrian has collected of his discourses.

The last author I shall mention of those properly to be classed among the Greek historians is Plutarch, and perhaps there is no writer of antiquity of equal value in point of important matter and useful information. Plutarch was a Bœotian by birth, a native of Chæronea, a small state of which his father was chief magistrate, with the title of Archon. He was borne in the 48th year of the Christian era, under the reign of the emperor Claudius. In his youth he travelled into Egypt, and while in that country, studied under Ammonius, a celebrated teacher of philosophy at Alexandria. Returning thence into Greece, he visited all the schools of the philosophers in that country; and, finally, with a mind replete with useful knowledge and an extensive acquaintance with men and manners, he repaired to Rome, for the purpose of examining the public records and collecting materials for the lives of the illustrious men of Italy and Greece. The reputation he had acquired as a man of great erudition procured him the acquaintance, of all the learned, and introduced him to the notice of the emperor Trajan, who honored him with high marks of his favor and friendship, and conferred on him the proconsular government of Illyria. A public life, however, was irksome to Plutarch,

whose chief enjoyment lay in the pursuits of literature and philosophy. He returned, after the death of Trajan, to his native city of Chæronea, where he passed the remaining years of a long life in discharging the office of its chief magistrate, in the composition of his excellent writings, and in the continual practice of all the active and social virtues. The lives of Illustrious Men, written by Plutarch, must upon the whole be ranked among the most valuable works which remain to us of the ancients. He is the only author who introduces us to an intimate and familiar acquaintance with those great men, whose public exploits and political characters we find indeed in other historians, but of whose individual features as men, and of their manners in domestic, private, and social intercourse, we should be utterly ignorant, were it not for his descriptive paintings, and the truly characteristic anecdotes which he records of them. What, if at times the biographer is chargeable with a little garrulity, and a too scrupulous minuteness in the detail of circumstances not of the highest importance? So natural is the desire felt by the ingenious mind of knowing every thing that concerns a great and illustrious character, that we can much more easily forgive the writer who is cheerfully lavish of the information he has collected, and at times descends even to trifling particulars, than him who, from a proud feeling of the dignity of authorship, is fastidiously sparing of his stores, and disdains to be ranked among the collectors of anecdote.

A great charm of Plutarch's writings is the admirable vein of morality which pervades all his compositions. Every sentiment proceeds from the heart, and forcibly persuades the reader of the amiable candor, worth, and integrity of the writer. While his biographical details contain the most valuable part of the ancient history of Greece and Rome, his moral writings include the sum of all the ancient ethics. Perhaps it was no exaggerated estimate of his merits made by Theodore Gaza, when he declared that if every trace of ancient learning was to perish, and he had it in his power to preserve one single book from the works of the profane writers, his choice would fall upon Plutarch.

The style of this author, though, in the judgment of the best critics, neither polished nor pure, is at all times energetic; and, on those occasions when the subject demands it, rises frequently to great eloquence.

An ancient Greek epigram of Agathias records the high esteem which the Roman people entertained for this excellent writer, in erecting a statue to his honor.*

* The epigram is thus translated by Dryden :

“ Bœotian Plutarch, to thy deathless praise
Does martial Rome this graceful statue raise ;
Because both Greece and she thy fame have shared,
Their heroes written, and their lives compared.
But thou thyself could never write thy own ;
Their lives have *parallels*, but thine has none.”