



**N**OW in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, **2** Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. **3** Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. **4** And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-4)

There is a wonderful historical heritage of the great land of Persia. One of her greatest gifts for our learning and edification was Cyrus the Great – the first King who was beneficent to conquered peoples and honored their faith and customs.

When in the fifth grade, I read the following story in my reader concerning this great king. My school room was hot and crowded, but I felt all alone with the Persian

king as I read of his great compassion. I dreamed of going and seeing that land, but had the almost certain view that such a privilege would never be mine. I was so very impressed that he had compassion on his people in spite of his great power. I was privileged to stand in the ruins of the summer palace of Cyrus (pronounced 'Kourush' in Farsi – the Persian language) where Daniel the prophet also had stood. I have visited the mountain tomb of Astyages (grandfather to Cyrus), Darius the Great, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, and others whose bodies lay in state in the Mountain of Mercy overlooking Perscepolis. I lived nearby this historical site for more than five years . . . and I was over-awed in visitng the stone tomb of Cyrus the Great. Over the huge door of his tomb are these words engraved, "O man, whosoever thour, and from whithersoever thou comest, Behold, I am Cyrus the Great King – therefore begrudge me not the small dust that covers my bones."

Cyrus the Great was my childhood hero on a par with General Robert E. Lee. I hope you will enjoy a reminder in this story of the kind of stories that illumined the mind of our American youth more than sixty years ago.

### THE KING'S CUPBEARER

A short story by James Baldwin

LONG, long ago, there lived in Persia a little prince whose name was Cyrus. He was not petted and spoiled like many other princes. Although his father was a king, Cyrus was brought up like the son of a common man. He knew how to work with his hands. He ate only the plainest food. He slept on a hard bed. He learned to endure hunger and cold.

When Cyrus was twelve years old he went with his mother to Media to visit his grandfather. His grandfather, whose name was Astyages, was king of Media, and very rich and powerful. Cyrus was so tall and strong and handsome that his grandfather was very proud of him. He wished the lad to stay with him in Media. He therefore gave him many beautiful gifts and everything that could please a prince.

One day King Astyages planned to make a great feast for the lad. The tables were to be laden with all kinds of food. There was to be music and dancing; and Cyrus was to invite as many guests as he chose.

The hour for the feast came. Everything was ready. The servants were there, dressed in fine uniforms. The musicians and dancers were in their places. But no guests came. "How is this, my dear boy?" asked the king. "The feast is ready, but no one has come to partake of it."

"That is because I have not invited any one," said Cyrus. "In Persia we do not have such feasts. If any one is hungry, he eats some bread and meat, with perhaps a few cresses, and that is the end of it. We never go to all this trouble and expense of making a fine dinner in order that our friends may eat what is not good for them."

King Astyages did not know whether to be pleased or displeased.

"Well" said he, "all these rich foods that were prepared for the feast are yours. What will you do with them?"

"I think I will give them to our friends," said Cyrus.

So he gave one portion to the king's officer who had taught him to ride. Another portion he gave to an old servant who waited upon his grandfather. And the rest he divided among the young women who took care of his mother.

The king's cupbearer, Sarcas, was very much offended because he was not given a share of the feast. The king also wondered why this man, who was his favorite, should be so slighted.

"Why didn't you give something to Sarcas?" he asked.

"Well, truly," said Cyrus, "I do not like him. He is proud and overbearing. He thinks that he makes a fine figure when he waits on you."

"And so he does," said the king. "He is very skillful as a cupbearer."

"That may be so," answered Cyrus, "but if you will let me be your cupbearer tomorrow, I think I can serve you quite as well."

King Astyages smiled. He saw that Cyrus had a will of his own, and this pleased him very much.

"I shall be glad to see what you can do," he said.

"To-morrow, you shall be the king's cupbearer"

You would hardly have known the young prince when the time came for him to appear before his grandfather. He was dressed in the rich uniform of the cupbearer, and he came forward with much dignity and grace. He carried a white napkin upon his arm, and held the cup of wine very daintily with three of his fingers. His manners were perfect. Sarcas himself could not have served the king half so well.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried his mother, her eyes sparkling with pride.

"You have done well," said his grandfather. "But you neglected one important thing. It is the rule and custom of the cupbearer to pour out a little of the wine and taste it before handing the cup to me. This you forgot to do."

"Indeed, grandfather, I did not forget it," answered Cyrus.

"Then why didn't you do it?" asked his mother.

"Because I believed there was poison in the wine."

"Poison, my boy!" cried King Astyages, much alarmed. "Poison! poison!"

"Yes, grandfather, poison. For the other day, when you sat at dinner with your officers, I noticed that the wine made you act queerly. After the guests had drunk quite a little of it, they began to talk foolishly and sing loudly; and some of them went to sleep. And you, grandfather, were as bad as the rest. You forgot that you were king. You forgot all your good manners. You tried to dance and fell upon the floor. I am afraid to drink anything that makes men act in that way."

"Didn't you ever see your father behave so?" asked the king.

"No, never," said Cyrus. "He does not drink merely to be drinking. He drinks to quench his thirst, and that is all."

When Cyrus became a man, he succeeded his father as king of Persia; he also succeeded his grandfather Astyages as king of Media. He was a very wise and powerful ruler, and he made his country the greatest of any that was then known. In history he is commonly called Cyrus the Great.

NOTE: Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon through ingenious stratagem and in accord with biblical prophecy of Isaiah - *Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.* - (Isaiah 44:26-28 \) When David showed him this prophecy which had been spoken 200 years earlier, Cyrus was overwhelmed. He did send the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild it. The Euphrates River was dried up to make Cyrus' entry into Babylon possible since her walls were invincible – all foretold 200 years previous to Cyrus' birth.

Cyrus once surrounded the city of Lydia in Asia Minor. The king agreed to surrender without resistance. In reward for that favor, Cyrus told the conquered king, "You can have anything you ask of me." The conquered king requested a very large quantity of gold. The aide of Cyrus was incensed that the king would be so presumptive. But Cyrus told his aide, "You should know that this man honors me as a great king since only a great king can give great gifts." Perhaps a lesson lies therein in our prayers to our King of Kings! (J. Ogles)