

**XENOPHON**

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Xenophon by Sir Alexander Grant

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**SIR ALEXANDER GRANT**

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# XENOPHON.

## CHAPTER I

### NOTICES OF THE LIFE OF XENOPHON PREVIOUS TO THE EXPEDITION OF CYRUS.

THERE is none of the ancient Greek authors whose personality stands more clearly before us than that of Xenophon. We owe this entirely to his own writings, for external notices of him are meagre and untrustworthy. But the historian of the expedition of Cyrus, the recorder of the conversations of Socrates, and the varied essayist on so many topics of ancient Greek life, was one of those writers who, in depicting other things, give at the same time a portrait of themselves. His chief work is the account of a military expedition in which he was himself engaged, and in which he ultimately played a very prominent and leading part. So it follows only naturally that five-sevenths of this work are almost pure autobiography. We have thus from Xenophon's own hand a minute and living pic-

ture of himself and his actions for more than a year and a half, during one of the most interesting episodes of military history. We have from himself also an indication of his subsequent mode of life in his country residence, when he had settled down into a landed proprietor, and had exchanged the sword for the pen. And all his writings, though perfectly artistic, are so naïve, communicative, and at the same time so consistent in tone, that we can have no doubt that they reflect his real character. They seem to bring the man himself, with his habits and ways of thinking, his principles, prejudices, and superstitions, vividly before us. But except what can be derived from these sources, we have scarcely any information about the life of Xenophon. There is a biography of him written by Diogenes Laertius at the end of the second century A.D. But, like the rest of the "Lives" of Diogenes, it is a mere *debris* of anecdotes and traditions; and no assertion which it contains can be accepted without criticism.

There is no reason, however, for discrediting the statement that Xenophon was the son of one Gryllus, an Athenian citizen; for this is corroborated by the better-attested fact that the historian had a son also named Gryllus—it being the custom at Athens to call children after their grandfathers. The family of Xenophon must have belonged to the upper middle ranks of Athens, as he himself was one of the class of "knights," or horsemen, for whom a property-qualification was required. But he could not have had much hereditary riches to depend on, else he would