

History of Greece Volume 5



Language	English
Author:	George Grote
Goodreads Rating:	3.67
ISBN13:	9780217160940
Published:	July 9th 2012 by Rarebooksclub.com
ISBN10:	0217160948
Genre:	Cultural
Pages:	164

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This is an OCR edition with typos. Excerpt from book: So terrific a reply had rarely escaped from the lips of the priestess. The envoys were struck to the earth by it, and durst not carry it back to Athens. In their sorrow they were encouraged yet to hope by an influential Delphian citizen named Timon (we trace here, as elsewhere, the underhand working of these leading Delphians on the priestess), who advised them to provide themselves with the characteristic marks of supplication, and to approach the oracle a second time in that imploring guise: O lord, we pray thee (they said), have compassion on these boughs of supplication, and deliver to us something more comfortable concerning our country; else we quit not thy sanctuary, but remain here until death. Upon which the priestess replied: Athene with all her prayers and all her sagacity cannot propitiate Olympian Zeus.¹ But this assurance I will give you, firm as adamant: when everything else in the land of Kekrops shall be taken, Zeus grants to Athene⁴ that the wooden wall alone shall remain unconquered, to defend you and your children. Stand not to await the assailing horse and foot from the continent, but turn your backs and retire: you shall yet live to fight another day. O divine Salamis, thou too shalt destroy the children of women, either at the seed-time or at the harvest. ² This second answer was a sensible mitigation of the first: it left open some hope of escape, though faint, dark, and unintelligible, ? and the envoys wrote it down to carry back to Athens, not concealing, probably, the terrific sentence which had preceded it. When

read to the people, the obscurity of the meaning provoked many different interpretations. What was meant by the wooden wall? Some supposed that the acropolis itself, which 1 Herodot. vii, 141. Ov dvvarai IlaAAdf At' Aiaoofievri ...