



Plutarch Selection

For our Plutarch selection, we have chosen the chapter "The Man Who Made Athens Beautiful," a study of Pericles from *The Children's Plutarch: Stories of the Greeks*, and included it on the following pages. The book may also be purchased on Amazon.

If your children are 6th grade or older, we recommend spending a full 12-week term studying Pericles with the edited (for length and content) study guide from Ambleside here:

<https://amblesideonline.org/plutarch-pericles>

You can also purchase the guide by Anne White on Amazon. (This is in place of *The Children's Plutarch*, not in addition to.)

Plutarch

The Man Who Made Athens Beautiful

The Children's Plutarch: Tales of the Greeks, by F. J. Gould

"YOUR head is like an onion!"

No answer.

"You brute, you scamp, your head is too big for your body."

No answer.

The man who did not answer was Pericles (Per-i-kleez), ruler of the State of Athens. Why the fellow was shouting at him along the street in this way I do not know. Pericles quietly kept on his road till he reached the door of his house. It was getting dusk, but through the darkness the voice behind still bawled. Pericles called to one of his servants:

"Bring a lighted torch," he said, 'and show this person the way home."

That was all the reply that Pericles gave to the rude Athenian. You see, he was a man of self-command, he did not break into a fury when he was insulted. This was not because he was weak or timid. When Athens was at war, Pericles joined the army, or sailed with the fleet.

He was a great favorite with the people; and you will not wonder at it when I tell you what he did for them. Any poor Athenian was allowed money to pay for admission to the open-air theatre. Soldiers were paid wages; and every year sixty galleys cruised about the sea for eight months, and the men who were trained in these ships as sailors were paid all the time. Corn was sold to poor persons very cheap. And parties of two hundred and fifty, and even one thousand, persons were sent across the water to settle in foreign cities where they would still be protected by the power of Athens. And if you had walked about the city in the days of Pericles, you would have seen large numbers of men at work building walls, archways, and temples, and using vast loads of stone, brass, ivory, gold, ebony-wood, cypress-wood, and so on. You would have seen carpenters, masons, braziers (or brass-workers), goldsmiths, painters, rope-makers, leather-cutters, paviors (those who laid pavement down in the roads), wagoners, and porters. Handsome statues of gods and goddesses were set up in the temples and streets. One statue was that of the lady Athene (Ath-ee-nee), made of shining gold and polished white ivory; she wore a tunic that reached down to her feet; a spear was in her hand, a dragon lay on the ground before her, and two sharp-beaked griffins grew out of her helmet. Where did the money come from to pay for these things? Well, I am afraid it mostly came from taxes (or tribute), which the city of Athens forced out of other people in the lands and islands round about. So, though the galleys sailed proudly, and the statues looked splendid, and the people enjoyed the plays at the free theatres, the glory could not last, because it was got by spoil from other people. Pericles had the rule for forty years.

The heart of Pericles was generous, and he was ever ready to aid a man who was in want. An old philosopher (or teacher of wisdom) had become so poor that he wished to die, and he lay down in despair, and covered up his head. Some people ran to the ruler.

'Sir," they cried, "your old friend, the philosopher, has covered up his head!"

Pericles knew at once what that meant. In ancient Greece it was a sign that a man would put an end to his life. The old philosopher meant to starve himself.

In great haste Pericles went to the house where his friend lay.

"My dear friend," he cried, "do not die like this. We cannot lose you; you are a man whom we love."

"Ah," groaned the old man, who was a wit in his way. "Ah, Pericles! those who want a lamp to burn always take care to keep it filled with oil."

He meant that if people cared for him they ought to keep him supplied with the food, etc., which he needed; and you may be sure that Pericles did not let his friend die.

Two years before his death a war broke out between Athens on the one side and Sparta and her allies (friends) on the other, and this war lasted thirty years; but Pericles only saw the beginning of it. Sad indeed he would have felt if he could have looked on to the close of the war and seen his beloved city defeated and its walls thrown down. He had fitted out a fleet of one hundred and fifty ships, and had just gone on board his own galley when the sky became dull and the earth took on a strange, gray color. Can you guess what had happened? The moon was passing between the sun and the earth, and so casting a shadow. It was an eclipse (or hiding) of the sun. The Greeks were in much fear, and the pilot of the commander's ship trembled exceedingly. Then Pericles took off his cloak, and placed it over the man's eyes, and said:

"Are you frightened at my cloak eclipsing you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, why are you frightened at the eclipse of the sun, which happens to be caused by something bigger than my cloak?"

The pilot regained his nerve, and the story was told from mouth to mouth, and there was no more terror in the fleet.

However, the ships returned to Athens without having done anything very remarkable, and the citizens were angry, and made Pericles pay a heavy fine of money. Before long they changed their minds, restored him his money, and chose him again for leader of the State. But the days of Pericles were soon to end. At this time a dire plague began in the city, and many thousands of the folk died.

Some say it was caused by so many people flocking into Athens to escape from the Spartan foe, and these strangers were mostly country persons who were used to the pure air of the fields, and who fell ill when they breathed the close air of the crowded houses of Athens. The sons of Pericles died, and one of these was specially beloved, and as the father laid a garland of flowers on the head of his dead son he burst into tears. And not long afterward he took the fever himself, and lay dying.

One day his friends were standing about his bed, and he was so still they thought him asleep or in a faint, and they spoke one to another of his life and deeds.

"How beautiful a city he has made Athens; and men from foreign lands come to admire it."

"The temple on the hill—how fine a piece of work is that; and we should never have had it if Pericles had not carried out the plan."

"And how the people took delight in going to the theatres free."

"The isles of the sea paid tribute to Athens because they feared the power of our ruler."

"Ah, my dear fellows," said Pericles, who had been listening, "other men have done such deeds as these. You have left out the one thing of which I am proud."

"What is that, sir?"

"It is the fact that no Athenian has ever put on mourning because of me, for I have caused the death of no dweller in this city."

And thus Pericles died.

Just a few words about the Maiden's Chamber before I finish. This was the temple on the hill that was mentioned by one of the friends of the dying ruler. In the Greek tongue the Maiden's Chamber was called the Parthenon (Parth-e-non). It was built of marble, and was about twice as long as it was broad. Instead of walls all round it there were tall pillars, eight at each end and fifteen at each side, so that whichever way you entered you would pass in between marble pillars. Inside the first rows of pillars was a second row, all the way round. And over the tops of the pillars, and all round the temple, were pictures in stone—I mean carvings. These carvings showed the battles of the gods and the wicked giants; the battle of the Athenian warriors with the fierce women of the North, called Amazons; and a procession of men on horses. If ever you would like to see any of these sculptured horses and men and women soldiers, you need not go to Greece. You can find plaster casts of them in the art museums of New York, Chicago, and other cities, though I am sorry to say they show that the originals, now in the British Museum, are very much battered and broken.

When the power of the Greeks had passed the temple was used as a church, and was named after the Virgin Mary. This was in what we called the Middle Ages (from about the year 400 to 1300 or 1400). Afterward the Turks were its masters, and made it into a mosque (mosk). In the year 1587 a war took place between the Turks and the people of Venice. And one day—what was that?

Boom!

A store of gunpowder which had been placed in the temple by the Turkish soldiers had exploded, and the building was almost destroyed.

War is a hateful thing. It brings to ruin the lovely carvings of the Maiden's Chamber, and it slays men who were once pretty babes nestling at the breasts of their mothers.