

up immediately another party—the Armagnacs—fired with still fiercer zeal to dispute with the Burgundians for ascendancy.

And thus it happened that in one of the most critical periods of her history France found her throne occupied by an imbecile King, and the entire country ravaged by civil strife. Taking advantage of this deplorable condition of France, Henry V. of England, who had just been crowned, lost no time in laying claim to the French crown, in virtue of an obscure title which came to him from Edward III. He soon invaded the French shore with ten thousand men, crossed the Somme, and fought and won the battle of Agincourt 'upon St. Crispin's Day.'

Subjection to England.

Following up this victory, King Henry, in 1420, compelled the French King and his Parliament to sign a treaty in the town of Troyes, which acknowledged Henry V. of England as Regent of France, and declared the illegitimacy of the Dauphin, afterwards Charles VII. But fortunately the crown of France never encircled the brow of Henry. Within two years he was seized by an incurable disease, and died. When dying, Henry directed that his brother, the Duke of Bedford, should be the Regent of France. But the vast majority of the French people proclaimed Charles' disinherited son as their sovereign, under the title of King Charles VII. The unhappy country, being thus divided into two hostile camps, was soon enwrapped in the flames of war.

For five years the country endured all the horrors of this internecine conflict. Towns were taken and retaken; castles and strongholds captured and recaptured. At length the English determined on striking a decisive blow. The river Loire was the line of demarcation between the two parties. To cross that river and seize the city of Orleans was the plan of the English commander, Lord Salisbury. On October 12, 1428, this general, at the head of an enormous army, having already reduced several of the towns that lay in the route of his march, laid siege to the important town of Orleans, on the right bank of the Loire. Within this city at the time, and occupying the defences around it, were all the forces which the French King could muster to his standard; on the fortunes, then, of Orleans were staked all his hopes. The siege lasted for seven dreadful months.

At length, notwithstanding the prodigies of valor performed by its defenders, the French King felt constrained to sue for terms. If the city is to be surrendered, better to see it, he thought, in the hands of a Frenchman, though an enemy, than to deliver it up to the English.

The Intervention of the Maid.

Precisely at this juncture, it was, when all hopes had vanished from the cause of the French King, that at the Chateau du Milieu, outside the town of Chinon, thirty miles from Tours, was seen the strange presence of a young girl, clad in male attire, her black hair falling in thick clusters on her shoulders. A presence so extraordinary, in such a place and at such a time, startled every beholder. This was the renowned Joan of Arc. In the company of an escort of seven men, one of whom was her brother, she had journeyed on horseback more than three hundred miles, and she is now in the Grand Logis of this beautiful Chateau, seeking an audience of the Dauphin (King Charles VII.) that he may hear the high message which she feels herself commissioned to deliver.

Let us for a moment take a glimpse of this maiden before she left the humble and rural homestead of her family. The waters of the Moselle in their upper course flow tranquilly between two chains of hills and knolls forming a valley of great beauty. On the right bank of this river lies the rich province of Lorraine, and from the left bank, stretching away in gentle folds, are seen the fertile plains of the champagne country. It is on the sunny eminences, and in the sheltered valleys of this district that the luxuriant vineyards are cultivated which yield the costly wine. This beautiful valley is covered with the richest verdure; such is the profusion of wild flowers coloring its meadows, such the variety of tint of its blossoming shrubs when they are in bloom, that the chief town of the district takes its name from the very loveliness of those colors. Vancouleurs, as the town is called, comes from the Latin words *Vallis Colorum*, or Valley of Colors. We are now in the Valley of the Meuse. Ten or twelve miles from Vancouleurs we come to the little station of Domremy—Maxey-sur-Meuse, and now the goal of our journey is all but reached. From the station a walk of half an hour brings us to the actual village of Domremy-la-Pucelle, a humble and unpretending little place, hidden far away from the bustling world, in the midst of a grove of poplars. But insignificant as the village is, it still holds that indescribable 'atmosphere' which fervent spirits seem to leave behind them in the places where they dwell. Here, on January 6, 1412, Joan of Arc was born.

Her parents were simple, hard-working country folk. Their family consisted of three sons and two daughters, Joan being the elder of the two. In the accounts given of her youth, nothing is mentioned to distinguish our heroine much from the other peasant girls who were her companions.

She was of a gentle and retiring nature. She was very industrious; the distaff was constantly in her hand, yet she often joined with a merry heart in the rustic sports of her young neighbors. Her figure was slender; graceful, and comely. Her father's little farm lay adjoining the village church and the graveyard around it. Joan was often observed to steal away from her playmates to enter this little church, and would be found on her knees before a favorite statue of the Blessed Virgin.

Her Religious Fervor.

And as it was then (and is still) the pious custom of the villagers to say their evening prayers in the church, Joan was sure to be there when the Angelus bell tolled. Indeed, such was her punctuality in attending that if the beadle happened to be late or absent, she, it is related, used to ring the bell. She also was accustomed to visit every Saturday a little solitary chapel which lay in a sequestered nook a few miles from Domremy, and which was called the Hermitage of the Virgin. There she used to bring garlands of flowers and hang them up before the statue of Our Lady.

It was while leading a life such as I have pictured—a life so simple, so artless, and so tranquil; and while pursuing such homely employments as herding the little flock of her father, and spinning for hours at the side of her mother, that Joan felt herself called to take up arms for France. Already, indeed, she had witnessed a little of the sufferings and of the horrors of the war that was then desolating her fair country; and this little impressed her mind deeply and painfully.

As the people of the Duchy of Lorraine had espoused the cause of the Duke of Burgundy, a zealous adherent of the English party, they crossed the Moselle on one occasion, and attacking the inhabitants of Domremy, who sided with the Armagnacs—the national party—they set fire to many of the houses of the village. This scene of fratricidal fury, together with the harrowing accounts of similar scenes throughout the kingdom, must, no doubt, have wrung her soul with anguish.

It was in the year 1425, when she was only thirteen years of age, that Joan heard for the first time a voice from above calling her to her strange mission. This happened on a beautiful summer's day; just as the midday Angelus bell was ringing, while she was in her father's garden. A bright and pleasing light shone at the same time about the place, causing her great fear and alarm. This voice was addressed to her three different times before she knew it was the voice of the Archangel Michael. This heavenly spirit, she said, appeared to her soon after in person, in the company of a shining troop of angels. In reference to this vision, Joan, when on her trial, made before her judges the most emphatic and positive assertions—'I saw them,' she said, 'with the eyes of my body,' as distinctly and as certain as I see you now; and when they went away, I wept, for I longed to be taken away with them.'

These visions became more frequent as the fortunes of the French grew more desperate and hopeless. Then they took place three times a week; and her constant and most familiar visitants were St. Catherine and St. Margaret. To these, her patron saints, was given the charge to instruct her in the things which Heaven intended to accomplish by her for the safety of France. She was commanded to hasten with all speed to the aid of the French King, as it was through her hands, and through her hands alone, that his enemies would be driven from the walls of Orleans, and that his own brow would be crowned with the crown of St. Louis.

But how was she—a simple peasant girl, dressed in her coarse red petticoat, and with no one to protect her—to make a journey of three hundred miles across a difficult and dangerous country. These difficulties and all others lying in her way, would be overcome, she was told; when she presented herself to the chief military commandant in Vancouleurs. Forthwith she set off for the house of her uncle, who lived near this town.

Her Proposal to Free Her Country.

She soon prevailed on him to accompany her to the Sire de Baudricourt, then acting as captain of the town for the Dauphin. When the girl told Baudricourt that she was commissioned to go in all haste to raise the siege of Orleans and to conduct the Dauphin to Rheims to be crowned, the soldier, in the rough style of men of his calling, laughed to scorn the words of the peasant girl.

This rebuff was borne with great meekness. Baudricourt advised her uncle to send her back to her father. She returned home and resumed her accustomed occupations.

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