

should find them teeming with supernatural favors. To-day we shall contemplate them only in the life and deeds of the Maid of Orleans. On the threshold of our subject we are met by an objection constantly repeated by false science and unbelief—Is a miracle possible? So silly is the objection that it exasperated one of the most famous infidels, Jean Jacques Rousseau. "This question," says he, "seriously treated were impious, if not absurd; the man who would solve it negatively would be too honored by punishment: he ought to be put in a madhouse—it *faudrait l'enfermer*."

Let us examine it, however. Those who deny the possibility of a miracle start from the principle that the laws which regulate the harmonious course of Nature obey a uniform force necessarily invariable. Any modification of these laws would subvert the general order. But these pretended scientific arguments are dashed to atoms against the simple consideration of God's omnipotence. God created these laws, God is master of these laws, and He can, by an effort of the same will which established them, suspend their course or modify their manifestations. Can He Who alone and freely determined these laws be Himself their prisoner? Surely not. Such an assertion is the rankest absurdity. Both in the physical order and in the moral order, a miracle is possible, since it is the effect of an infinite power, which commands and governs with sovereign and unlimited authority. Not only is a miracle possible, but it essentially befits Divine government, for it stamps with a solemn and indisputable character its providential action in sublunary events.

No doubt, God's power is splendidly exhibited in the wondrous work of creation: yet men grow accustomed to the grand spectacle of the universe and cease to be affected thereby. But, let an extraordinary fact happen outside the laws of Nature, instantly they are stricken with wonder, and are compelled to acknowledge the hand of the Most High. Still (mark it well), these extraordinary strokes of Providence disturb not the general order, but concur in it most admirably: for the immutable designs of God are fulfilled in the exception as well as in the law. When God intervenes in the government of the world, or in the life of the Church, it belongs to His wisdom to so stamp His action as to reveal its origin. Thus Our Lord Jesus Christ proved His Divine mission by His holiness and by the splendor of His miracles. And when He uses certain chosen creatures here below as the intermediaries of His power, and the executors of His designs, He gifts them with a supernatural force: He marks them with Divine tokens which clearly exhibit them as the envoys and the instruments of His providence.

So it was with Joan of Arc. At what time was Divine intervention more opportune, nay, more necessary, than at the moment our heavenly messenger made her appearance? Recall to mind the sad plight of France: "*la grande pitié qui était au royaume de France*"—at the time when Joan of Arc, prior to becoming the heroic warrior of many battlefields, was the lowly and gentle village-girl assiduous in prayer, at the spinning-wheel, or minding her flock. What dark days then fell on France! After the civil discord, which had reddened her soil with her blood, after the Great Schism of the West which for a while threatened the break-up of the unity of the Church, a dreadful plague devastated the land. The English, already masters of a part of French territory, extended their conquests and their victories far and wide. In vain did French traditional valor oppose the conquerors: it gradually yielded every inch of the sacred soil of fatherland, after strewing with its myriad corpses the battlefields of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt.

To the invasion was added the fratricidal struggle between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians, the King's insanity, degrading treaties, and the proclamation of Henry V. of England as Regent of France.

When Charles VII. succeeded his unhappy father, his whole kingdom was reduced to a few provinces south of the Loire, to the remnants of an army, to discouraged counsellors, and ruined populations; and he himself, disheartened by misfortune, had begun to despair.

Was it, then, the end of France, the end of "*la douce et noble France*," the end of the fairest realm barring that of Heaven? Human wisdom might have so thought. But God decreed its salvation: the most Christian nation could not perish. Joan was destined by God, not only to free France from the stranger's yoke, but to save the faith of the French people. But for Joan and her victories, and her triumphant but tragic martyrdom, Henry VIII. of England about one hundred years later (in virtue of the iniquitous Treaty of Troyes, 1420, which betrayed the rights of the legitimate Kings of France and sold them to England), would have been master and King of France. With him schism, and with his successors heresy, would have ascended the throne of Charlemagne and St. Louis. Had they driven Catholic France, the Eldest Daughter of the Church, into apostasy, as England was driven, one of the strongest bulwarks of Rome and Catholicism against the rising tide of the Reformation would have been swept away, and Western Europe would surely have been covered with the flood. The splendid Catholic life of France during the 16th and 17th centuries would have been impossible. Joan of Arc saved France from the grasp of the foe: she kept France as a distinct nation upon the map of Europe. That solemn fact France can never forget. Undoubtedly the Maid of Domremy was the saviour of French nationality. But Joan did more. She preserved France for the fold of Peter. She kept it for the Catholic Church.

But consider the qualities of this instrument of the national resurrection. No great general—no diplomatist of genius. No, but a young girl almost a child, a lowly peasant, simple, upright, pure, obedient to her parents, gentle with her companions, charitable to the poor, the pride and edification of her parish—Joan of Arc, now so known in history. Observe her well—she was called to bring into vivid light the rôle of France, her vocation to be ever the good seldier of Jesus Christ, "*la bon sergent de Jésus Christ*," as St. Louis used to say, thus in one word indicating the true glory of his country. In the eyes of Joan of Arc, Jesus Christ was the true King of France: Charles VII. only His lieutenant. If she was called to remake the national unity by the expulsion of the foreigner, and by constituting the provinces under the sceptre of Charles VII., her final aim was to insure the authority of Jesus Christ, and she constantly repeated that such was her mission. At Vaucouleurs she said to the Sire de Baudricourt: "The Kingdom belongs, not to the Dauphin: it belongs to my Lord. But my Lord wills that the Dauphin be a King and hold his Kingdom in commission—*en commandé*." At Chinon she said to the King himself: "Gentil Dauphin, I am called Joan the Maid—*Jeanne la Pucelle*—and the King of Kings requires through me that you be anointed at Rheims, and you shall be the lieutenant of the King of Heaven, Who is the King of France." Joan was at the service of Christ before she was at the service of Charles VII. She wrote to the inhabitants of Troyes: "Joan the Maid informs and apprises you by the King of Heaven, her rightful and sovereign Lord, in whose royal service she daily lives." To live in union with Jesus Christ, to serve Him daily, to insure His royalty over France, to proclaim and set in honor for all times and countries this vital principle: that true authority comes from God, and that it alone avails in regard to human conscience by the stability of that origin—such was the main object (too often forgotten by historians) of Joan's mission.

How did she fulfil that mission? What first strikes us in the achievement of her great work is the weakness and the nothingness of the instrument chosen by God: "God chose the weak things of this world to confound the strong." (I. Cor. 27.) Joan, a poor daughter of the people, without education, without support, without credit, forsaken of all, contradicted by her kindred, hampered in her first steps by everyone in authority over her. At her first appearance she was jeered at by the unbelief of her day as an *over-excited girl, hallucinated, hypnotised*. Absurd imputations! Joan an *over-excited girl*! She whose innocent life delighted