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## JOAN OF ARC;

THE MAID OF ORLEANS.

### CHAPTER I.

REMARKS ON THE CONTENTS OF THIS HISTORY.

When man broke his peace with God, he lost from his side the Angel of Peace, as inseparable from the cup of peace as man is from the rock of death and torment on which he is now bound, where wretched passions, like hungry vultures, torture him by day, and grant him no rest by night. Their pestilential breath has transformed the earth, the beautiful garden of God, into a vast and desolate battle-field, on which nation is perpetually striving with nation, and brother dyeing his hand in the blood of brother. Glittering swords, poisoned bows, and deadly feuds, are constantly passing an inheritance from race to race, from father to son. Peace never lasts long among the combatants, and indeed only occurs when exhaustion has paralyzed their powers, or the last drop of blood has been shed in the struggle. Very limited is the number of those who keep in their hearts the words of the Eternal Love, who gave Himself as a Peace-Offering between God and man, and who inculcated upon the infuriated combatants:

"Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

Wherever the sword of battle is appealed to, its law comes into force, which law is: the strong conquer, the weak fall. It is the natural course of things in war, that the wolf should tear the lamb if he meet him in the way. But if Almighty should Himself condescend to interfere in the struggle, and with His own right arm arrest the natural course of events, all is at once changed—the law of might no longer rules the result. He, upon whose dread command death awakens into life, and life sinks into death; He, higher than all laws which He has Himself given to His creatures, can, in His inscrutable wisdom, give the victory to whom He will—to the strong, or to the weak. It often happens in His wise decrees, that before the gaze of the world He brings to naught the cunning of the artful thro' the simplicity of the child-like; or shatters the lofty oak with the frail stem of the lily; that the pride of scorner and the prudence of the skeptic may be brought to shame, and the world be forced to acknowledge that there is verily a God in Heaven, that He is Lord of all, and that to Him alone belongs the earth.

Just such a wonderful record, and verified to a greater extent than almost any other history by the solemn oaths of living witnesses, is that of the young shepherdess, Joan of Arc, called after her great victory the Maid of Orleans. Her life is a history of great and glorious deeds, as full of adventure as that of the boldest warrior; yet tender, lovely, and touching as that of a holy, consecrated virgin. The living Breath of God is felt through its web of wonders, and His miracles shine everywhere through it, like stars glittering in the stillness of the midnight heavens.

As the prize of many and signal victories, England had already set upon her head the crown of France; already had the leaders and nobles of half the realm taken the oath of fidelity to the foreign sovereign; Paris was lost; Orleans foresaw its certain fall; and the forsaken king, in the anguish of his heart, contemplated immediate flight from the beautiful dominions of his ancestors. Lo! in the very hour of deepest need an unknown maiden appears upon the field of battle; she could bring to her king no troops, no treasures; nothing but the simple assurance that God, the King of Heaven, would have compassion on France, that His power should be with her arm, and that He would lead her steps to victory.

Miraculous indeed! A quiet, weak child brought up far from the turmoil of the world, with her sheep and spinning wheel; trembling at home if only spoken to; shedding bitter tears when her savage enemies, enraged by her victories, calumniated her maiden delicacy and honor; weeping convulsively if she saw any one die upon the field of battle; who, when the Voice from above called her to combat in aid of her oppressor king, exclaimed: "I am only a poor child, and do not know how to mount a horse, or draw a sword!" Lo! in this weak girl, poor keeper of her father's herds, who lifted the prostrate banner of France from the dust, and before whose God-strengthened, virgin arm the conquerors of Cressy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, the dreaded bowmen of England fled in dismay.—Carrying the banner in her hands before the boldest knights in France, it was this simple maid who led them to storm and victory; it was she who won for the petty King of Bourges, as his enemies, in his abasement, called the unfortunate Charles VII.; the glorious title given him in history, King Charles, the Victorious! She it was who led him through the bristling swords of his enemies to Rheims, and placed upon his head the crown of his ancestors.

And that England does not at present bear the proud title of the United Kingdom of England and France; that the French realm is not groan-

ing under a heavy yoke, like unhappy Ireland, had she, like that unfortunate country, refused the sacrifice of the Apostolic Faith to the demands of the conqueror—is France heavily indebted to her true heroine, the victorious and matchless Maid of Orleans!

But while she thus held in her own hand the destinies of France and Europe, she renounced all praise, declaring to the world, and proving it through her wonderful prophecies, that it was not through human power or wisdom that she was capable of such things, but solely and entirely through the might of God, through whose compassion she had been sent, and that she desired no reward save the salvation of her own soul.

After she had completed her great commission, and placed upon her king the holy crown of St. Louis, then was the maiden also crowned, but with no transitory, glittering glory—the unyielding lustre of the crown of martyrdom was placed upon her gentle head; that immortal halo circling the brow of those who suffer death in the service of God, and praise His name from the midst of the flames of their blazing pyres.

### CHAPTER II.—THE HOME AND PARENTS OF THE MAID OF ORLEANS.

In the beginning of the fifteenth century, when Sigismund, of the House of Luxemburg, held the imperial power and the sword of Charles the Great, and Alexander V. occupied the Apostolic See, there lived in a little house at Domremy, upon the confines of Champagne, Burgundy and Lorraine, a poor couple, Jacques d'Arc, and Isabella Romee, his wife. It is unanimous testimony of those under whose eyes their simple lives were passed, that they were pious, upright peasants, of unsullied reputation. They served God with humble hearts, brought up their children to industry and in the fear of God, were modest in their conversation and bearing, correct in all their transactions with their fellow-men, and lived in Christian peace with their neighbors. It was no easy thing for them to make their living, and their bread was gained by the sweat of their brows; but they ate it with grateful hearts, willingly sharing their little with the poor and helpless, that so God might mercifully look upon them on the great day of his eternal judgment.

It was a tranquil lovely spot in which their quiet home was situated, in a solitary and pleasant valley, rich in wide and sunny meadows, in luxuriant grain fields, in orchards, and in vine-clad hills. The young Meuse sparkled through its midst, glittering and singing on its way thro' the friendly villages, by the quiet chapels, and past the old chateaux. Upon the crests of the hills around are still standing the wrecks of the dark old forests, from which the tall trees, the mute witnesses of past races and ages, with their withered crowns shaken by the storms of centuries, look sadly down into the smiling valley with its fruits and flowers, as the hoary-headed old man gazes gravely upon the young sporting around him, laughing because they know nothing of the wintry storms of life, and have never looked upon the pale stern face of death.

The surrounding country is not indeed sublime and varied as the Alpine valleys, where the shepherd pastures his flocks on the slopes of snow-capped mountains, or at the feet of giant cliffs with sounding cataracts; neither is it rich in commerce and thronged with travellers, as are the valleys of the larger rivers; but it is truly a tranquil picture of happy labor, of contested rest.

The village of Domremy, pertaining to the parish of the neighboring town, Greux, was situated between Neuchateau and Vancoeur, and was an immediate possession of the French crown. Lying on the very limits of the kingdom of France, and at that time almost surrounded by foreign dominions, the fidelity and attachment of that section of country to its old line of kings had only been strengthened by unceasing wars and bitter struggles. In things spiritual Domremy pertained to Germany; its Bishop was of Toul, its Archbishop of Treves. In those days, when the wings of the Imperial German Eagle spread widely over the trans-Rhenish provinces of the ancient kingdom of France, the great boundary stones of the Realm erected by the Emperor Albert, stood but a few miles distant from Domremy.

The little house in which Jacques d'Arc and Isabella Romee, his wife, lived more than four hundred years ago, is still to be seen. It may readily be distinguished from those around it;—in the arch above its door stands an old stone figure of a woman in armor, with long flowing hair, and in a kneeling posture. This figure is now more than half destroyed by time; yet in the arch under it stand three escutcheons still in good preservation. The one upon the right bears a naked sword, the point turned upwards, and holding a king's crown; the one to the left bears three plow shares; between these two is seen the three lilies, the old shield of France; over the shields is a sheaf of grain with grape clusters, and the super-scription: "Long live Labor—Long live King Louis!" with the date, 1481.

Certainly the good Jacques d'Arc never once dreamed that after hundreds of years should have passed away, neither prince nor peasant would pass near Domremy without visiting his poor house, stopping long to gaze with reverence upon the kneeling figure and the three escutcheons over the doorway. Although nearly five hundred years have elapsed, and many a mighty house and haughty race have sunk into oblivion, the traveller still stops before the humble dwelling, and around it lingers the sympathies of humanity. And as long as gratitude lives in the hearts of men, so it will continue, for the hand of God was over this house, and here, as man counts time, was born Joan of Arc, about 1411 years after the birth of Christ.

She is the kneeling female figure in the knightly coat of armor, and the escutcheon with the naked sword and king's crown was granted to her race for a perpetual memorial that she had hastened from the plow of her father, (as designated by the second shield with the three plow shares) to aid her king in the hour of his sorest need;—and with the point of her own sword won for him the fair crown of lilies—the kingdom of France!

The motto of her house: "Long live Labor! Long live King Louis!" let each one hold in honor, and although he may conquer no crown for his king, as did the heroic maiden, he may still gain corn and grapes, and live in peace with his neighbors, like the pious parents of Joan of Arc.

### CHAPTER III.—CHARACTER OF THE MAIDEN DURING CHILDHOOD.

Joan had three brothers and one sister, but from her earliest years she was distinguished above the youthful members of her own household as an especially good and pious child. Testimony regarding her early life, from more than thirty eye-witnesses of all ranks, is still extant. High and low, knights and priests, royal officials and peasants, men and women, unite testifying to the purity and uprightness of her character and conduct during her childhood. Nearly every one of these witnesses praises some peculiar virtue which he has himself seen her put in practice.

According to these various testimonials, her heart was exceedingly tender and compassionate, her nature simple and void of suspicion, and her intellect bright and clear; she was orderly in speech and manners, industrious, humble, quiet, and modest, and while free from every emotion of impatience or anger, bold and courageous in the performance of duty.

But above all do they laud her piety; the love burning in her soul toward the eternal Creator of the Good and the Beautiful, with entire submission to His will, was indeed the true source of her virtues, the golden chain linking them all in one harmonious whole. Whether in wood, field, or house, God was ever present to her mind, and that presence was her guiding star through fortune and misfortune. The House of God was her especial dwelling-place, and when able, she never failed, morning and evening, to assist at the services devoted to His worship.—She went often and with great compunction to confess her sins, and to strengthen her soul by receiving the Bread of Life. If she chanced to be in the fields when the bell rang calling the faithful to prayer, and the distance was too great or her work too pressing to allow her to join them in the temple, she would fall upon her knees under the open sky, and lift her gentle voice to the throne of God.

The witnesses farther testify that her chief delight consisted in speaking of God and of the Blessed Virgin. When the labors of the day were ended, and the other maidens would be laughing and jesting or lizily sauntering along the highways, Joan would generally be found in one corner of the church, kneeling before a cross, with her eyes devoutly fixed upon the image of the Saviour, or upon the mild countenance of the Mother of Sorrows. She was however by no means gloomy or melancholy, but always cheerful and glad to see herself surrounded by happy faces. None have ever reproached her with having prided herself upon the superior graces and devotion vouchsafed her from above. She blamed none who did not feel called upon to follow her example; she was gentle and kind toward all, aiding and consoling whenever she had the opportunity, and—according to John Moret, a farmer of Greux who was sixty years old at the time his testimony was given—beloved by every inhabitant of the village. Another farmer, Simon Musner, says that when he was th, she nursed him with the greatest care, and spoke to his heart the gentlest words of consolation.

A third witness relates that her compassion for the poor was so great that she not only begged shelter for them from her family and friends, but would even relinquish her own bed and sleep upon the floor. Whatever money she did not expend in alms, was devoted to the service of the altar. Perin, the sacristan of Domremy,

states that she often bitterly reproached him for neglecting to ring the bell for the evening Angelus, and that she promised him money as a reward for greater care in the future.

In her earlier childhood she aided her brothers in the labors of the field, and took her turn with the other children of the village in driving the herds, including her father's, to pasture. When somewhat older, her mother needed her more in the house, and she became very skillful in sewing and spinning.

She had several intimate friends among the village maidens, and found much pleasure in association with grave elderly women; she also delighted in playing with young children, whom she was very successful in entertaining, and who loved to be with her.

One of her favorite recreations was the weekly procession to a small forest chapel, called the Hermitage of Our Lady of Bernout. The quiet house of prayer stood upon an eminence behind the village, near the border of an ancient oak wood. The site to this day is covered by the ruins of the temple of God; and as they rise above the smiling valley, they lift the soul to Him who has so richly adorned the woods and fields that the beauty of nature far surpasses the glory of princes. The whole neighborhood held this spot in especial veneration, and like many other of our most renowned places of pilgrimage, it seems in ancient times to have been consecrated to the service of the heathen gods. In such spots, the teachers and martyrs of the Gospel often kindled the flame burning before the altar of God, whence the churches afterwards arising in the vicinity received their light. Many mysterious legends, still current among the people, may be traced to similar sources.

Not far from the chapel, a healing fountain gushed from the ground. Its waters were supposed to be beneficial to persons stricken by fever. The legend said that in the old heathen times the place was inhabited by fairies, and that they even yet sometimes appeared to mortals.—Roots possessing magic powers were also supposed to grow in the neighborhood. Near the fountain stood a noble old beech tree, called the Beautiful May, or the Fairy Tree. This beech, with its thick foliage and wide-spreading branches hanging down to the ground, and forming a green tent, was the delight of the whole community.—Every Spring, on that Sunday (Mid-Lent) when, at the Introit, *Letania Jerusalem* is chanted, the lord of the Castle of Domremy, with his household and all the youth of the village, went in festive procession to the Fairy Tree. The children sang and danced round the tree, drank at the fountain, plucked flowers, and wore garlands, with which they adorned the green beech. The lord of Domremy distributed wine and bread, a peculiar kind of small rolls being baked in the village for use on that day, known as Spring Sunday. This custom was probably a reminiscence of some festival pertaining to heathen times, which Christianity had transformed into a joyful May pilgrimage.

Joan joined with the other children in solemnizing this day, but the witnesses relate that she was more accustomed to sing than to dance, and that though she also devoted some of her wreaths to the decoration of the old tree, yet the greater number were reserved for the adornment of the image of our Lady in the forest chapel, before which she every Saturday placed lights and prayed fervently.

More than two hundred years after Joan's death, Edmund Ritcher, the maiden's diligent biographer, saw the tree still standing, in all its pristine glory, and beheld the same festive observances. Thus peacefully did the years once pass over the land; each spring found new bowers budding beside the fountain, and a new generation dancing round the beech, unwitting that their ancestors had thus danced ages before, and that their posterity would thus dance in ages to come.

When in later years the maiden's sword had stricken the enemies of her king and country, and had thus aroused their bitter ire, they wickedly strove to find a crime in her participation in this festival, and in her pious pilgrimage to the forest chapel. "She had studied magic arts in that unholy place, and to them, and not to the almighty power of God, must her victories be ascribed!" But Joan, who had a profound horror of magic, and of everything not founded upon God himself, thus replied to their questions regarding the fairies and the magic roots:—

"I have often heard old people, who were not, however, of my own family, say that that place was visited by fairies. Madame d'Aubery, wife of the village magistrate and my godmother, told me that she herself had seen these fairies, but whether that be true or not, I do not know. As for myself, to the best of my knowledge, I never saw the fairies under that tree, nor in any other place that I know of."

"I have heard my brothers say that it was reported in my home, that I had received my mission under the beech tree. But that is not true,

and I deny it entirely. I do not remember that the saints ever appeared to me under the Fairy Tree. When I first stood before my king, some persons asked me whether there was not near my home a forest called the Oak Wood, because there was an ancient prophecy foretelling that from that forest should issue a certain maiden who would do wondrous deeds. But I never believed such things regarding that wood. I have never owned a magic root. I have been told that it was sinful and dangerous to own one, and in fact I do not know of what possible use it could be. I have heard that it might be employed in procuring money, but I do not believe that. The voices of my Holy Ones never said anything to me about it."

Such were the maiden's replies, free from superstition in an age when persons much more learned than she, believed in the power of a magic root or a wishing rod; her mind was filled with other cares than the luring of gold by magic arts from the bosom of the hills; the miseries of her king and country lay nearest to her heart, and to remedy these, she addressed Heaven in no magic formulae, but in fervent prayers.

Although Domremy lay so far from the great highways and large cities of the realm, yet the wild war tumult of that terrible time had penetrated even to its quiet vale. The whole of France was divided into two parties, one named from the house of Orleans or of Armagnac, and the other from that of Burgundy. The contest was long and bitter, until finally the Burgundians to avenge the murder of their lord, betrayed the bleeding realm, with its unfortunate, demented sovereign, to the old hereditary enemy, England. The inhabitants of Domremy, with but one exception, adhered to their legitimate ruler. But another village in their immediate vicinity declared for the Burgundians. This fearful civil war had kindled so fierce a flame in the minds of the opposing parties that the very babes drank in hatred and enmity with their mothers' milk. In the evening, when the labors of the day were done, the children of the two quiet villages would sometimes sally forth to meet each other in mutual strife. Joan, destined one day to lead to battle the bravest knights of France, could not remember ever having taken part in this childish war, but had frequently seen the children of her own village return home wounded and bleeding. She also confessed that she had wished that the sole adherent of Burgundy in Domremy might have his head stricken off, but her pious heart, which never permitted her to lose sight of God, always added, if such were indeed God's will. Thus did Joan, who so deeply sympathized with all suffering, and who was gentleness and mildness personified, also feel the influence of that spirit of deadly hatred which renders civil war so much more fearful than any other. But she seems finally to have been reconciled even to this single Burgundian, as they are known to have stood together as godfather and godmother at the baptism of an infant. He always spoke of her with the greatest respect.—When in after life she was asked if she had ever entertained a lively desire to injure the Burgundians, she replied with noble simplicity: "I always, from the bottom of my heart, desired that my king might regain his kingdom." Such was her own unvariable sentiment, and she would often weep with her conquered enemies and endeavor to dry their tears.

Thus did Joan quietly pass her secluded life among the poor inhabitants of the valley, and all who knew her loved her. And yet this maiden, so universally praised, whom the pastor and the whole community considered the best child in the village, and of whom Albert, Sieur of Urchies testified on oath that he had often wished that heaven had sent him just such a daughter—this little girl, whose deeds were one day to amaze all the nations of the west, could neither read nor write, and her poor parents could give her no learning beyond the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. We may hence see how much more may be accomplished by a heart devoted to God and strengthened by His love and power, than by all earthly learning and wisdom.

In an ancient life of the maiden we find an account of a curious phenomenon, likewise found in the legends of many of the saints, namely—how her inward peace and the fervor of her love influenced even the lower animals, the unreasoning creatures of the woods and fields. While still very young, as she sat watching sheep, she would often call the birds, and lo! they would fly towards her as to a beloved playmate, and pick the crumbs from her lap. This may be true, or it may be merely a beautiful legend with which the love of the people has striven to embellish the fame of their pious heroine. Years after, when her relentless enemies, with every effort to stain her pure name, and sent an envoy in her native place in search of a confirmation regarding her early life, he returned saying that he had heard nothing of the kind that he would not be glad to see in his own letter. Such is the testimony of John Moreau, sacristan of Rouen.