

THE MAID OF ORLEANS.

The reign of Charles VII. of France commenced in 1422 under unhappy auspices. The French had been beaten at Cravant and at Verneuil, and in 1429 the king, driven by the English from the greater part of his domains, was now really only king of Bourges, and master of Berri, Poitou and the Bourbonnais. Orleans only stood in the way of the victorious army, and the English generals, fully comprehending the importance of that city, spared no efforts to take it. For several months Orleans had suffered all the horrors of a siege, its inhabitants were driven to the direst extremities when a saviour appeared in the person of Joan of Arc—afterwards named the

Maid of Orleans, from her heroic defence of that city.

Joan of Arc was born of humble parents about 1410-11, in the village of Domremi, near Vaucouleurs, on the borders of Lorraine. She was a servant in a small inn, where she fulfilled the duties of ostler and waiting-maid. Her character was irreproachable, and hitherto she had shown none of those enterprising qualities which displayed themselves soon after. The district in which she passed her early life was remarkable for the devout simplicity of its inhabitants, and Joan, who was unremitting in her prayers and devotions, became at an early age strongly imbued with the prevailing religious sentiment of her native place. But the misfortunes of her country seem to

have been the greatest object of her commiseration and her regard. "Her young heart, even at that time," says Lord Mahon in his "Historical Essays," "beat high with enthusiasm for her native France, now beset and beleaguered by the island strangers. Her young fancy loved to dwell on those distant battles, the din of which might scarcely reach her quiet village, but each apparently hastening the ruin of her fatherland. We can picture to ourselves how earnestly the destined heroine—the future leader of armies—might question those chance travellers whom, as we are told, she delighted to relieve, and for whose use she would often resign her own chamber, as to each fresh report from the changeful scene of war." Her mind,



"THE MAID OF ORLEANS"—After a Painting by Mrs. Ward.

inflamed by constant meditation on such subjects, began to feel strange impulses, which she took—willingly enough perhaps—for inspirations from heaven. At times she imagined she heard mysterious voices bidding her "go to the assistance of the King of France and return to him his kingdom." At first she excused herself as a poor, simple peasant, who could do nothing to help the king; but the voices ordered her to "seek out Baudricourt, governor of Vaucouleurs, who would conduct her to the king." Convinced of the reality of her admonitions, she went to Baudricourt and informed him of her destination by Heaven to free her native land of its enemies. Baudricourt at first treated her with neglect, but her importunities at length prevailed; and willing to make a trial of her pretensions, he

furnished her with arms and attendants, who conducted her to Chinon, where the court then resided. The French court for a while paid but little attention to her pretensions to inspiration; but at length, convinced by her energy and enthusiasm, the king concluded to grant her a trial. She was armed *cap-à-pied*, and placed at the head of a body of soldiers, with whom she entered and relieved Orleans. A tide of successes followed, till at length nothing remained to England but Calais. In the meantime Joan, having thrown herself into the city of Compiègne, then beleaguered by the Burgundians, was taken prisoner by them in 1430, and handed over to the English. The Duke of Bedford, who, it is alleged, purchased her from her capturer, tried her at Rouen for heresy and witchcraft, and

she was burnt alive in that city on the 4th December 1430.

The illustration with which we present our readers is copied from a steel engraving. The original, a very interesting painting by Mrs. Ward, was exhibited at the Royal Academy of English Artists in London in 1867. The subject was suggested to the artist by the passage in Lord Mahon's book which we have quoted. The village-maiden has just been attending to the wants of a passing soldier, from whom she has heard the last news from the camp. In the midst of her domestic duties she has stopped short, and is brooding over the story of continued defeat and dishonour—wondering perhaps what she might do to retrieve the fortunes of France were she to obey those mysterious voices that never let her rest.