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JOAN OF ARC;

THE MAID OF ORLEANS.

CHAPTER IV.—THE HEAVENLY VISIONS OF THE YOUTHFUL JOAN.

While Joan thus walked in the ways of divine love, the time was approaching when the hand of God was to be laid upon her hidden life, and she was to be singularly guided towards the lofty part she was destined to play upon this earth.

But as the vision of the saintly envoys through whom the Most High revealed His will to this lowly maiden, was vouchsafed to no other mortal, we will let her speak for herself, merely gathering what she in her after years testified in presence of her judges.

All that I have done for France has been accomplished through the grace and by the command of God, the Lord of Heaven, as He Himself ordained and revealed to me through His angels and saints; and all I know I have learned solely and entirely through the revelation and by the ordinance of God.

At His command I went to King Charles VII, son of King Charles VI. I would rather have been torn asunder by wild horses than have thus gone to him without the permission of God.

All my way and deeds are in God's hands, and all my hopes are placed upon Him. According to the best of my ability, have I accomplished all that the holy voices required of me; they commanded and promised nothing without the permission and good pleasure of God, and all that I have done at His command I believe to have been done aright.

A week would not suffice to tell all that God has revealed unto me. But as to the manner in which the holy ones first appeared to me, it happened as follows: Seven years ago, when I was nearly thirteen years of age, one summer's day, about noon, I found myself in my father's garden, and suddenly heard a voice, apparently proceeding from the direction of the church, which stood at my right hand.

I looked up and beheld a shining apparition. It wore the semblance of a good and virtuous being; it had wings;—bright rays of light surrounded it on every side, and it was accompanied by heavenly angels.—Angels often visit Christians without the knowledge of the latter; I myself have frequently seen them among the followers of our Lord.—This apparition was the angel Michael. The voice seemed to me worthy of all veneration, but I was then still a young child, and being much afraid, I doubted whether the radiant being could indeed be that angel. I was not fully convinced until I had heard the voice three times, and then it taught me so many things that I firmly believed it to be that of the angel Michael.

I saw him and the other angels as distinctly as I now see you, my judges, and I believe as firmly in what he said and did, as I do in the sufferings and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What confirms me in this belief is the good counsel, the aid, and excellent instruction he has always given me.

The angel said to me that I must, above all things, be a good child, and be diligent in my attendance at church. He promised me divine aid, and also told me how God would have mercy upon France, and how I must hasten to assist my king. He likewise said that St. Catherine and St. Margaret would come to me, and that I must do whatever they would command; they would be sent by God to lead my steps, and aid me with their counsel in all I had to do.

As the angel foretold, St. Catherine and St. Margaret both appeared to me; they bade me go to Robert de Baudricourt, the king's governor at Vaucouleurs; they said he would repeatedly send me away, but would finally yield to my desires, and give me an escort to take me to the king in the interior of France, where I must raise the siege of Orleans. I replied to them that I was only a poor child, and knew not how to mount a horse or lead an army. They said I must boldly unfurl my banner, that God would aid me, and that my king, in spite of his many enemies, would regain his whole kingdom. Be comforted, they said, and when you reach your king's presence, a notable sign will be given by which he will be induced to believe in you and bid you welcome.

at full liberty to tell my parents or not to do so, but I would not have mentioned their visits for anything in the world. In everything else, I have been strictly obedient to my father and my mother. In failing on this occasion to submit myself to their decision, and in going away without their knowledge, I believe myself free from blame, for I went at the command of God, and as God commanded me, I would have gone had I had a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers, and had I been a king's daughter.

I do not remember ever having heard the voices under the Fairy Tree; I have seen the saints beside the fountain, but I do not know what they there said to me. From the time I was first told to seek the interior of France, I have taken as little part as possible in the games and rejoicings under the Fairy Tree. I do not think I have danced under that tree since I came to the age of reason.

I rarely see the saints except surrounded by a glory. I see a face, but of their vestments, their hair, their arms, I can say nothing. They always appear to me under the same forms, and I have never observed the least contradiction in their discourses. I have no difficulty in distinguishing them from one another; I recognise them by the sound of their voices, and by their greeting; they also always tell me their names before they begin to speak. When I am in the forest, I can hear them as they are coming to me. St. Catherine and St. Margaret wear rich, costly crowns, as is proper. I understand perfectly all they say: they have low, sweet, modest voices; they speak with dignity, and in the French language. I wish every one could hear them as distinctly as I do.

Before the deliverance of Orleans, and also since then, they often addressed me as Joan the Virgin, and as the Daughter of God. From time to time, the saints bade me to go to confession.

They come without my calling them, and when they delay appearing, I beg our Lord to send them to me. I have never yet needed them that they did not come. I feel very joyful when St. Michael and the angels accompany the two saints, for then I think I cannot be in a state of mortal sin, else they would at once leave me. When they appear, I show them all the honor in my power, and feel as if I could never show them enough, knowing as I do that they dwell in heaven. I have often during the holy sacrifice of the Mass made offerings of tapers, that the Priest might light them in honor of God, and burn them before the images of the Blessed Virgin and St. Catherine. I have never yet offered as many as I could have wished. I have also adorned the images of St. Catherine and St. Margaret with wreaths of flowers, and when they appear to me, I kneel down before them; when I have not done so, I have always asked their pardon. When St. Michael and the angels leave me, I invariably bow to the ground and kiss the spot whereon they have stood. I have embraced both the saints with my arms;—at the present time, I hear their voices daily; I have need of consolation, and without their aid, should no longer be living. I have seen them with my own eyes, and I believe in them as firmly as I do in the existence of God.

Such is Joan's own account of the wondrous mode in which she received God's command to lift her sword for her king. She clung to this firm belief in the heavenly apparitions, in spite of threats and torments, and even when dying amid the flames she audibly announced their presence.

The path pointed out to her was indeed a troublesome and a weary one, requiring a heroic soul devoted to God and inspired by His love, and a spirit that could endure the world's contempt with the meekness and patience becoming an envoy of God, and yet that, bold as a lion, could bear steadily onward the banner of the Most High, heedless of swords and flames threatening upon the right and upon the left. How was she to pass from the frontier of France, and through hostile bands reach the king, and induce a despotic sovereign to trust her with his sole hope, his last army? And when all difficulties with those friendly to her were overcome, then was to begin her path in battle among her enemies.—But the power which upheld the heroic maiden was no spirit of weakness and doubt; she bent in deep humility before her God, but she boldly and undimly bore his banner before the eyes of men, and, with her glance fixed upon Heaven, firmly crossed each yawning abyss, and victoriously reached the lofty goal to which our Lord through his saints had called her.

ROSAURA AND HER KINSFOLK.

CHAPTER I.

Gloomy, and wrapped in thought—his heart wounded by the strange caprice of his beloved lady, the fair Rosaura of Haldenbach—Count Julius Wildeck, a young captain of horse, stood leaning against a window, apart from the cheerful tea-circle, which he seemed almost to have forgotten. The glorious, but disastrous, fate of his ancient house rose up before his

afflicted soul. He asked himself how he, the only remaining branch of an ancient house, was to terminate his career, since a long peace had permitted him not even one deed of war, while the future gave little or no prospect of such an opportunity; and since the love which had kindled in his knightly heart reached forth to him, not the consolatory myrtle, but almost a garland of thorns. He well knew, that of all the suitors whom riches and beauty drew to Rosaura's feet, he was the only one to whom a sweet look of her gracious eye was a sufficient reward;—and thus the more cruelly was he pierced by the lowering harshness, the rigid reserve, which, without any imaginable cause, seemed so often to possess the mind of the maiden against him.

It had happened to him thus to-day; and so much the more painful was it, since he knew that Rosaura was not to leave home on the following morning, and that he now probably saw her for the last time for many long weeks. It is true she was not to travel to a great distance;—she was going with her aunt to one of her estates, which lay not far off among the mountains; but it was well known that during her residence there no one might converse with her. Every half year she was accustomed to perform this journey, spending the period of her absence in the most rigorous seclusion; and it was generally believed that some sad vow or penance of her deceased parents obliged her to such a course; the more so as she was always observed to look very thoughtful before her departure, and to return home pale, and with marks of weeping in her eyes.

Julius felt himself only the more strangely attached to his beloved on account of this dark mystery. At one time it seemed to him that he might be able to remove the hidden sorrow which hung over her; and this very day he had gazed upon her pale angel-form with the deepest love and emotion. But again, her repulsive, and almost hostile mien stepped in sharply between them, and drove him back into his own deserted being.

Occupied with such thoughts, he had forgotten for the time the presence of those around him, and he whispered to himself: 'To what end do we—mistaken offspring of the old heroic race—still live on, when there is no longer any renown in the world for us to earn, and scarcely even one genuine pleasure.'

'We must resort to the chase,' said a deep voice behind him. 'That is, and will always be, the fittest pastime for our day.'

Julius looked round astonished. There stood close by him a tall man in antique dress, of noble, almost elegant, form, with keen bright eyes, and a countenance which bore so much of suffering in it, that one could not look upon the heroic pride which so visibly moved over it without a feeling of sympathising sorrow. The stranger seemed to have been addressing a councillor, who had just left him with an embarrassed smile;—then, turning towards Julius, he said to him, with a confident, friendly air: 'You appear to be entirely of my opinion, sir count.'

'Oh, certainly,' replied Julius, half-surprised and half-asserting. 'The chase is a kind of knightly pastime, and infinitely better than a carousing party, since some honorable and perilous adventures may be encountered in it; for of course the huntsman must not confine himself merely to the pursuit of hares and other timid animals.'

'Bravo! you delight me extremely,' said the old gentleman, seizing Julius' hand. 'And what say you to hunting with us for the next few weeks at my old castle of Finsterborn? This, moreover, is a time which I would not willingly pass without some brave companions. I have, I believe, the honor to address the Count Lobach?'

'With your leave,' replied Julius, 'Count Lobach stands yonder,' and looking over, he observed, with painful emotion, his rival (for such the count was) holding at this very moment an earnest conversation with Rosaura. All the more willing, however, to accept the unexpected invitation, which appeared happily to sever him for a time from town, and regiment, and the whole circle of his acquaintance, he proceeded, composedly: 'I am Count Wildeck; and if your kindness refers not to the name but to the person, I shall have the honor of paying a visit to your castle, if it is not at too great a disgrace. I do not remember to have heard the name of Finsterborn.'

My castle is only a few miles distant from hence, said the stranger, with evident embarrassment; though it lies certainly somewhat wild and deep among the mountains. I will send one of my huntsmen, however, to conduct you to my little fastness. And you are Count Wildeck! A Count Wildeck still among us in these days! Now, then, Heaven will prosper us. As for me, I am the retired Colonel Haldenbach. I talk somewhat confusedly; make allowance for me—it is too much for my head. In the morning I shall expect you. In the morning—is it not?

He squeezed the count's hand tightly, and with a strange hoarse laugh hastened forth from the door.

Julius remained behind in astonishment. And this was the old Colonel Haldenbach with whom he had conversed! He had heard something before of this strange, hermit-like uncle of Rosaura's. Some people took him for a deeply studious, but very unhappy philosopher; others thought him altogether crazed. And his inexplicable behavior at this time—friendly and attractive, and yet dark and forbidding.

His fair niece has surely inherited something of this strange temper from him, murmured Julius, ill-humoredly to himself.

Rosaura moved softly past him. 'What had you to say with my uncle, Count Wildeck?' whispered she hastily, in a kind and anxious tone. 'For God's sake be quite open and candid with me for this once.'

'Alas! that I have always been,' sighed the kindling youth. 'The colonel spoke nothing but was kind and friendly to me. I am to attend him on a hunting expedition for some days at his castle of Finsterborn.'

Rosaura became deadly pale. She beat her face still nearer to him, and he felt her breath upon his cheek as she pronounced these words: 'To-morrow evening in the prince's park, at the hermitage.'

She vanished. Full of joy, and yet withal enveloped as it were in some fearful enigma, Julius returned home.

CHAPTER II.

A warm summer evening rested with golden light over the prince's park, while Julius, with beating heart, trotted along the garden fence on his slender Arabian, and longingly watched through the branches of the dark green firs for the appearance of the beloved form. On a sudden Rosaura stepped forth from a neighboring walk. But, alas! not alone, but with five or six laughing and chattering companions. In bitter vexation Julius pulled the reins and struck the spurs into his horse's sides. The noble animal, unaccustomed to such contumelious treatment, gave some sudden leaps into the air. The ladies shrieked; and Julius, courteously greeting them, sprang onwards. 'My good Abdul,' said he to his horse, pacifying him at the same time by a few kind strokes on the neck, 'good Abdul, I was a fool to make you suffer for the heartless caprice of a woman. Be not angry, my good horse; it shall not be so again.' And, as if he understood his rider's words, the noble animal neighed joyfully up to him, and returned obediently to his light, gentle trot.

Julius, in the first moment of indignation, had thought of hastening back to the town; but recollecting that he should only increase the triumph of his fair tormentor by shewing his resentment, he proudly subdued his swelling heart. He swung himself from the saddle, gave his horse to his page, and walked on with assumed serenity towards a group of ladies whom he saw assembled around a tea-table. In a turn of the walk he encountered the merry princess Alwina with one of her kinswomen on her arm. After the first salutations had passed, she said to him, softly and quickly: 'We have a piece of pastime in hand, in which you must assist us, Count Wildeck.—That the Haldenbachs have a strange family surname we have long known; but Rosaura could never be prevailed upon to tell us what it was; nay, she always seemed vexed and embarrassed when the question was put to her; and this has increased our curiosity. But my brother yesterday ascertained, by privately listening, that they call Colonel Haldenbach—when his full name is mentioned—Death brand. Now, therefore, I beg you will bring into your conversation as many 'death-brands,' or again, as many 'deaths,' and 'brands' separately as you possibly can; we will do the same: and Rosaura must know nothing of the plan.'

Julius bowed assent with a smile, and the ladies disappeared in order to approach by another way, so that their jesting bargain with the count might not be suspected. He found Rosaura very pale and serious; and she greeted him with such undecipherably moving grace—turning her large dark eyes towards him from under her long shaded eyelashes, and again casting them down to the ground with a deep sigh—that he almost repented of the part he had agreed to take in the princess's sport. He knew, too, how little Rosaura was accustomed to hear such jesting as this; and the thought of wounding the heart of this mild, sorrowful beauty went to his very soul. But the impossibility of addressing one private word to her, or of receiving any explanation from her in this circle of strangers, and in the presence of so many inquisitive and almost childish faces, roused his vexation afresh, and he began the jest by asking Rosaura whether it would not prove the real death of her beauty, if she allowed so fair a countenance to be exposed to the brand (or burning) of the evening sun.—Rosaura evidently connected the two fearful syllables, and looked anxiously around. Then

the princess Alwina stepped up with her companions, seated herself opposite to Rosaura, and, taking up the count's sentence, proceeded:—'And, after all, is there not here a 'death-brand' among us?'

Julius rejoined in the same style, the others followed, and, as Alwina had planned, 'death' and 'brand' flew back and forwards so plentifully, in their laughing talk, that even those who were strangers to the secret found themselves involuntarily recurring to these two syllables; and 'death-brand,' and 'death' and 'brand,' and 'brand' and 'death,' rang like a multiplied echo through their jesting conversation. Alwina could scarcely refrain from laughing loud.

But Rosaura became paler and paler; and suddenly rising, she said, in a very serious tone: 'Count Wildeck, two words with you.'

Thereupon she stepped slowly down a hidden avenue. The whole were speechless with astonishment; and Julius, half-shuddering, walked after her.

Rosaura remained silent for a little. At last she said: 'You have truly accomplished a great feat, sir count, when you talked out of my unhappy uncle the fearful surname of our race, in order, it seems, to furnish a little novelty, and to idle away the time at your liking with these agreeable companions. I thank you, Count Wildeck—truly, I thank you; for, in some respects, I shall pursue my morning's journey with much more satisfaction; and then I have, by this proof of your candor, considerably enlarged, or rather confirmed, my knowledge of man's character. You were in the right last night, sure enough. You were as candid with me as, I doubt not, you have always been.'

The reproaches of his beloved had at first so melted the heart of the youth, that he silently walked beside her with humble, downcast look; but the charge of falsehood raised at once his indignant spirit.

'On my honor, lady,' said he firmly, 'what I said to you yesternight was the pure truth. I have never heard your uncle utter a single syllable which acquainted me with the surname of your family. It was told me for the first time within the last quarter of an hour.'

At the recollection of the fearful name Julius shuddered and stopped.

Rosaura, at the first words of his answer, had lowered her angry look before the bright knightly eye of the youth; and she now replied, with soft voice: 'I am grieved to have judged you wrongly, Count Wildeck. It would have been doing you an injury, and therefore—O heavens! I speak distractedly—but really—therefore if you are indeed devoted to me, go not to my uncle, to Castle Finsterborn to-morrow—or rather, go not there at all. Your hand upon it, Julius.'

She held out to him her fair right hand. For the first time she had called him Julius; her voice was so touching—so lovingly tender.

'O gracious Heaven!' said the youth, softly, and touching the hand of his longed-for angel, 'I will indeed do whatever you desire. But permit me one small request; may I pay you one visit during your absence, dear Rosaura?'

'Dear Rosaura!' replied the lady of Haldenbach, loftily, while she drew back her hand—'dear Rosaura! Truly there is nothing in the world so bold as a young fashionable of our day. And the very little, little request! Pay your visits where you will, sir count, only not to me.'

And with anger-glowing cheeks she turned herself away, and hastened back to her companions.

Julius followed her, and whispered softly: 'Only one more word. Shall I go to Finsterborn?'

'On my account,' said Rosaura to herself—and it seemed to the count as she spoke it seriously—'On my account to death!'

'Willingly, from my heart,' replied he, touched in the very depth of his spirit; and resolved now to give up all else in the world for the mysterious hint of the Colonel Haldenbach, surnamed Death-brand.

Gloomy, and out of tune, the company dispersed; and Julius received no farewell from his beloved. But as her open carriage, already far before the slow, dejected rider, wound round a bending of the road, it seemed to him as if she waved her handkerchief towards him as an adieu, and at the same time hid her weeping face in her snow-white veil.

CHAPTER III.

Towards the evening of the next day Julius rode pensively through the antique gate of the mountain town, Waldho. He had before his eyes the vision of the fair Rosaura as she beckoned to him with her white handkerchief.—But, again, her scornful temper arose before his mind. He fancied now that he had deceived himself in a strangely ridiculous manner by that dear, parting salute. He raised his head aloft with sullen fortitude, and looked about for the approach of the huntsman whom the colonel had promised to send thither to meet him.