

JOAN OF ARC.

Joan who saved her country and her throne
And gained for price of all her deeds, a grave.

—DELAVIGNE.



It has been often and truly remarked that in the greatest crises of human affairs, when genius and might had been foiled in their endeavors to overcome the difficulties of the hour, when despair had seized the most sanguine and everything seemed tottering on the brink of destruction, heroes or heroines (whence they came the world knew not) have stepped forth, and seizing with a firm grasp the helm of a foundering state, have steered it triumphantly into the haven of safety and success. At their approach the world looked on in awe: their bearing called for respect and admiration; their looks had a magnetic power; their voice, though soft, was commanding and exerted an irresistible force on their followers. The scientist raised his head from his absorbing books and wondered at these beings not subject, it seemed, to the ordinary laws of nature; the rationalist attempted in vain to make reason explain those living phenomena; the atheist stood spellbound and deified them. But he who believed in God exclaimed in an enthusiasm of faith: "*Digitus Dei est hic.*" Yes, it has often been the case that God has chosen as the instruments of His providence in temporal affairs the lowest and weakest of mankind. Nay, He has often intrusted the destinies of nations to the hands of women, as if to laugh to scorn the boast of human genius and power and to manifest to man the omnipotence of His all-ruling will. History recalls the feats of a Deborah and a Judith, of an Esther and a Volumnia, who saved their people from imminent ruin. But nowhere in the annals of the

world do we find a more striking example of this fact than in Joan of Arc, a young maid yet in her teens, who, guided by the hand of God, saved the kingdom of France from the power of the usurper.

At the time of which we write, France was in a desperate condition. The English charger was quenching his thirst in the waters of the Seine and the Loire; his hoofs were resounding on the pavements of the principal French cities; and over every citadel floated victoriously the British standard.

Charles VII., *the little king of Bourges*, then residing in Chinon and steeped to the lips in luxurious pleasures, daily received with seeming indifference the news of ever-increasing losses. Nevertheless there were still in France some great and patriotic hearts, who contemplated with a sorrowful eye the victories of the enemy and the apathy of their own countrymen; there were yet some strong and ready arms to fight to the shedding of the last drop of their blood for king and country. Such hearts and such arms Orleans contained within her walls, and she was now holding the invaders at bay. In this valiant city were now concentrated all the hopes of France. She had already been resisting for a long time all the horrors of a long and vigilant siege. But at last exhausted by her prolonged efforts, she would have to surrender. And Orleans lost to France, meant the destruction of all that was French. It meant the loss of language, institutions and national manners. But Divine Providence wished only to punish France, to humiliate her; He desired not her ruin. And so He raised up Joan of Arc, the virgin of Domremy. The life of this heroine is