

THE HOLY MAID

Mark Twain's Eulogy of "Saint Joan of Arc."

Most Extraordinary Person Race Has Produced.

In the December Harper's Magazine Mark Twain contributes an article entitled "Saint Joan of Arc." He says that the official record of the trials and tribulations of Joan of Arc is the most remarkable history that exists in any language, and he styles Joan "the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced." Mr. Clemens concludes his sketch as follows:

We can understand how Joan of Arc could be born with a military genius, with leonine courage, with incomparable fortitude, with a mind which was in several particulars a prodigy—a mind which included among its specialties the lawyer's gift of detecting traps laid by the adversary in cunning and treacherous arrangements of seemingly innocent words, the orator's gift of eloquence, the advocate's gift of presenting a case in clear and compact form, the judge's gift of sorting and weighing evidence, and finally, something recognizable as more than a mere trace of the statesman's gift of understanding a political situation and how to make profitable use of such opportunities as it offers; we can comprehend how she should be born with these great qualities, but we cannot comprehend how they became immediately usable and effective without the developing forces of a sympathetic atmosphere and the training which comes of teaching, study, practice,—years of practice—and the help of a thousand mistakes. We can understand how the possibilities of the future perfect peach are all lying hid in the humble bitter almond, but we cannot conceive the peach springing directly from the almond without the intervening long seasons of patient cultivation and development. Out of a cattle-pasturing peasant village lost in the remoteness of an unvisited wilderness and atrophied with ages of stupefaction and ignorance we cannot see a Joan of Arc issue equipped to the last detail for her amazing career and hope to be able to explain the riddle of it, labor at it as we may.

It is beyond us. All the rules fail in this girl's case. In the world's history she stands alone—quite alone. Others have been great in their first public exhibitions of generalship, valor, legal talent, diplomacy, fortitude; but always their previous years and associations had been in a larger or smaller degree a preparation for these things. There have been no exceptions to the rule. But Joan was competent in a law case at 16 without ever having seen a law book or a courthouse before; she had no training in soldiership and no associations with it, yet she was a competent general in her first campaign; she was brave in her first battle, yet her courage had no education—not even the education which a boy's courage gets from never ceasing reminders that it is not permissible in a boy to be a coward, but only in a girl; friendless, alone, ignorant, in the blossom of her youth, she sat week after week, a prisoner in chains, before her assemblage of judges, enemies hunting her to the death, the ablest minds in France, and answered them out of an untaught wisdom which overmatched their learning, baffled their tricks and treacheries with a native sagacity which compelled their wonder, and scored every day a victory against these incredible odds and camped unchallenged on the field. In the history of the human intellect, untrained, inexperienced, and using only its birthright equipment of untried capacities, there is nothing which approaches this. Joan of Arc stands alone, and must continue to stand alone, by reason of the unfellowed fact that in the things wherein she was great she was so without shade or suggestion of help from preparatory teaching, practice, environments, or experience. There is no one to compare her with, none to measure her by; for all others among the illustrious grew towards their high place in an atmosphere and surroundings which discovered their gift to them and nourished it, intentionally or unconsciously. There have been other young generals, but they have been soldiers before they were generals; she began as a general; she commanded the first army she ever saw; she led it from victory to victory, and never lost a battle with it; there have been young commanders-in-chief,

but none so young as she; she is the only soldier in history who has held the supreme command of a nation's armies at the age of 17.

Her history has still another feature which sets her apart and leaves her without fellow or competitor; there have been many uninspired prophets, but she was the only one who ever ventured the daring detail of naming, along with a foretold event, the event's precise nature, the special time limit within which it would occur, and the place—and scored fulfillment. At Vaucouleurs she said she must go to the king and be made his general, and break the English power, and crown her sovereign—"at Rheims." It all happened. It was all to happen next year—and it did. She foretold her first wound and its character and date a month in advance, and the prophecy was recorded in a public record book three weeks in advance. She repeated it in the morning of the date named, and it was fulfilled before night. At Tours she foretold the limit of her military career—saying it would end in one year from the time of its utterance—and she was right. She foretold her martyrdom—using that word, and naming a time three months away—and again she was right. At a time when France seemed hopelessly and permanently in the hands of the English she twice asserted in her prison before her judges that within seven years the English would meet with a mightier disaster than had been the fall of Orleans; it happened within five—the fall of Paris. Other prophecies of hers came true, both as to the event named and the time limit prescribed.

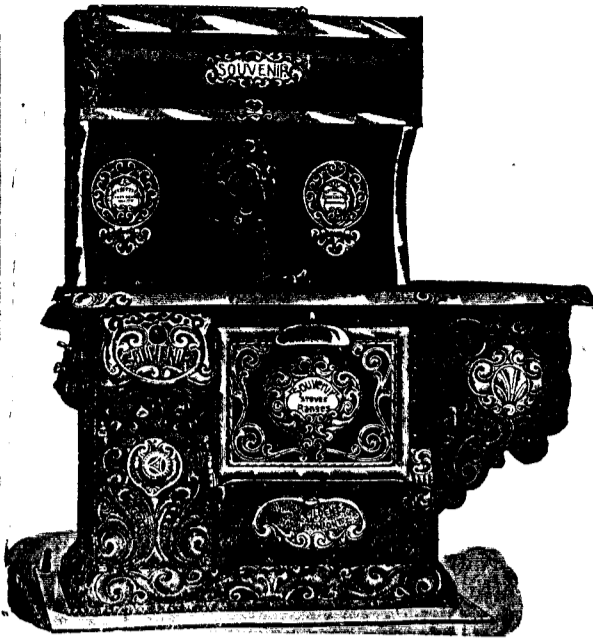
She was deeply religious and believed that she had daily speech with angels; that she saw them face to face, and that they counseled her, comforted and heartened her, and brought commands to her direct from God. She had a childlike faith in the heavenly origin of her apparitions and her Voices, and not any threat of any form of death was able to frighten it out of her loyal heart. She was a beautiful and simple and lovable character. In the records of the Trials this comes out in clear and shining detail. She was gentle and winning and affectionate; she loved her home and friends and her village life; she was miserable in the presence of pain and suffering; she was full of compassion; on the field of her most splendid victory she forgot her triumph to hold in her lap the head of a dying enemy and comfort his passing spirit with pitying words; in an age when it was common to slaughter prisoners she stood dauntless between hers and harm, and saved them alive; she was forgiving and generous, unselfish, magnanimous; she was pure from all spot or stain of baseness. And always she was a girl; and dear and worshipful, as is meet for that estate; when she fell wounded, the first time she was frightened, and cried when she saw her blood gushing from her breast; but she was Joan of Arc! and when presently she found that her generals were sounding the retreat, she staggered to her feet and led the assault again and took that place by storm.

There is no blemish in that rounded and beautiful character.

How strange it is!—that almost invariably the artist remembers only one detail—one minor and meaningless detail of the personality of Joan of Arc—to wit, that she was a peasant girl and forgets all the rest; and so he paints her as a strapping, middle-aged fisherwoman, with costume to match, and in her face the spirituality of a ham. He is slave to his one idea, and forgets to observe that the supremely great souls are never lodged in gross bodies. No brain, no muscle, could endure the work that their bodies must do; they do their miracles by the spirit, which has fifty times the strength and staying power of brawn and muscle. The Napoleons are little, not big; and they work twenty hours in the twenty-four, and come up fresh, while the big soldiers with the little hearts know what Joan of Arc was like, without asking—merely by what she did. The artist should paint her spirit—then he could not fail to paint her body right.

Taking into account, as I have suggested before, all the circumstances—her origin, youth, sex, illiteracy, early environment, and the obstructing conditions under which she exploited her high gifts and made her conquests in the field, but before the courts that tried her for her life—she is easily and by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced.

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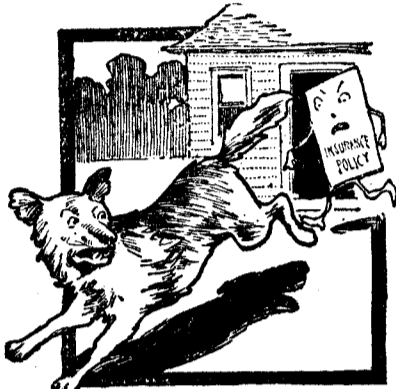
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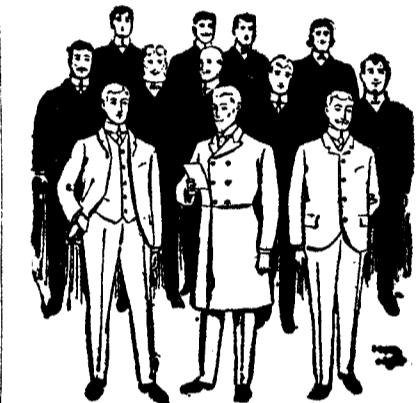
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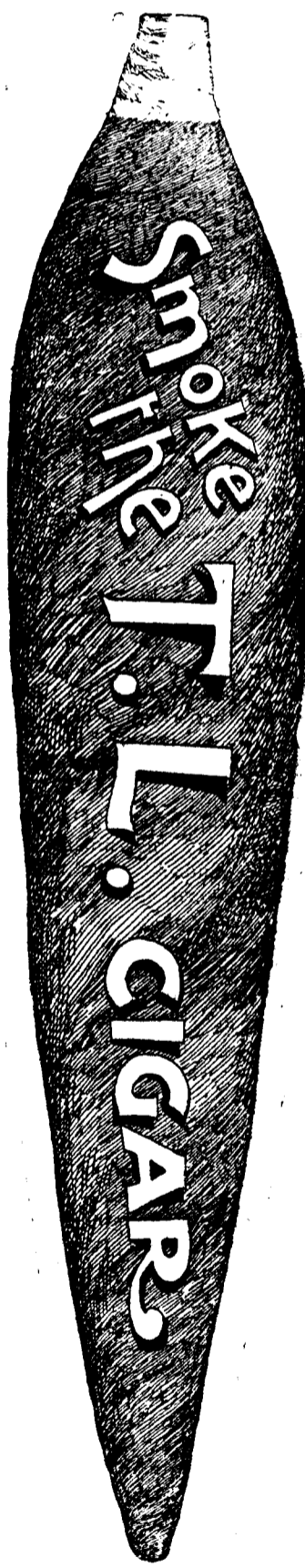
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