

EVERETT-GREEN EVELYN

**A HEROINE OF
FRANCE: THE STORY
OF JOAN OF ARC**

Evelyn Everett-Green
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The Story of Joan of Arc

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CHAPTER I. HOW I FIRST HEARD OF THE MAID

"The age of Chivalry-*alas!* – is dead. The days of miracles are past and gone! What future is there for hapless France? She lies in the dust. How can she hope to rise?"

Sir Guy de Laval looked full in our faces as he spoke these words, and what could one reply? Ah me! – those were sad and sorrowful days for France-and for those who thought upon the bygone glories of the past, when she was mistress of herself, held high her head, and was a power with hostile nations. What would the great Charlemagne say, could he see us now? What would even St. Louis of blessed memory feel, could he witness the changes wrought by only a century and a half? Surely it were enough to cause them to turn in their graves! The north lying supine at the feet of the English conqueror; licking his hand, as a dog licks that of his master, lost to all sense of shame that an English infant in his cradle (so to speak) should rule through

a regent the fair realm of France, whilst its own lawful King, banished from his capital and from half his kingdom, should keep his Court at Bourges or Chinon, passing his days in idle revelry, heedless of the eclipse of former greatness, careless of the further aggressions threatened by the ever-encroaching foe.

Was Orleans to fall next into the greedy maw of the English adventurers? Was it not already threatened? And how could it be saved if nothing could rouse the King from his slothful indifference? O for the days of Chivalry! – the days so long gone by!

Whilst I, Jean de Novelpont, was musing thus, a curious look overshadowed the face of Bertrand de Poulengy, our comrade and friend, with whom, when we had said adieu to Sir Guy a few miles farther on, I was to return to Vaucouleurs, to pay a long-promised visit there. I had been journeying awhile with Sir Guy in Germany, and he was on his way to the Court at Chinon; for we were all of the Armagnac party, loyal to our rightful monarch, whether King or only Dauphin still, since he had not been crowned, and had adopted no truly regal state or authority; and we were earnestly desirous of seeing him awaken from his lethargy and put himself at the head of an army, resolved to drive out the invaders from the land, and be King of France in truth as well as in name. But so far it seemed as though nothing short of a miracle would effect this, and the days of miracles, as Sir Guy had said, were now past and gone.

Then came the voice of Bertrand, speaking in low tones, as

a man speaks who communes with himself; but we heard him, for we were riding over the thick moss of the forest glade, and the horses' feet sank deep and noiseless in the sod, and our fellows had fallen far behind, so that their laughter and talk no longer broke upon our ears. The dreamy stillness of the autumn woodlands was about us, when the songs of the birds are hushed, and the light falls golden through the yellowing leaves, and a glory more solemn than that of springtide lies upon the land.

Methinks there is something in the gradual death of the year which attunes our hearts to a certain gentle melancholy; and perchance this was why Sir Guy's words had lacked the ring of hopeful bravery that was natural to one of his temperament, and why Bertrand's eyes were so grave and dreamy, and his voice seemed to come from far away.

"And yet I do bethink me that six months ago I did behold a scene which seems to me to hold within its scope something of miracle and of mystery. I have thought of it by day, and dreamed of it by night, and the memory of it will not leave me, I trow, so long as breath and being remain!"

We turned and looked at him—the pair of us—with eyes which questioned better than our tongues. Bertrand and I had been comrades and friends in boyhood; but of late years we had been much sundered. I had not seen him for above a year, till he joined us the previous Wednesday at Nancy, having received a letter I did send to him from thence. He came to beg of me to visit him at his kinsman's house, the Seigneur Robert de Baudricourt of

Vaucouleurs; and since my thirst for travel was assuaged, and my purse something over light to go to Court, I was glad to end my wanderings for the nonce, in the company of one whom I still loved as a brother.

From the first I had noted that Bertrand was something graver and more thoughtful than had been his wont. Now I did look at him with wonder in my eyes. What could he be speaking of?

He answered as though the question had passed my lips.

"It was May of this present year of grace," he said, "I mind it the better that it was the Feast of the Ascension, and I had kept fast and vigil, had made my confession and received the Holy Sacrament early in the day. I was in my lodging overlooking the market place, and hard by the Castle which as you know hangs, as it were, over the town, guarding or threatening it, as the case may be, when a messenger arrived from my kinsman, De Baudricourt, bidding me to a council which he was holding at noon that day. I went to him without delay; and he did tell me a strange tale.

"Not long since, so he said, an honest prud'homme of the neighbouring village of Burey le Petit, Durand Laxart by name, had asked speech with him, and had then told him that a young niece of his, dwelling in the village of Domremy, had come to him a few days since, saying it had been revealed to her how that she was to be used by the God of Heaven as an instrument in His hands for the redemption of France; and she had been told in a vision to go first to the Seigneur de Baudricourt, who would then find means whereby she should be sent to the Dauphin (as she

called him), whom she was to cause to be made King of France."

"*Mort de Dieu!*" cried Sir Guy, as he gazed at Bertrand with a look betwixt laughter and amaze, "and what said your worshipful uncle to that same message?"

"At the first, he told me, he broke into a great laugh, and bid the honest fellow box the girl's ears well, and send her back to her mother. But he added that the man had been to him once again, and had pleaded that at least he would see his niece before sending her away; and since by this time he was himself somewhat curious to see and to question this village maiden, who came with so strange a tale, he had told Laxart to bring her at noon that very day, and he desired that I and certain others should be there in the hall with him, to hear her story, and perhaps suggest some shrewd question which might help to test her good faith."

"A good thought," spoke Sir Guy, "for it is hard to believe in these dreamers of dreams. I have met such myself—they talk great swelling words, but the world wags on its way in spite of them. They are no prophets; they are bags of wind. They make a stir and a commotion for a brief while, and then they vanish to be heard of no more."

"It may be so," answered Bertrand, whose face was grave, and whose steadfast dark-blue eyes had taken a strange shining, "I can only speak of that which I did see and hear. What the future may hold none can say. God alone doth know that."

"Then you saw this maid—and heard her speech. What looked

she like? – and what said she?"

"I will tell you all the tale. We were gathered there in the great hall. There were perhaps a score of us; the Seigneur at the head of the council table, the Abbe Perigord on his right, and the Count of La Roche on his left. There were two priests also present, and the chiefest knights and gentlemen of the town. We had all been laughing gaily at the thought of what a village maid of but seventeen summers-or thereabouts-would feel on being introduced into the presence of such a company. We surmised that she would shrink into the very ground for shame. One gentleman declared that it was cruel to ask her to face so many strangers of condition so much more exalted than her own; but De Baudricourt cried out, 'Why man, the wench is clamouring to be taken to the King at his Court! If she cannot face a score of simple country nobles here, how can she present herself at Chinon? Let her learn her place by a sharp lesson here; so may she understand that she had best return to her distaff and spindle and leave the crowning of Kings to other hands!' And it was in the midst of the roar of laughter which greeted this speech that the door opened slowly-and we saw the maid of whom we had been talking."

"And she doubtless heard your mirth," spoke I, and he bent his head in assent.

"I trow she did," he answered, "but think you that the ribald jests of mortal men can touch one of the angels of God? She stood for a moment framed in the doorway, and I tell you I lie

not when I declare that it seemed to all present as though a halo of pure white light encircled her. Where the light came from I know not; but many there were, like myself, who noted it. The far end of the hall was dim and dark; but yet we saw her clear as she moved forward. Upon her face was a shining such as I have seen upon none other. She wore the simple peasant dress of her class, with the coif upon her head; yet it seemed to me-ay, and to others too-as though she was habited in rich apparel. Perchance it was that when one had seen her face, one could no longer think upon her raiment. If a queen-if an angel-if a saint from heaven stood in stately calm and dignity before one's eyes, how could we think of the raiment worn? We should see nothing but the grandeur and beauty of the face and form!"

"Mort de Dieu!" cried Sir Guy with his favourite oath, "but you look, good Bertrand, as though you had gazed upon some vision from the unseen world!"

"Nay," he answered gravely, "but I have looked upon the face of one whom God has visited through His saints. I have seen the reflection of His glory in human eyes; and so I can never say with others that the days of miracles are past."

Bertrand spoke with a solemnity and earnestness which could not but impress us deeply. Our eyes begged him to continue, and he told the rest of his tale very simply.

"She came forward with this strange shining in her eyes. She bent before us with simple reverence; but then lifted herself up to her full height and looked straight at De Baudricourt without

boldness and without fear, as though she saw in him a tool in the hand of God, and had no other thought for him besides.

"'Seigneur,' she said, 'my Lord has bidden me come to you, that you may send me to the Dauphin; for He has given me a message to him which none else may bear; and He has told me that you will do it, therefore I know that you will not fail Him, and your laughter troubles me not.'

"'Who is your Lord, my child?' asked De Baudricourt, not laughing now, but pulling at his beard and frowning in perplexity.

"'Even the Lord of Heaven, Sire,' she answered, and her hands clasped themselves loosely together whilst her eyes looked upward with a smile such as I have seen on none other face before. 'He that is my Lord and your Lord and the Lord of this realm of France. But it is His holy will that the Dauphin shall be its King, and that he shall drive back the English, and that the crown shall be set upon his head. And this, with other matters which are for his ear alone I am sent to tell him; and you, good my lord, are he who shall send me to my King.'

"Thus she spoke, and looked at us all with those shining eyes of hers; yet it seemed to me she scarce saw us. Her glance did go beyond, as though she were gazing in vision upon the things which were to be."

"She was beautiful, you say?" asked Sir Guy, whose interest was keenly aroused; but who, I saw, was doubtful whether Bertrand had not been deceived by some witchery of fair face and graceful form; for Bertrand, albeit a man of thews and sinews

and bold as a lion in fight, was something of the dreamer too, as warriors in all ages have sometimes been.

"Yes—as an angel of God is beautiful," he answered, "ask me not of that; for I can tell you nothing. I know not the hue of her hair or of her eyes, nor what her face was like, nor her form, save that she was tall and very slender; but beautiful—ah yes! —with the beauty which this world cannot give; a beauty which silenced every flippant jest, shamed every scoffing thought, turned ridicule into wonder, contempt into reverence. Whether this wonderful maiden came in truth as a messenger of God or no, at least not one present but saw well that she herself believed heart and soul in her divine commission."

"And what answer did the Seigneur de Baudricourt make to her?"

"He gazed upon her full for awhile, and then he suddenly asked of her, 'And when shall all these wonders come to pass?'

"She, with her gaze fixed still a little upwards, answered, 'Before mid-Lent next year shall succour reach him; then will the city of Orleans be in sore straight; but help shall come, and the English shall fly before the sword of the Lord. Afterwards shall the Dauphin receive consecration at Rheims, and the crown of France shall be set upon his head, in token that he is the anointed of the Lord.'

"'And who has told you all this, my child?' asked De Baudricourt then, answering gently, as one speaks within a church.

"*Mes voix,*' she answered, speaking as one who dreams, and in dreaming listens.

"'What voices?' asked De Baudricourt, 'and have you naught but voices to instruct you in such great matters?'

"'Yes, Sire,' she answered softly, 'I have seen the great Archangel Michael, his sword drawn in his hand; and I know that he has drawn it for the deliverance of France, and that though he has chosen so humble an instrument as myself, yet that to him and to the Lord of Heaven will he the victory and the glory.'

"When she had thus spoken there was a great silence in the hall, in which might have been heard the fall of a pin, and I vow that whether it were trick of summer sunshine or no, the light about the maiden seemed to grow brighter and brighter. Her face was just slightly uplifted as one who listens, and upon her lips there was a smile.

"'And I know that you will send me to the Dauphin, Robert de Baudricourt,' she suddenly said, 'because my voices tell me so.'

"We all looked at De Baudricourt, who sat chin on hand, gazing at the maiden as though he would read her very soul. We waited, wondering, for him to speak. At last he did.

"'Well, my girl, I will think of all this. We have till next year, by your own showing, ere these great things shall come to pass. So get you home, and see what your father and mother say to all this, and whether the Archangel Michael comes again or no. Go home-be a good girl, and we will see what we will see.'"

"'Was that all he promised?' spoke Sir Guy with a short laugh.

"I trow the maiden dreamer would not thank him for that word! A deliverer of princes to be bidden to go home and be a good girl! What said she to that counsel?"

"Ay, well you may ask," spoke Bertrand with subdued emotion. "Just such a question sprang to my lips as I heard my kinsman's answer. I looked to see her face fall, to see sparks of anger flash from her eyes, or a great disappointment cloud the serene beauty of her countenance. But instead of this a wonderful smile lighted it, and her sweet and resonant voice sounded clear through the hall.

"Ah, now Seigneur, I know you for a good and true man! You speak as did my voices when first I heard them. "Jeanne, *sois bonne et sage enfant; va souvent a l'eglise*"; that was their first message to me, when I was but a child; and now you say the same to me-be a good girl. Thus I know that your heart is right, and that when my Lord's time is come you will send me with His message to the Dauphin.'

"And so saying she bent again in a modest reverence before us. Yet let me tell you that as she did so, every man of us sprang to his feet by an impulse which each one felt, yet none could explain. As one man we rose, and bowed before her, as she retired from the hail with the simple, stately grace of a young queen. Not till the door had closed behind her did we bethink us that it was to a humble peasant girl we had paid unconscious homage. We who had thought she would well-nigh sink to the dust at sight of us, had been made to feel that we were in the presence of royalty!"

"*Tu Dieu!* but that is a strange story!" quoth Sir Guy with knitted brows. "For many a long day I have heard nought so strange! What think you of it yourself, good Bertrand? For by my troth you speak like a man convinced that a miracle may even yet be wrought for France at the hand of this maid."

"And if I do, is that so strange? Cannot it be that the good God may still speak through His saints to the sons of men, and may raise up a deliverer for us, even as He did in the days of old for His chosen people? Is His arm shortened at all? And is it meet that we Christian knights should trust Him less than did the Jews of old?"

Sir Guy made no reply, but fell into thought, and then asked a sudden question:

"Who is this peasant maid of whom you speak? And where is she now? Is she still abiding content at home, awaiting the time appointed by her visions?"

"I trow that she is," answered Bertrand. "I did hear that she went home without delay, as quietly as she had come. Her name is Jeanne d'Arc. She dwells in the village of Domremy over yonder. Her father is an honest prud'homme of the place. She has brothers and a sister. She is known in the village as a pious and gentle maid, ever ready to tend the sick, hold vigil for the dead, take charge of an ailing child, or do any such simple service for the neighbours. She is beloved of all, full of piety and good works, constant in attendance at church, regular in her confession and at mass. So much have I heard from her kinsman Laxart,

though for mine own part I have not seen her again."

"And what thinks De Baudricourt of her mission? Does he ever speak of it?"

"Not often; and yet I know that he has not forgotten it. For oftentimes he does sink into a deep reverie; and disjointed words break from him, which tell me whither his thoughts have flown.

"At the first he did say to me, 'Let the girl go home; let us see if we hear more of her. If this be but a phantasy on her part; if she has been fasting and praying and dreaming, till she knows not what is true and what is her own imagining, why, time will cure her of her fancies and follies. If otherwise-well, we will see when the time comes. To act in haste were to act with folly.'

"And so he dismissed the matter, though, as I say, he doth not forget it, and I think never a day comes but he thinks on it."

"And while the Lord waits, the English are active!" cried Sir Guy with a note of impatience in his voice. "They are already threatening Orleans. Soon they will march in strength upon it. And if that city once fall, why what hope is there even for such remnants of his kingdom as still remain faithful south of the Loire? The English will have them all. Already they call our King in mockery 'the King of Bourges;' soon even that small domain will be reft away, and then what will remain for him or for us? If the visions of the maiden had been true, why doth not the Lord strike now, before Salisbury of England can invest the city? If Orleans fall, all is lost!"

"But Jeanne says that Orleans shall be saved," spoke Bertrand

in a low voice, "and if she speaks sooth, must not she and we alike leave the times and seasons in the hand of the Lord?"

Sir Guy shrugged his shoulders, and gave me a shrewd glance, the meaning of which I was at no loss to understand. He thought that Bertrand's head had been something turned, and that he had become a visionary, looking rather for a miracle from heaven than for deliverance from the foe through hard fighting by loyal men marching under the banner of their King. Truth we all knew well that little short of a miracle would arouse the indolent and discouraged Charles, cowed by the English foe, doubtful of his own right to call himself Dauphin, distrustful of his friends, despairing of winning the love or trust of his subjects. But could it indeed be possible that such a miracle could be wrought, and by an instrument so humble as a village maid-this Jeanne d'Arc?

But the time had come when we must say adieu to our comrade, and turn ourselves back to Vaucouleurs, if we were not to be benighted in the forest ere we could reach that place. We halted for our serving men to come up; and as we did so Bertrand said in a low voice to Sir Guy:

"I pray you, Seigneur de Laval, speak no word to His Majesty of this maid and her mission, until such time as news may reach him of her from other sources."

"I will say no word," answered the other, smiling, and so with many friendly words we parted, and Bertrand and I, with one servant behind us, turned our horses' heads back along the road by which we had come.

"Bertrand," I said, as the shadows lengthened, the soft dusk fell in the forest, and the witchery of the evening hour fell upon my heart, "I would that I could see this maiden of whom you speak, this Jeanne d'Arc of the village of Domremy."

He turned and looked me full in the face; I saw his eyes glow and the colour deepen in his cheeks.

"You would not go to mock, friend Jean de Metz?" he said, for so I am generally named amongst my friends.

"Nay," I answered truthfully, "there is no thought of mockery in my heart; yet I fain would see the Maid."

He paused awhile in thought and then made answer:

"At least we may ride together one day to Domremy; but whether or no we see the Maid will be according to the will of Heaven."

CHAPTER II. HOW I FIRST SAW THE MAID

I did not forget my desire to see this maiden of Domremy, nor did Bertrand, I trow, forget the promise, albeit some days passed by ere we put our plan into action.

Bad news kept coming in to the little loyal township of Vaucouleurs. There was no manner of doubt but that the English Regent, Bedford, was resolved to lose no more time, but seek to put beneath his iron heel the whole of the realm of France. Gascony had been English so long that the people could remember nothing different than the rule of the Roy Outremer-as of old they called him. Now all France north of the Loire owned the same sway, and as all men know, the Duke of Burgundy was ally to the English, and hated the Dauphin with a deadly hatred, for the murder of his father-for which no man can justly blame him. True, his love for the English had cooled manifestly since that affair of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and Jacquelaine of Brabant, in which as was natural, he took the part of his brother; but although the Duke of Bedford was highly indignant with Duke Humphrey, and gave him no manner of support in his rash expedition, yet the Duke of Burgundy resented upon the English what had been done, and although it did not drive him into the arms of the Dauphin, whom he hated worse, it loosened the bond

between him and our foes, and we had hoped it might bring about a better state of things for our party. Yet alas! – this seemed as far as ever from being so; and the Burgundian soldiers still ravaged along our borders, and it seemed oftentimes as though we little loyal community of the Duchy of Bar would be swallowed up altogether betwixt the two encroaching foes. So our hearts were often heavy and our faces grave with fear.

I noted in the manner of the Governor, whose guest I had now become, a great gravity, which in old days had not been there; for Robert de Baudricourt, as I remembered him, had ever been a man of merry mood, with a great laugh, a ready jest, and that sort of rough, bluff courage that makes light of trouble and peril.

Now, however, we often saw him sunk in some deep reverie, his chin upon his hand, his eyes gazing full into the blaze of the leaping fire of logs, which always flamed upon the hearth in the great hall, where the most part of his time was spent. He would go hunting or hawking by day, or ride hither and thither through the town, looking into matters there, or sit to listen to the affairs of the citizens or soldiers as they were brought before him; and at such times his manner would be much as it had ever been of yore-quick, almost rough, yet not unkindly-whilest the shrewd justice he always meted out won the respect of the people, and made him a favourite in the town.

But when the evening fell, and the day's work was done, and after supper we sat in the hall, with the dogs slumbering around us, talking of any news which might have come in, either of raids

by the roving Burgundians, or the advance of the English towards Orleans, then these darker moods would fall upon him; and once when he had sat for well-nigh an hour without moving, his brow drawn and furrowed, and his eyes seemingly sunk deeper in his head, Bertrand leaned towards me and whispered in mine ear:

"He is thinking of the Maid of Domremy!"

De Baudricourt could not have heard the words, yet when he spoke a brief while later, it almost seemed as though he might have done so.

"Nephew," he said, lifting his head abruptly and gazing across at us, "tell me again the words of that prophecy of Merlin's, spoken long, long ago, of which men whisper in these days, and of which you did speak to me awhile back."

"Marry, good mine uncle, the prophecy runs thus," answered Bertrand, rising and crossing over towards the great fire before which his kinsman sat, "'That France should be destroyed by the wiles of a woman, and saved and redeemed by a maiden.'"

The bushy brows met in a fierce scowl over the burning eyes; his words came in a great burst of indignation and scorn.

"Ay, truly-he spake truly-the wise man-the wizard! A woman to be the ruin of the kingdom! Ay, verily, and has it not been so? Who but that wicked Queen Isabeau is at the bottom of the disgraceful Treaty of Troyes, wherein France sold herself into the hands of the English? Did she not repudiate her own son? Did not her hatred burn so fiercely against him that she was ready to tarnish her own good fame and declare him illegitimate, rather

than that he should succeed his father as King of France? Did she not give her daughter to the English King in wedlock, that their child might reign over this fair realm? Truly has the kingdom been destroyed by the wiles of a woman! But I vow it will take more than the strength of any maiden to save and redeem it from the woes beneath which it lies crushed!"

"In sooth it doth seem so," answered Bertrand with grave and earnest countenance, "but yet with the good God nothing is impossible. Hath He not said before this that He doth take of the mean and humble to confound the great of the earth? Did not the three hundred with Gideon overcome the hosts of the Moabites? Did not the cake of barley bread overturn the tent and the camp of the foe?"

"Ay, if the good God will arise to work miracles again, such things might be; but how can we look for Him to do so? What manner of man is the Dauphin of France that he should look for divine deliverance? 'God helps those who help themselves,' so says the proverb; but what of those who lie sunk in lethargy or despair, and seek to drown thought or care in folly and riotous living-heedless of the ruin of the realm?"

"There is another proverb, good mine uncle, that tells how man's extremity is God's opportunity," quoth Bertrand thoughtfully; "if we did judge of God's mercy by man's worthiness to receive the same, we might well sink in despair. But His power and His goodness are not limited by our infirmities, and therein alone lies our hope."

De Baudricourt uttered a sound between a snort and a grunt. I knew not what he thought of Bertrand's answer; but that brief dialogue aroused within me afresh the desire I had before expressed to see the maid, Jeanne of Domremy; and as the sun upon the morrow shone out bright and clear, after a week of heavy rain storms, we agreed that no better opportunity could we hope for to ride across to the little village, and try whether it were possible to obtain speech with the young girl about whom such interest had been aroused in some breasts.

We spoke no word to De Baudricourt of our intention. Bertrand knew from his manner that he was thinking more and more earnestly of that declaration on the part of the village maiden that her Lord-the King of Heaven-had revealed to her that she must be sent to the Dauphin, to help him to drive out the English from his country, and to place the crown of France upon his head, and that he, Robert de Baudricourt, was the instrument who would be used to speed her on her way. Bertrand knew that this thought was weighing upon the mind of his kinsman, and the more so as the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy drew nearer.

Autumn had come. Winter was hard at hand; and before Mid-Lent the promised succour to France was to arrive through the means of this maiden-this Jeanne d'Arc.

"He is waiting and watching," spoke Bertrand, as we rode through the forest, the thinning leaves of which allowed the sunlight to play merrily upon our path. "He says in his heart that

if this thing be of God, the Maid will come again when the time draws near; but that if it is phantasy, or if she be deluded of the Devil, perchance his backwardness will put a check upon her ardour, and we shall hear no more of it. The Abbe Perigord, his Confessor, has bidden him beware lest it be a snare of the Evil One" – and as he spoke these words Bertrand crossed himself, and I did the like, for the forest is an ill place in which to talk of the Devil, as all men know.

"But for my part, when I think upon her words, and see again the look of her young face, I cannot believe that she has been thus deceived; albeit we are told that the Devil can make himself appear as an angel of light."

This was the puzzle, of course. But surely the Church had power to discern betwixt the wiles of the Evil One and the finger of God. There were words and signs which any possessed of the Devil must needs fly before. I could not think that the Church need fear deception, even though a village maid might be deceived.

The forest was very beautiful that day, albeit travelling was something slow, owing to the softness of the ground, and the swollen condition of the brooks, which often forced us to go round by the bridges instead of taking the fords; so that we halted a few miles from Domremy to bait our horses and to appease our own hunger, for by that time our appetite was sharp set.

It was there, as we sat at table, and talked with mine host, that we heard somewhat more of this Maid, whom we had started

forth in hopes to see.

Bertrand was known for the kinsman of De Baudricourt and all the countryside knew well the tale, how that Jeanne d'Arc had gone to him in the springtide of the year, demanding an escort to the Dauphin King of France, for whom she had a message from the King of Heaven, and whom she was to set upon his throne.

"When she came home again, having accomplished nothing," spoke the innkeeper, leaning his hands upon the table and greatly enjoying the sound of his own voice, "all the village made great mock of her! They called her the King's Marshal, the Little Queen, Jeanne the Prophetess, and I know not what beside. Her father was right wroth with her. Long ago he had a dream about her, which troubled him somewhat, as he seemed to see his daughter in the midst of fighting men, leading them on to battle."

"Did he dream that? Surely that is something strange for the vision of a village prud'homme anent his little daughter."

"Ay truly, though at the time he thought little of it, but when all this came to pass he recalled it again; and he smote Jeanne upon the ear with his open hand, and bid her return to her needle and her household tasks, and think no more of matters too great for her. Moreover, he declared that if ever she were to disgrace herself by mingling with men-at-arms, he would call upon her brothers to drown her, and if they disobeyed him, he would take and do it with his own hands!"

"A Spartan father, truly!" murmured Bertrand.

"O ay-but he is a very honest man, is Jacques d'Arc; and he

was very wroth at all the talk about his daughter, and he vowed she should wed an honest man, as she is now of age to do, and so forget her dreams and her visions, and take care of her house and her husband and the children the good God should send them—like other wedded wives."

"Then has she indeed wedded?" asked Bertrand earnestly.

"Ah, that is another story!" answered our host, wagging his head and spreading out his hands. "It would take too long were I to tell you all, *messires*; but so much will I tell. They did find a man who had long desired the pretty Jeanne for his wife, and he did forswear himself and vow that he had been betrothed to Jeanne with her own free will and consent, and that now he claimed her as his wife. Jeanne, whose courage is high, though she be so quiet and modest in her daily life, did vehemently deny the charge, whereupon the angry father and his friend, the claimant of her hand, did bring it into the court, and the Maid had to defend herself there from the accusation of broken faith. But by St. Michael and all his angels! — how she did confound them all! She asked no help from lawyers, though one did offer himself to her. She called no witnesses herself; but she questioned the witnesses brought against her, and also the man who would fain have become her lord, and out of their own mouths did she convict them of lying and hypocrisy and conspiracy, so that she was triumphantly acquitted, and her judges called her a most wonderful child, and told her mother to be proud of such a daughter!"

I saw a flush rise to Bertrand's cheek, a flush as of pride and joy. And indeed, I myself rejoiced to hear the end of the tale; for it did seem as though this maiden had been persecuted with rancour and injustice, and that is a thing which no man can quietly endure to hear or see.

"And how have they of Domremy behaved themselves to her since?" I asked; and Bertrand listened eagerly for the answer.

"Oh, they have taken her to favour once more; her father has been kind again; her mother ever loved Jeanne much, for her gentleness and beauty and helpfulness at home. All the people love her, when not stirred to mockery by such fine pretensions. If she will remain quietly at home like a wise and discreet maiden, no one will long remember against her her foolish words and dreams."

As we rode through the fields and woodlands towards Domremy, the light began to take the golden hue which it does upon the autumn afternoon, and upon that day it shone with a wonderful radiance such as is not uncommon after rain. We were later than we had meant, but there would be a moon to light us when the sun sank, and both we and our horses knew the roads well; or we could even sleep, if we were so minded, at the auberge where we had dined. So we were in no haste or hurry. We picked our way leisurely towards the village, and Bertrand told me of the Fairy Well and the Fairy Tree in the forest hard by, so beloved of the children of Domremy, and of which so much has been heard of late, though at that time I knew nothing of any such things.

But fairy lore has ever a charm for me, and I bid him show me these same things. So we turned a little aside into the forest, and found ourselves in a lovely glade, where the light shone so soft and golden, and where the songs of the birds sounded so sweet and melodious, that I felt as though we were stepping through an enchanted world, and well could I believe that the fairies danced around the well, sunk deep in its mossy dell, and fringed about with ferns and flowers and the shade of drooping trees.

But fairies there were none visible to our eyes, and we moved softly onwards towards the spreading tree hard by. But ere we reached it, we both drew rein as by a common impulse, for we had seen a sight which arrested and held us spellbound, ay, and more than that, for the wonder and amaze of it fell also upon the horses we bestrode. For scarcely had we drawn rein, before they both began to tremble and to sweat, and stood with their forefeet planted, their necks outstretched, their nostrils distended; uttering short, gasping, snorting sounds, as a horse will do when overcome by some terror. But for all this they were as rigid as if they had been carved in stone.

And now, what did we see? Let me try and tell, so far as my poor words may avail. Beneath a spreading tree just a stone's throw to the right of where we stood, and with nothing between to hinder our view of her, a peasant maiden, dressed in the white coif, red skirt, and jacket and kerchief of her class, had been bending over some fine embroidery which she held in her hands. We just caught a glimpse of her thus before the strange thing

happened which caused us to stop short, as though some power from without restrained us.

Hard by, as I know now, stood the village, shut out from view by the trees, with its little church, and the homestead of Jacques d'Arc nestling almost within its shadow. At the moment of which I speak the bell rang forth for the Angelus, with a full, sweet tone of silvery melody; and at the very same instant the work dropped from the girl's hands, and she sank upon her knees. At the first moment, although instinctively, we reined back our horses and uncovered our heads, I had no thought but that she was a devout maiden following the office of the Church out here in the wood. But as she turned her upraised face a little towards us, I saw upon it such a look as I have never seen on human countenance before, nor have ever seen (save upon hers) since. A light seemed to shine either from it or upon it-how can I tell which? – a light so pure and heavenly that no words can fully describe it, but which seemed like the radiance of heaven itself. Her eyes were raised towards the sky, her lips parted, and through the breathless hush of silence which had fallen upon the wood, we heard the soft, sweet tones of her voice.

"Speak, my Lord-Thy servant heareth!"

It was then that our horses showed the signs of terror of which I have before spoken. For myself, I saw nothing save the shining face of the Maid-I knew who it was-there was no need for Bertrand's breathless whisper-"It is she-herself!" – I knew it in my heart before.

She knelt there amid the fallen leaves, her face raised, her lips parted, her eyes shining as surely never human eyes have shone before. A deep strange hush had fallen over all nature, broken only by the gentle music of the bell. The ruddy gold light of approaching sunset bathed all the wood in glory, and the rays fell upon the kneeling figure, forming a halo of glory round it. But she did not heed, she did not see. She was as one in a trance, insensible to outward vision. Once and again her lips moved, but we heard no word proceed from them, only the rapt look upon her face increased in intensity, and once I thought (for I could not turn my gaze away) that I saw the gleam of tears in her eyes.

The bell ceased as we stood thus motionless, and as the last note vibrated through the still air, a change came over the Maid. Her head drooped, she hid her face in her hands, and thus she knelt as one absorbed in an intensity of prayer. Even as this happened, the peculiar glory of the sunlight seemed to change. It shone still, but without such wonderful glow, and our horses at the same time ceased their trembling and their rigid stillness of pose. They shook their heads and jingled their bits, as though striving to throw off some terrifying impression.

"Let us withdraw from her sight," whispered Bertrand touching my arm, and very willingly I acceded to this suggestion, and we silently pressed into the shadow of some great oaks, which stood hard by, the trunks of which hid us well from view. It seemed almost like a species of sacrilege to stand there watching the Maid at her prayers, and yet I vow, that until the bell ceased

we had no more power to move than our horses. Why we were holden by this strange spell I know not. I can only speak the truth. We saw nothing and we heard nothing of any miraculous kind, and yet we were like men in a dream, bound hand and foot by invisible bonds, a witness of something unseen to ourselves, which we saw was visible to another.

Beneath the deep shadow of the oaks we looked back. The Maid had risen to her feet by this, and was stooping to pick up her fallen work. That done, she stood awhile in deep thought, her face turned towards the little church, whence the bell had only just ceased to sound.

I saw her clearly then—a maiden slim and tall, so slender that the rather clumsy peasant dress she wore could not give breadth or awkwardness to her lithe figure. The coif had slipped a little out of place, and some tresses of waving hair had escaped from beneath it, tresses that looked dark till the sun touched them, and then glowed like burnished gold. Her face was pale, with features in no way marked, but so sweet and serene was the expression of the face, so wonderful was the depth of the great dark eyes, that one was lost in admiration of her beauty, albeit unable to define wherein that beauty lay.

When we started forth, I had meant to try and seek speech with this Jeanne—this Maid of Domremy—and to ask her of her mission, and whether she were still believing that she would have power to carry it out; but this purpose now died within me.

How could I dare question such a being as to her visions? Had

I not seen how she was visited by sound or sight not sensible to those around her? Had I not in some sort been witness to a miracle? Was it for us to approach and ask of her what had been thus revealed? No! – a thousand times no! If the good God had given her a message, she would know when and where to deliver it. She had spoken before of her voices. Let them instruct her. Let not men seek to interfere. And so we remained where we were, hidden in the deep shadows, whilst Jeanne, with bent head and lingering, graceful steps, utterly unconscious of the eyes that watched her, went slowly out of sight along the glade leading towards the village and her home.

Only when she had disappeared did we venture to move on in her wake, and so passed by the low-browed house, set in its well-tended little garden, where the d'Arc family lived. It lay close to the church, and bore a look of pleasant homelike comfort. We saw Jeanne bending tenderly over a chair, in which reclined the bent form of a little crippled sister. We even heard the soft, sweet voice of the Maid, as she answered some question asked her from within the open door. Then she lifted the bent form in her arms, and I did note how strong that slim frame must be, for the burden seemed as nothing to her as she bore it within the house; and then she disappeared from view, and we rode onwards together.

"There, my friend," spoke Bertrand at last, "I have kept my promise, you have seen the Maid."

"Yes," I answered gravely, "I have seen the Maid," and after that we spoke no word for many a mile.

CHAPTER III. HOW THE MAID CAME TO VAUCOULEURS

It may yet be remembered by some how early the snow came that year, to the eastern portion of France at least. I think scarce a week had passed since our journey to Domremy, before a wild gale from the northeast brought heavy snow, which lay white upon the ground for many long weeks, and grew deeper and deeper as more fell, till the wolves ravaged right up to the very walls of Vaucouleurs, and some of the country villages were quite cut off from intercourse with the world.

Thus it came about that I was shut up in Vaucouleurs with my good comrade and friend Bertrand, in the Castle of which Robert de Baudricourt was governor, and for awhile little news reached us from the outside world, though such news as did penetrate to our solitude was all of disaster for the arms of France.

We never spoke to De Baudricourt of our expedition to Domremy, nor told him that we had seen the Maid again. Yet methinks not a day passed without our thinking of her, recalling something of that wonderful look we had seen upon her face, and asking in our hearts whether indeed she were truly visited by heavenly visions sent by God, and whether she indeed heard voices which could reach no ears but hers.

I observed that Bertrand was more regular in attendance at

the services of the Church, and especially at Mass, than was usual with young knights in those days, and for my part, I felt a stronger desire after such spiritual aids than I ever remember to have done in my life before. It became a regular thing with us to attend the early Mass in the little chapel of the Castle; and, instead of growing lax (as I had done before many times in my roving life), as to attending confession and receiving the Holy Sacrament, I now began to feel the need for both, as though I were preparing me for some great and solemn undertaking. I cannot well express in words the feeling which possessed me—ay, and Bertrand too—for we began to speak of the matter one with another—but it seemed to us both as though a high and holy task lay before us, for which we must needs prepare ourselves with fasting and prayer; I wondered if, perhaps, it was thus that knights and men in days of old felt when they had taken the Red Cross, and had pledged themselves to some Crusade in the East.

Well, thus matters went on, quietly enough outwardly, till the Feast of the Nativity had come and gone, and with that feast came a wonderful change in the weather. The frost yielded, the south wind blew soft, the snow melted away one scarce knew how, and a breath of spring seemed already in the air, though we did not dare to hope that winter was gone for good and all.

It was just when the year had turned that we heard a rumour in the town, and it was in this wise that it reached our ears. De Baudricourt had been out with his dogs, chasing away the wolves back into their forest lairs. He had left us some business

to attend to for him within the Castle, else should we doubtless have been of the party. But he was the most sagacious huntsman of the district, and a rare day's sport they did have, killing more than a score of wolves, to the great joy of the townsfolk and of the country people without the walls. It was dark ere he got home, and he came in covered with mud from head to foot; the dogs, too, were so plastered over, that they had to be given to the servants to clean ere they could take their wonted places beside the fire; and some of the poor beasts had ugly wounds which needed to be washed and dressed.

But what struck us most was that De Baudricourt, albeit so successful in his hunt, seemed little pleased with his day's work. His face was dark, as though a thunder cloud lay athwart it, and he gave but curt answers to our questions, as he stood steaming before the fire and quaffing a great tankard of spiced wine which was brought to him. Then he betook himself to his own chamber to get him dry garments, and when he came down supper was already served. He sat him down at the head of the table, still silent and morose; and though he fell with right good will upon the viands, he scarce opened his lips the while, and we in our turn grew silent, for we feared that he had heard the news of some disaster to the French arms, which he was brooding over in silent gloom.

But when the retainers and men-at-arms had disappeared, and we had gathered round the fire at the far end of the hall, as was our wont, then he suddenly began to speak.

"Went ye into the town today?" he suddenly asked of us.

We answered him, Nay, that we had been occupied all day within the Castle over the services there he had left us to perform.

"And have you heard nought of the commotion going on there?"

"We have heard nought. Pray what hath befallen, good sir? Is it some disaster? Hath Orleans fallen into the hands of the English?"

For that was the great fear possessing all loyal minds at this period.

"Nay, it is nought so bad as that," answered De Baudricourt, "and yet it is bad enough, I trow. That mad girl from Domremy is now in the town, telling all men that Robert de Baudricourt hath been appointed of God to send her to the Dauphin at Chinon, and that she must needs start thither soon, to do the work appointed her of heaven.

"*Dents de Dieu!* – the folly of it is enough to raise the hair on one's head! Send a little paysanne to the King with a wild story like hers! 'Tis enough to make the name of De Baudricourt the laughingstock of the whole country!"

I felt a great throb at heart when I heard these words. Then the Maid had not forgot! This time of waiting had not bred either indifference or doubt. The time appointed was drawing near, and she had come to Vaucouleurs once more, to do that which was required of her!

O, was it not wonderful? Must not it be of heaven, this thing?

And should we seek to put the message aside as a thing of nought?

Bertrand was already speaking eagerly with his kinsman; but it seemed as though his words did only serve to irritate the Governor the more. In my heart I was sure that had he been certain the Maid was an impostor, he would have been in no wise troubled or disturbed, but would have contented himself by sharply ordering her to leave the town and return home and trouble him no more. It was because he was torn by doubts as to her mission that he was thus perturbed in spirit. He dared not treat her in this summary fashion, lest haply he should be found to be fighting against God; and yet he found it hard to believe that any deliverance for hapless France could come through the hands of a simple, unlettered peasant girl; and he shrank with a strong man's dislike from making himself in any sort an object of ridicule, or of seeming to give credence to a wild tale of visions and voices, such as the world would laugh to scorn. So he was filled with doubt and perplexity, and this betrayed itself in gloomy looks and in harsh speech.

"Tush, boy! You are but an idle dreamer. I saw before that you were fooled by a pretty face and a silvery voice. Go to! – your words are but phantasy! Who believes in miracles now?"

"If we believe in the power of the good God, shall we not also believe that He can work even miracles at His holy will?"

"Poof-miracles! – the dreams of a vain and silly girl!" scoffed De Baudricourt, "I am sick of her name already!"

Then he suddenly turned upon me and spoke.

"Jean de Metz, you are a knight of parts. You have sense and discretion above your years, and are no featherhead like Bertrand here. Will you undertake a mission from me to this maiden? Ask of her the story of her pretended mission. Seek to discover from her whether she be speaking truth, or whether she be seeking to deceive. Catch her in her speech if it may be. See whether the tale she tells hang together, and then come and report to me. If she be a mad woman, why should I be troubled with her? She cannot go to the Dauphin yet, come what may. The melting snows have laid the valleys under water, the roads are impassable; horses would stick fast in the mire, and we are not at the end of winter yet. She must needs wait awhile, whatever her message may be, but I would have you get speech of her, and straightly question her from me. Then if it seem well, I can see her again; but if you be willing, you shall do so first."

I was more than willing. I was rejoiced to have this occasion for getting speech with the Maid. I spoke no word of having had sight of her already, but fell in with De Baudricourt's wish that I should go to her as if a mere passing stranger, and only afterwards reveal myself as his emissary. I slept but little all that night, making plans as to all that I should speak when I saw her on the morrow, and, rising early, I betook myself to Mass, not to the private chapel of the Castle, but to one of the churches in the town, though I could not have said why it was that I was moved to do this.

Yet as I knelt in my place I knew, for there amongst the worshippers, her face upraised and full of holy joy, her eyes alight with the depth of her devotion, her hands clasped in an ecstasy of prayer, was the Maid herself; and I found it hard to turn my eyes from her wonderful face, to think upon the office as it was recited by the priest.

I did not seek speech of her then, for she tarried long in the church over her prayers. I felt at last like one espying on another, and so I came away. But after breakfast, as the sun shone forth and began to light up the narrow streets of the little town, I sallied forth again alone, and asked of the first citizen I met where could be found the dwelling place of one Jeanne d'Arc, from Domremy, who was paying a visit to the town.

I had scarce need to say so much as this. It seemed that all the people in the town had heard of the arrival of the Maid. I know not whether they believed in her mission, or whether they scoffed at it; but at least it was the talk of the place how she had come before, and fearlessly faced the Governor and his council, and had made her great demand from him, and how she had come once again, now that the year was born and Lent approaching, in the which she had said she must seek and find the Dauphin. Thus the man was able at once to give me the information I asked, and told me that the girl was lodging with Henri Leroyer the saddler, and Catherine his wife, naming the street where they dwelt, but adding that I should have no trouble in finding the house, for the people flocked to it to get a sight of the Maid, and to ask her

questions concerning her mission hither, and what she thought she was about to accomplish.

And truly I did find that this honest citizen had spoken the truth, for as I turned into the narrow street where Leroyer lived, I saw quite a concourse of people gathered about the house, and though they made way for me to approach, knowing that I was from the Castle, I saw that they were very eager to get sight or speech of the Maid, who was standing at the open door of the shop, and speaking in an earnest fashion to those nearest her.

I made as though I were a passing stranger, who had just heard somewhat of her matter from the bystanders, and I addressed her in friendly fashion, rather as one who laughs.

"What are you doing here, *ma mie*? And what is this I hear? Is it not written in the book of fate that the King or Dauphin of France must be overcome of England's King, and that we must all become English, or else be driven into the sea, or banished from the realm?"

Then for the first time her wonderful eyes fastened themselves on my face, and I felt as though my very soul were being read.

"Nay, sire," she answered, and there was something so flute-like and penetrating in her tones that they seemed to sink into my very soul, "but the Lord of Heaven Himself is about to fight for France, and He has sent me to the Governor here, who will direct me to the Dauphin, who knows nothing of me as yet. But I am to bring him help, and that by Mid-Lent. So I pray you, gentle knight, go tell Robert de Baudricourt that he must needs bestir

himself in this business, for my voices tell me that the hour is at hand when, come what may, I must to Chinon, even though I wear my legs to the knees in going thither."

"Why should I tell this to the Seigneur de Baudricourt?" I asked, marvelling at her words and the fashion of her speech.

"Because he has sent you to me," she answered, her eyes still on my face, "and I thank him for having chosen so gracious a messenger; for you have a good heart, and you are no mocker of the things my Lord has revealed to me; and you will be one of those to do His will, and to bring me safely to the Dauphin."

Half confounded by her words I asked:

"Who is your Lord?"

"It is God," she answered, and bent her head in lowly reverence.

And then I did a strange thing; but it seemed to be forced upon me from above by a power which I could not withstand. I fell suddenly to my knees before her, and put up my clasped hands, as we do when we pay homage for our lands and honours to our liege lord. And, I speak truth, and nought else, the Maid put her hands over mine just as our lord or sovereign should do, and though I dare swear she had never heard my name before, she said:

"Jean de Novelpont de Metz, my Lord receives you as His faithful knight and servant. He will be with us now and to the end."

And the people all uncovered and stood bareheaded round us,

whilst I felt as though I had received a mandate from Heaven.

Then I went into the house with Jeanne, and asked her of herself, and of her visions and voices. She told me of them with the gentle frankness of a child, but with a reverence and humility that was beautiful to see, and which was in strange contrast to some of the things she spoke, wherein she told how that she herself was to be used of Heaven for the salvation of France.

I cannot give her words as she spoke them, sitting there in the window, the light upon her face, her eyes fixed more often upon the sunny sky than upon her interlocutor, though now and again she swept me with one of her wonderful glances. She told me how from a child she had heard voices, which she knew to be from above, speaking to her, bidding her to be good, to go to the church, to attend to her simple duties at home. But as she grew older there came a change. She remembered the day when first she saw a wonderful white light hovering above her; and this light came again, and yet again; and the third time she saw in it the figure of an angel—more than that—of the Archangel Michael himself—the warrior of Heaven; and from him she first received the message that she was to be used for the deliverance of her people.

She was long in understanding what this meant. St. Michael told her she should receive other angelic visitors, and often after this St. Catherine and St. Margaret appeared to her, and told her what was required of her, and what she must do. At first she was greatly affrighted, and wept, and besought them to find some

other for the task, since she was but a humble country maid, and knew nothing of the art of warfare, and shuddered at the sight of blood. But they told her to be brave, to trust in the Lord, to think only of Him and of His holy will towards her. And so, by degrees, she lost all her fears, knowing that it was not of herself she would do this thing, and that her angels would be with her, her saints would watch over her, and her voices direct her in all that she should speak or do.

"And now," she added, clasping her hands, and looking full into my face, "now do they tell me that the time is at hand. Since last Ascensontide they have bid me wait in quietness for the appointed hour; but of late my voices have spoken words which may not be set aside. I must be sent to the Dauphin. Orleans must be saved from the hosts of the English which encompass it. I am appointed for this task, and I shall accomplish it by the grace of my Lord and His holy saints. Then the crown must be set upon the head of the Dauphin, and he must be anointed as the king. After that my task will be done; but not till then. And now I must needs set forth upon the appointed way. To the Dauphin I must go, to speak to him of things I may tell to none other; and the Sieur Robert de Baudricourt is appointed of Heaven to send me to Chinon. Wherefore, I pray you, gentle knight, bid him no longer delay; for I am straitened in spirit till I may be about my Lord's business, and He would not have me tarry longer."

I talked with her long and earnestly. Not that I doubted her. I could not do so. Although no voices came to me, yet my heart

was penetrated by a conviction so deep and poignant that to doubt would have been impossible. France had been sold and betrayed by one bad woman; but here was the Maid who should arise to save! I knew it in my heart; yet I still spoke on and asked questions, for I must needs satisfy De Baudricourt, I must needs be able to answer all that he would certainly ask.

"How old are you, fair maiden?" I asked, as at length I rose to depart, and she stood, tall and slim, before me, straight as a young poplar, graceful, despite her coarse raiment, her feet and hands well fashioned, her limbs shapely and supple.

"I was seventeen last week," she answered simply, "the fifth of January is my *jour de fete*."

"And your parents, what think they of this? What said they when you bid them farewell for such an errand?"

The tears gathered slowly in her beautiful eyes; but they did not fall. She answered in a low voice:

"In sooth they know not for what I did leave them. They believed I went but to visit a sick friend. I did not dare to tell them all, lest my father should hold me back: He is very slow to believe my mission; he chides me bitterly if ever word be spoken anent it. Is it not always so when the Lord uses one of His children? Even our Lord's brethren and sisters believed not on Him. How can the servant be greater than his Lord?"

"You fear not, then, to disobey your parents?"

I had need to put this question; for it was one that De Baudricourt had insisted upon; for he knew something of Jacques

d'Arc's opposition to his daughter's proposed campaign.

"I must obey my Lord even above my earthly parents," was her steadfast reply; "His word must stand the first. He knows all, and He will pardon. He knows that I love my father and my mother, and that if I only pleased myself I should never leave their side."

Then suddenly as she spoke a strange look of awe fell upon her; I think she had forgotten my presence, for when she spoke, her words were so low that I could scarce hear them.

"I go to my death!" she whispered, the colour ebbing from her face, "but I am in the hands of my Lord; His will alone can be done."

I went out from her presence with bent head. What did those last words signify-when hitherto all she had spoken was of deliverance, of victory? She spoke them without knowing it. Of that I was assured; and therefore I vowed to keep them locked in my heart. But I knew that I should never forget them.

I found Robert de Baudricourt awaiting my coming in the great hall, pacing restlessly to and fro. Bertrand was with him, and I saw by the tense expression upon his face that he was eager for my report. I gave him one quick glance upon entering, which I trow he read and understood; but to De Baudricourt I spoke with caution and with measured words, for he was a man whose scorn and ridicule were easily aroused, and I knew that Bertrand had fallen into a kind of contempt with him, in that he had so quickly believed in the mission of the Maid.

"Well, and what make you of the girl? Is she witch, or mad,

or possessed by some spirit of vainglory and ambition? What has she said to you, and what think you of her?"

"In all truth, my lord, I believe her to be honest; and more than this, I believe her to be directed of God. Strange as it may seem, yet such things have been before, and who are we to say that God's arm is shortened, or that He is not the same as in the days of old? I have closely questioned the Maid as to her visions and voices, and I cannot believe them delusions of the senses. You may ask, are they of the Devil? Then would I say, if there be doubt, let the Abbe Perigord approach her with holy water, with exorcisms, or with such sacred words and signs as devils must needs flee before. Then if it be established that the thing is not of the Evil One, we may the better regard it as from the Lord of whom she speaks. At least, if she can stand this test, I would do this much for her-give her a small escort to Chinon, with a letter to the Dauphin. After that your responsibility will cease. The matter will be in the hands of the King and his advisers."

"Ay, after I have made myself the laughingstock of the realm!" burst out De Baudricourt grimly; yet after he had questioned me again, and yet again, and had even held one interview himself with the Maid, who came of her own accord to the Castle to ask for him one day, he seemed to come to some decision, after much thought and wavering.

Bringing out one of his rattling oaths, he cried:

"Then if she can bear the touch of holy water, and the sign of book and taper and bell-and I know not what beside-then shall

she be sent to the King at Chinon, and I, Robert de Baudricourt, will send her-come what may of the mission!"

CHAPTER IV. HOW THE MAID WAS TRIED AND TESTED

I had myself proposed the test, and yet when the moment came I was ashamed of myself. The Abbe had put on his robes and his stole; a vessel containing holy water stood before him on the table; the book of the Blessed Gospels was in his hands, a boy with a taper stood at his side. The place was the hall of the Castle, and the Governor with a few of those most in his confidence stood by to see what would follow. I was at his right hand.

Bertrand brought in the Maid. I know not what he had said to her, or whether he had prepared her for what was about to take place; but however that may have been, her face wore that calm and lofty serenity of expression which seemed to belong to her. As she approached she made a lowly reverence to the priest, and stood before him where Bertrand placed her, looking at him with earnest, shining eyes.

"My daughter," spoke the Abbe gravely, "have you security in your heart that the visions and voices sent to you come of good and not of evil? Many men and women have, ere this, been deceived-yea, even the holy Saints themselves have been tempted of the devil, that old serpent, who is the great deceiver of the hearts and spirits of men. Are you well assured in your heart that you are not thus deceived and led away by whispers and

suggestions from the father of lies?"

There was no anger in her face, but a beautiful look of reverent, yet joyful, confidence and peace.

"I am well assured, my father, that it is my Lord who speaks to me through His most holy and blessed Saints, and through the ever-glorious Archangel Michael."

"And yet, my daughter, you know that it is written in the Holy Scriptures that the devil can transform himself into an angel of light."

"Truly that is so, my father; but is it not also written that those who put their trust in the Lord shall never be confounded?"

"Yes, my daughter; and I pray God you may not be confounded. But it is my duty to try and test the spirits, so as to be a rock of defence to those beneath my care. Yet if things be with you as you say, you will have no fear."

"I have no fear, my father," she answered, and stood with folded hands and serene and smiling face whilst he went through those forms of exorcism and adjuration which, it is said, no evil spirit can endure without crying aloud, or causing that the person possessed should roll and grovel in agony upon the ground, or rush frantically forth out of sight and hearing.

But the Maid never moved, save to bend her head in reverence as the Thrice Holy Name was proclaimed, and as the drops of holy water fell upon her brow. To me it seemed almost like sacrilege, in face of that pure and holy calm, to entertain for one moment a doubt of the origin of her mission. Yet it may be that

the test was a wise one; for De Baudricourt and those about him watched it with close and breathless wonder, and one and another whispered behind his hand:

"Of a surety she is no witch. She could never stand thus if there was aught of evil in her. Truly she is a marvellous Maid. If this thing be of the Lord, let us not fight against Him."

The trial was over. The Maid received the blessing of the Abbe, who, if not convinced of the sacredness of her mission, was yet impotent to prove aught against her. It is strange to me, looking back at those days, how far less ready of heart the ecclesiastics were to receive her testimony and recognise in her the messenger of the Most High than were the soldiers, whether the generals whom she afterwards came to know, or the men who crowded to fight beneath her banner. One would have thought that to priests and clergy a greater grace and power of understanding would have been vouchsafed; but so far from this, they always held her in doubt and suspicion, and were her secret foes from first to last.

I made it my task to see her safely home; and as we went, I asked:

"Was it an offence to you, fair Maid, that he should thus seek to test and try you?"

"Not an offence to me, Seigneur," she answered gently, "but he should not have had need to do it. For he did hear my confession on Friday. Therefore he should have known better. It is no offence to me, save inasmuch as it doth seem a slighting of my

Lord."

The people flocked around her as she passed through the streets. It was wonderful how the common townfolk believed in her. Already she was spoken of as a deliverer and a saviour of her country. Nay, more, her gentleness and sweetness so won upon the hearts of those who came in contact with her, that mothers prayed of her to come and visit their sick children, or to speak words of comfort to those in pain and suffering; and such was the comfort and strength she brought with her, that there were whispers of miraculous cures being performed by her. In truth, I have no knowledge myself of any miracle performed by her, and the Maid denied that she possessed such gifts of healing. But that she brought comfort and joy and peace with her I can well believe, and she had some skill with the sick whom she tended in her own village, so that it is likely that some may have begun to mend from the time she began to visit them.

As for De Baudricourt, his mind was made up. There was something about this girl which was past his understanding. Just at present it was not possible to send her to the King, for the rains, sometimes mingled with blinding snow storms, were almost incessant, the country lay partially under water, and though such a journey might be possible to a seasoned soldier, he declared it would be rank murder to send a young girl, who, perchance, had never mounted a horse before, all that great distance. She must needs wait till the waters had somewhat subsided, and till the cold had abated, and the days were somewhat longer.

The Maid heard these words with grave regret, and even disapproval.

"My Lord would take care of me. I have no fear," she said; but De Baudricourt, although he now faithfully promised to send her to Chinon, would not be moved from his resolution to wait.

For my part, I have always suspected that he sent a private messenger to Chinon to ask advice what he should do, and desired to await his return ere acting. But of that I cannot speak certainly, since he never admitted it himself.

If the delay fretted the Maid's spirit, she never spoke with anger or impatience; much of her time was spent in a little chapel in the crypt of the church at Vaucouleurs, where stood an image of Our Lady, before which she would kneel sometimes for hours together in rapt devotion. I myself went thither sometimes to pray; and often have I seen her there, so absorbed in her devotions that she knew nothing of who came or went.

By this time Bertrand and I had steadfastly resolved to accompany the Maid not only to Chinon, but upon whatsoever campaign her voices should afterwards send her. Although we were knights, we neither of us possessed great wealth; indeed, we had only small estates, and these were much diminished in value from the wasting war and misfortunes of the country. Still we resolved to muster each a few men-at-arms, and form for her a small train; for De Baudricourt, albeit willing to send her with a small escort to Chinon, had neither the wish nor the power to equip any sort of force to accompany her, though there would

be no small danger on the journey, both from the proximity of the English in some parts, and the greater danger from roving bands of Burgundians, whose sole object was spoil and plunder, and their pastime the slaughter of all who opposed them.

And now we began to ask one another in what guise the Maid should travel; for it was obvious that her cumbrous peasant garb was little suited for the work she had in hand, and we made many fanciful plans of robing her after the fashion of some old-time queen, such as Boadicea or Semiramis, and wondered whether we could afford to purchase some rich clothing and a noble charger, and so convey her to the King in something of regal state and pomp.

But when, one day, we spoke something of this to the Maid herself, she shook her head with a smile, and said:

"Gentle knights, I give you humble and hearty thanks; but such rich robes and gay trappings are not for me. My voices have bidden me what to do. I am to assume the dress of a boy, since I must needs live for a while amongst soldiers and men. I am sent to do a man's work, therefore in the garb of a man must I set forth. Our good citizens of Vaucouleurs are already busy with the dress I must shortly assume. There is none other in which my work can be so well accomplished."

And in truth we saw at once the sense of her words. She had before her a toilsome journey in the companionship of men. She must needs ride, since there was no other way of travelling possible; and why should the frailest and tenderest of the party

be burdened by a dress that would incommode her at every turn?

And when upon the very next day she appeared in the Castle yard in the hose and doublet and breeches of a boy, and asked of us to give her her first lesson in horsemanship, all our doubts and misgivings fled away. She wore her dress with such grace, such ease, such simplicity, that it seemed at once the right and fitting thing; and not one of the soldiers in the courtyard who watched her feats that day, passed so much as a rude jest upon her, far less offered her any insult. In truth, they were speedily falling beneath the spell which she was soon to exercise upon a whole army, and it is no marvel to me that this was so; for every day I felt the charm of her presence deepening its hold upon my heart.

Never have I witnessed such quickness of mastery as the Maid showed, both in her acquirement of horsemanship and in the use of arms, in both of which arts we instructed her day by day. I had noted her strength and suppleness of limb the very first day I had seen her; and she gave marvellous proof of it now. She possessed also that power over her horse which she exercised over men, and each charger that she rode in turn answered almost at once to her voice and hand, with a docility he never showed to other riders. Yet she never smote or spurred them; the sound of her voice, or the light pressure of knee or hand was enough. She had never any fear from the first, and was never unhorsed. Very soon she acquired such skill and ease that we had no fears for her with regard to the journey she soon must take.

Although filling the time up thus usefully, her heart was ever

set upon her plan, and daily she would wistfully ask:

"May we not yet sally forth to the Dauphin?"

Still she bore the delay well, never losing opportunities for learning such things as might be useful to her; and towards the end of the month there came a peremptory summons to her from the Duke of Lorraine, who was lying very ill at Nancy.

"They tell me," he wrote to De Baudricourt, "that you have at Vaucouleurs a woman who may be in sooth that Maid of Lorraine who, it has been prophesied, is to arise and save France. I have a great curiosity to see her; wherefore, I pray you, send her to me without delay. It may be that she will recover me of my sickness. In any case, I would fain have speech of her; so do not fail to send her forthwith."

De Baudricourt had no desire to offend his powerful neighbour, and he forthwith went down to the house of Leroyer, taking Bertrand and me with him, to ask of the Maid whether she would go to see the Duke at his Court, since the journey thither was but short, and would be a fitting preparation for the longer one.

We found her sitting in the saddler's shop, with one of his children on her lap, watching whilst he fashioned for her a saddle, which the citizens of Vaucouleurs were to give her. Bertrand and I were to present the horse she was to ride, and I had also sent to my home for a certain holiday suit and light armour made for a brother of mine who had died young. I had noted that the Maid had just such a slim, tall figure as he, and was certain that this

suit, laid away by our mother in a cedar chest, would fit her as though made for her. But it had not come yet, and she was habited in the tunic and hose she now wore at all times. Her beautiful hair still hung in heavy masses round her shoulders, giving to her something of the look of a saintly warrior on painted window.

Later on, when she had to wear a headpiece, she cut off her long curling locks, and then her hair just framed her face like a nimbus; but today it was still hanging loose upon her shoulders, and the laughing child had got his little hands well twisted in the waving mass, upon which the midday sun was shining clear and strong. She had risen, and was looking earnestly at De Baudricourt; yet all the while she seemed to be, as it were, listening for other sounds than those of his voice.

When he ceased she was silent for a brief while, and then spoke.

"I would fain it had been to the Dauphin you would send me, Seigneur; but since that may not be yet, I will gladly go to the Duke, if I may but turn aside to make my pilgrimage to the shrine of St Nicholas, where I would say some prayers, and ask help."

"Visit as many shrines as you like, so as you visit the Duke as well," answered De Baudricourt, who always spoke with a sort of rough bluffness to the Maid, not unkindly, though it lacked gentleness. But she never evinced fear of him, and for that he respected her. She showed plenty of good sense whilst the details of the journey were being arranged, and was in no wise abashed at the prospect of appearing at a Court. How should

she be, indeed, who was looking forward with impatience to her appearance at the Court of an uncrowned King?

Bertrand and I, with some half-dozen men-at-arms, were to form her escort, and upon the very next day, the sun shining bright, and the wind blowing fresh from the north over the wet lands, drying them somewhat after the long rains, we set forth.

The Maid rode the horse which afterwards was to carry her so many long, weary miles. He was a tall chestnut, deep in the chest, strong in the flank, with a proudly arching neck, a great mane of flowing hair, a haughty fashion of lifting his shapely feet, and an eye that could be either mild or fierce, according to the fashion in which he was treated. On his brow was a curious mark, something like a cross in shape, and the colour of it was something deeper than the chestnut of his coat. The Maid marked this sign at the first glance, and she called the horse her Crusader. Methinks she was cheered and pleased by the red cross she thus carried before her, and she and her good steed formed one of those friendships which are good to see betwixt man and beast.

Our journey was not adventurous; nor will I waste time in telling overmuch about it. We visited the shrine, where the Maid passed a night in fasting and vigil, and laid thereon a little simple offering, such as her humble state permitted. The next day she was presented to the Duke of Lorraine, as he lay wrapped in costly silken coverlets upon his great bed in one of the most sumptuous apartments of his Castle.

He gazed long and earnestly at the Maid, who stood beside him, flinching neither from his hollow gaze, nor from the more open curiosity or admiration bestowed upon her by the lords and ladies assembled out of desire to see her. I doubt me if she gave them a thought. She had come to see the sick Duke, and her thoughts were for him alone.

There was something very strange and beautiful in her aspect as she stood there. Her face was pale from her vigil and fast; her hair hung round it in a dark waving mass, that lighted up at the edges with gold where the light touched it. Her simple boy's dress was splashed and travel stained; but her wonderful serene composure was as marked here as it had been throughout. No fears or tremors shook her, nor did any sort of consciousness of self or of the strangeness of her position come to mar the gentle dignity of her mien or the calm loveliness of her face.

The Duke raised himself on his elbow the better to look at her.

"Is this true what I have heard of you, that you are the Maid of Lorraine, raised up, according to the word of the wizard Merlin, to save France in the hour of her extremity?"

"I am come to save France from the English," she answered at once; "to drive them from the city of Orleans, to bring the Dauphin to Rheims, and there see the crown set upon his head. This I know, for my Lord has said it. Who I am matters nothing, save only as I accomplish the purpose for which I am sent."

Her sweet ringing voice sounded like a silver trumpet through the room, and the lords and ladies pressed nearer to hear and see.

"In sooth, the Maid herself-the Maid who comes to save France!"

Such was the whisper which went round; and I marvelled not; for the look upon that face, the glorious shining in those eyes, was enough to convince the most sceptical that the beatific vision had indeed been vouchsafed to them.

The Duke fell back on his pillows, regarding her attentively.

"If then, Maiden, you can thus read the future, tell me, shall I recover me of this sickness?" he gasped.

"Of that, sire, I have no knowledge," she answered. "That lies with God alone; but if you would be His servant, flee from the wrath to come, which your sins have drawn upon you. Turn to the Lord in penitence. Do His will. Be reconciled to your wife; for such is the commandment of God. Perchance then you will find healing for body and soul. But seek not that which is hidden. Do only the will of the Lord, and trust all to Him."

She was hustled from the room by the frightened attendants, who feared for her very life at the hands of their irate lord. He had done many a man to death for less than such counsel. But the Maid felt not fear.

"He cannot touch me," she said, "I have my Lord's work yet to accomplish."

And in truth the Duke wished her no ill, though he asked not to see her more. Perhaps-who knows-these words may have aroused in him some gleams of penitence for his past life. I have heard he made a better end than was expected of him when his

time came. And before the Maid left the Castle he sent her a present of money, and said he might even send his son to help the Dauphin, if once Orleans were relieved, and her words began to fulfil themselves.

So then we journeyed home again, and we reached Vaucouleurs on the afternoon of the twelfth day of February. The Maid had been smiling and happy up till that time, and, since the weather was improving, we had great hopes of soon starting forth upon the journey for Chinon. Nevertheless, the streams were still much swollen, and in some places the ground was so soft that it quaked beneath our horses' feet. We travelled without misadventure, however, and I wondered what it was that brought the cloud to the brow of the Maid as we drew nearer and nearer to Vaucouleurs.

But I was to know ere long; for as we rode into the courtyard of the Castle the Maid slipped from her horse ere any could help her, and went straight into the room where the Governor was sitting, with her fearless air of mastery.

"My lord of Baudricourt, you do great ill to your master the Dauphin in thus keeping me from him in the time of his great need. Today a battle has been fought hard by the city of Orleans, and the arms of the French have suffered disaster and disgrace. If this go on, the hearts of the soldiers will be as water, the purpose of the Lord will be hindered, and you, Seigneur, will be the cause, in that you have not hearkened unto me, nor believed that I am sent of Him."

"How know you the thing of which you speak, girl?" asked De Baudricourt, startled at the firmness of her speech.

"My voices have told me," she answered; "voices that cannot lie. The French have met with disaster. The English have triumphed, and I still waste my time in idleness here! How long is this to continue, Robert de Baudricourt?"

A new note had come into her voice—the note of the general who commands. We heard it often enough later; but this was the first time I had noted it. How would De Baudricourt take it?

"Girl," he said, "I will send forth a courier at once to ride with all speed to the westward. If this thing be so, he will quickly meet some messenger with the news. If it be as you have said, if this battle has been fought and lost, then will I send you forth without a day's delay to join the King at Chinon."

"So be it," answered the Maid; and turned herself to the chapel, where she spent the night in prayer.

It was Bertrand who rode forth in search of tidings, his heart burning within him. It was he who nine days later entered Vaucouleurs again, weary and jaded, but with a great triumph light in his eyes. He stood before De Baudricourt and spoke.

"It is even as the Maid hath said. Upon the very day when we returned to Vaucouleurs, the English—a small handful of men—overthrew at Rouvray a large squadron of the French, utterly routing and well-nigh destroying them. The English were but a small party, convoying herrings to the besiegers of Orleans. The ground was strewn with herrings after the fight, which men call

the Battle of the Herrings. Consternation reigns in the hearts of the French-an army flies before a handful! The Maid spake truly; the need is desperate. If help reach not the Dauphin soon, all will be lost!"

"Then let the Maid go!" thundered the old man, roused at last like an angry lion; "and may the God she trusts in guard and keep her, and give to her the victory!"

CHAPTER V. HOW THE MAID JOURNEYED TO CHINON

So the thing had come to pass at last-as she had always said it must. Robert de Baudricourt was about to send her to the Court of the Dauphin at Chinon. The weary days of waiting were at an end. She was to start forthwith; she and her escort were alike ready, willing, and eager. Her strange mystic faith and lofty courage seemed to have spread through the ranks of the chosen few who were to attend her.

I trow, had she asked it, half the men of Vaucouleurs would have gladly followed in her train; for the whole town was moved to its core by the presence of the Maid in its midst. Almost were the townsfolk ready to worship her, only that there was something in her own simplicity and earnest piety which forbade such demonstration. All knew that the Maid herself would be first to rebuke any person offering to her homage other than true man can and ought to offer to true woman.

And now let me speak here, once and for all, of the love and reverence and devotion which the Maid had power to kindle in the hearts of those with whom she came in contact. I can indeed speak of this, for I am proud to this day to call myself her true knight. From the first I felt towards her as I have felt to none since-not even to the wife of my manhood's tried affections.

It was such a love as may be inspired by some almost angelic, presence—there was no passion in it. I believe I speak truly when I say that not one of the Maid's true followers and knights and comrades-in-arms, ever thought of her as possible wife—ever even dreamed of her as lover. She moved amongst us as a being from another sphere. She inspired us with a courage, a power, and a confidence in her and in our cause, which nothing could shake or daunt. She was like a star, set in the firmament of heaven. Our eyes, our hearts turned towards her, but she was never as one of us.

Still less was she as other women are, fashioned for soft flatteries, ready to be wooed and won. Ah, no! With the Maid it was far otherwise. Truly do I think that of herself she had no thought, save as she was the instrument appointed of her Lord to do the appointed work. To that task her whole soul was bent. It filled her to the full with an ecstasy of devotion which required no words in which to express itself. And I can faithfully say that it was not the beauty of her face, the sweetness of her ringing voice, nor the grace and strength of her supple form which made of men her willing followers and servants.

No, it was a power stronger and more sacred than any such carnal admiration. It came from the conviction, which none could fail to reach, that this Maid was indeed chosen and set apart of Heaven for a great and mighty work, and that in obeying her, one was obeying the will of God, and working out some purpose determined in the counsels of the heavenlies.

With her man's garb and light armour, the Maid had assumed an air of unconscious command which sat with curious graceful dignity upon the serene calm of her ordinary demeanour. Towards her followers of the humbler sort she ever showed herself full of consideration and kindness. She felt for their fatigues or privations in marching, was tenderly solicitous later on for the wounded. Above all, she was insistent that the dying should receive the consolations of religion, and it was a terrible thought to her that either friend or foe should perish unshriven and unassailed.

Her last act at Vaucouleurs, ere we started off in the early dawn of a late February day, was to attend Mass with all her following.

An hour later, after a hasty meal provided by De Baudricourt, we were all in the saddle, equipped and eager for the start. The Maid sat her chestnut charger as to the manner born. The pawings of the impatient animal caused her no anxiety. She was looking with a keen eye over her little band of followers, taking in, as a practised leader of men might do, their equipment and general readiness for the road. She pointed out to me several small defects which required adjusting and rectifying.

Already she seemed to have assumed without effort, and as a matter of course, the position of leader and general. There was no abatement of her gentle sweetness of voice or aspect, but the air of command combined with it as though it came direct and without effort as a gift from heaven. None resented it;

all submitted to it, and submitted with a sense of lofty joy and satisfaction which I have never experienced since, and which is beyond my power to describe.

There was one change in the outward aspect of the Maid, for her beautiful hair had been cut off, and now her head was crowned only by its cluster of short curling locks, upon which today she wore a cloth cap, though soon she was to adopt the headpiece which belonged to the light armour provided. She had been pleased by the dress of white and blue cut-cloth which I had humbly offered her, and right well did it become her. The other suit provided by the townsfolk was carried by one of the squires, that she might have change of garment if (as was but too probable) we should encounter drenching rains or blustering snow storms.

So far she had no sword of her own, nor had she spoken of the need of such a weapon for herself. But as we assembled in the courtyard of the Castle, getting ourselves into the order of the march, De Baudricourt himself appeared upon the steps leading into the building, bearing in his hands a sword in a velvet scabbard, which he gravely presented to the Maid.

"A soldier, lady, has need of a weapon," were his words, as he placed it in her hands; "take this sword, then. I trow it will do you faithful service; and may the Lord in whom you trust lead you to victory, and save this distracted realm of France from the perils which threaten to overwhelm her!"

"I thank you, Seigneur de Baudricourt," she answered, as she

took the weapon, and permitted me to sling it for her in the belt for the purpose which she already wore, "I will keep your gift, and remember your good words, and how that you have been chosen of heaven to send me forth thus, and have done the bidding of the Lord, as I knew that so true a man must needs do at the appointed time. For the rest, have no fear. The Lord will accomplish that which He has promised. Before the season now beginning so tardily has reached its height, the Dauphin will be the anointed King of France, the English will have suffered defeat and Orleans will be free!"

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