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THE STORY OF  
JOAN OF ARC

Andrew Lang

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# Andrew Lang

## The Story of Joan of Arc

### CHAPTER I. THE CHILDHOOD OF JOAN OF ARC

JOAN OF ARC was perhaps the most wonderful person who ever lived in the world. The story of her life is so strange that we could scarcely believe it to be true, if all that happened to her had not been told by people in a court of law, and written down by her deadly enemies, while she was still alive. She was burned to death when she was only nineteen: she was not seventeen when she first led the armies of France to victory, and delivered her country from the English.

Joan was the daughter of a poor man, in a little country village. She had never learned to read, or write, or mount a horse. Yet she was so wise that many learned men could not puzzle her by questions: she was one of the best riders in France; one of the most skilled in aiming cannons, and so great a general that she defeated the English again and again, and her army was never beaten till her King deserted her. She was so brave that severe wounds could not stop her from leading on her soldiers, and so tender-hearted that she would comfort the wounded English on the field of battle, and protect them from cruelty. She was so good that her enemies could not find one true story to tell against her in the least thing; and she was so modest that in the height of her glory she was wishing to be at home in her father's cottage, sewing or spinning beside her mother.

Joan, who was born at Domremy, in the east of France, on January 6, 1412, lived in a very unhappy time. For nearly a hundred years the kings of England had been trying to make themselves kings of France, just as they had been trying to make themselves kings of Scotland. Perhaps they might have succeeded, if they had confined themselves to one conquest at a time. But they left Scotland alone while they were attacking France, and then Scotland sent armies to help the French, as at other times the French sent armies to help Scotland.

Eight years before Joan was born a sad thing happened to her country. Henry V. of England had married the Princess Katherine of France, and the French, or some of them, tired of being beaten in war, consented to let the child of Henry and the Princess Katherine be their King, instead of the son of their old King. The old King's son was called "the Dauphin"; that was the title of the eldest son of the French kings. This Dauphin was named Charles. His friends went on fighting the English for his sake, but he was not crowned King. The coronations of French Kings were always done in the Cathedral at Rheims, where they were anointed with sacred oil. The oil was kept in a very old flask, which was said to have been brought from heaven, to a Saint, by an Angel. No eldest son of the King was thought really King of France, after his father's death, till he had been anointed with this heavenly oil at Rheims by the Archbishop. It is important to remember this; you will see the reason afterwards. Now, Rheims was in the power of the English, so the Dauphin, Charles, could not go there and be made King in earnest. The English said that he was not the son of his father, the late King, which made him very unhappy. We shall hear how Joan comforted him and made him King for good and all. What Scots and Frenchmen could not do, she did.

In the meantime the French were divided into two parties. Some sided with the Dauphin, Prince Charles; more, and especially all the people of Burgundy, and the Duke of Burgundy, a great and rich country, were on the side of the English. So they fought very cruelly, for the land was full of companies of ill-paid soldiers, who plundered the poor, so that towns fell into decay, many fields were empty of sheep and cows, and the roads became covered with grass. In the villages a boy used to watch all day, from the spire of the church, to see whether any soldiers were riding up. If they came, the cattle were driven into the woods, and men, women, and children ran to hide themselves, carrying such things away as they could. The soldiers of all sorts robbed equally, for they had often

no regular pay, and the Scots were not behindhand in helping themselves wherever they went. Even gentlemen and knights became chiefs of troops of robbers, so that, whoever won in the wars, the country people were always being plundered.

In the middle of these miseries Joan was born, in a village where almost everybody was on the side of the Dauphin: the right side. In the village nearest to hers, Maxey, the people took the English side, and the boys of the two places had pitched battles with sticks and stones. It is true that they would have found some other reason for fighting, even if the English had not been in France. Joan used to see her brothers, Peter and John, come home from these battles with their noses bleeding, and with black eyes, but she did not take part herself in these wars.

Her village was near a strong-walled town called Vaucouleurs, which was on the side of the Dauphin. When Joan was a little girl she did not see very much of the cruelty of the soldiers; the village was only visited once or twice by enemies. But she heard of what was going on in the rest of France: "there was great pity in France," she said. She did, once or twice, see some of the "pity." There was a man called Henry d'Orly, living in a castle named Doulevant, who, like many other gentlemen in these days, was a captain of robbers.

One day several spearmen of his rode into Domremy, Joan's village, and seized Joan's father's cows, with all the other cows that they could find, just as the Scotts, Elliots, and Armstrongs used to ride across the Border and drive the cattle of the English farmers. But a lady lived in a strong castle rear Domremy, and when she heard how the village people had been plundered she sent the news to a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who gathered his spearmen and rode after the robbers. The thieves, of course, could not ride faster than the stolen cows could trot; they pricked the poor beasts with their spears, and made them lumber along, but a cow is slow at best. The pursuers galloped and came on the cattle in a little town, while the thieves were drinking in the wine shops. When they heard the horses of the pursuers gallop down the street, they mounted their horses and spurred for their lives; but now came their master, Henry d'Orly, with more spearmen, who followed after the cattle and the gentlemen who were driving them home. They turned and charged Henry d'Orly, and cleared the road, and the cows came home to Domremy, all safe.

Another time all the people in Domremy had to fly from home, and go to a town called Neufchâteau, where they were safe behind strong walls. They only stayed there for a few days, but, later, the English said that Joan had been a servant in an inn at this town, and had learned to ride there, which was quite untrue.

There were beautiful woods near the village, and in one oak wood an oak called the Fairy Tree. There was a story that a beautiful fairy used to meet her lover at that tree, just as under the Eildon Hill, the Queen of Fairyland met Thomas the Rhymer. The children used to take cakes, and make feasts, and hang garlands of flowers on the boughs of that oak; but Joan did not care much about fairies, and preferred to lay her wild flowers beneath the statues of Saints in the village Church, especially St. Catharine and St. Margaret. Of course, all this was long before the Reformation in which the Protestants broke the images of Saints in the churches, and smashed their pictures on the glass windows with stones, and destroyed a beautiful statue of Joan on the bridge at Orleans.

These things were done more than a hundred years after Joan was dead.

Though Joan could run faster than the other girls and boys, and beat them when they ran races, she liked to be quiet. Nobody could sew and spin better than she did, and she was very fond of praying alone in church. She would even go away from the other children into lonely places, and implore God to have pity on France. The services in church, the singing and music, made her very happy, and when she heard the church bells across the fields, she would say her prayer. She was very kind, and would give up her bed to any poor traveller whom her father took in for a night, and would sleep beside the hearth. She took care of the sick, and, if ever she had any money, she would spend it on Masses to be said in honour of God, and for the sake of men's souls.

So Joan lived till she was thirteen. She was a strong, handsome girl, beautifully made, with black hair. We do not know the colour of her eyes, probably brown or dark grey. A young knight wrote to his mother, when he first saw Joan, that she was "a creature all divine." Jean never sat to a painter for her portrait, though once she saw a kind of fancy picture of herself in the hands of a Scottish archer.

Young men do not say so much about a girl who is not beautiful, and indeed, armies do not rush together to follow a maiden with no good looks. But though Jean, when she came to command armies, liked to be well dressed, and to have fine armour, that was partly because she was a natural, healthy girl, and partly because she was a kind of banner for men to follow into fight, and banners ought to be splendid.

She took, no thought of her own beauty, and the young knights and squires who fought, later, under her flag, said that they looked on her as a sacred thing, and never dreamed of making love to her. She let it be known that she would never marry any one, while the English were still in France. She was not a nun, and had not made a vow never to marry at all, but while her country was in danger she never thought of marriage; she had other things to do.

## CHAPTER II. HOW THE VOICES CAME TO THE MAID

WHEN Joan was about thirteen a very wonderful thing happened to her. One day she and the other girls and boys were running a race for a crown of flowers. Joan was easily the winner, and as she was running, a child who was looking on cried, "Joan. I see you flying along without touching the ground." After the race Joan had a curious feeling as if she did not know where she was and then heard a young man's voice near her bidding her go home, for her mother needed her. She did not know who spoke; she thought it might be her brother, or one of her neighbours, so she ran home. She found that her mother had not sent for her, and she was going back to her friends, when a bright light like a shining cloud appeared to her, and a Voice told her to go and save France from the English. Till that hour she had been sorry for the sorrows in France, but as she was only a little girl, she had never thought that she could lead an army against the English.

This is the first account that people heard of the coming of the mysterious Voices to Jeanne: it was written down about four years after the Voices first came, and six weeks after Jean's first great defeat of the English (in May 1429). Two years later, after Joan was a prisoner of the English, the French priests and lawyers who took the English side asked her thousands of questions about everything that she had done in her life, and the answers were written down in a book, word for word. They asked her about these wonderful Voices. There were things that she refused to tell these priests and lawyers, but she did say this: —

"When I was about thirteen there came to me a Voice from God, teaching me how I was to behave and what I was to do. And the first time that Voice came, I was afraid. I was standing about the middle of the day, in summer, in my father's garden. The Voice came from the right hand, from where the church stands, and when it came I usually saw a great light on the side from which it spoke. The Voice told me to be a good girl and go to church, and go to save France. I said that I was only a poor girl, who could not ride or lead the soldiers in the wars," but the Voice kept on for years, telling her that she must go.

She not only heard Voices, but she saw shining figures of the Saints in heaven. She never would tell the lawyers much about how the Saints appeared to her, but said, "I saw them as clearly as I see you, and I used to cry when they went away. And I wished that they would take me with them where they went."

These Saints were St. Margaret, St. Catherine, and the Archangel St. Michael. When Joan spoke to her own friends about what she saw and heard they say that "she seemed marvelously happy, lifting her eyes to heaven." This is all that we know about these wonderful things which kept Joan company from the time when she was thirteen to the day of her death, when she was nineteen, advising her about what she was to do for the saving of France. If the Voices had not spoken to her often, she would never have gone to the wars, and for some years she told nobody about the Voices, and stayed at home in her village. Even when she went to the wars, her friends could not persuade her to say more than I have told you about these strange things. She said that she had a "council" which advised her in everything. If there was much noise in a room where she might be, she could not hear the Voices distinctly. Only one person said that he saw angels' faces in her company; none of her friends who knew her best saw or heard anything extraordinary. She very much disliked to speak about the Saints and Voices.

## CHAPTER III. HOW THE MAID OBEYED THE VOICES

TIME went on, and the Dauphin, the rightful Prince of France, was more and more unfortunate. It is true that Henry V., the King of England, died. He was a great soldier, and his son was only a baby, but the war was carried on by the brother of the late King, the Duke of Bedford; by the Earl of Salisbury; by the famous Talbot; by Sir John Fastolf, and many other English generals. The Scots won a great victory over the English at Baugé bridge, where the Duke of Clarence, the brother of Henry V., was killed. But the French and Scots were beaten at Verneuil, where most of the Scots fell fighting bravely. However, a new army came from Scotland, under Stewart of Dam-ley, and still the war went on.

By that time the Dauphin only held France south of the great river Loire. The strongest place which was true to the Dauphin was the town of Orleans. If the English could once take that city, and fill it with provisions, and guns, and other weapons, the French could not hope to win it back again, and the English would overrun the whole of the centre and south of France, and drive the Dauphin out of his own country. He was very poor and very unhappy. He could scarcely pay his bootmaker, and as he was not a good fighting man, he lived here and there idly, at towns south of Orleans, such as Blois and Poitiers. He used to wonder whether he had not better give up the war and go to Spain or Scotland. Another thing made him miserable. He did not know for certain whether he had really the right to be King or not, as many people said that he was not truly the son of the last King of France.

In his distress he prayed, privately and in silence, that he might know whether or not he was the rightful prince, and ought to be crowned and anointed as King. But he told nobody about this, and lived as he best could, wandering from one town to another. Then he heard that his great city of Orleans was being besieged by the English, in the autumn of the year 1428. Orleans lies on the right bank of the river Loire, which here is deep, broad, and swift, with several islands in the middle of the current. The bridge was fortified, on the farther side, by two strong towers, called Les Tourelles, but the English took this fortification, and so the people of Orleans could not cross the river by the bridge, and they broke down an arch, that the English might not cross to them.

One day the English general came to this fort, at the time when the soldiers of both sides dined, to look out of a narrow window, and watch what was going on in the besieged town. Now it happened that a cannon lay, ready loaded, in a niche of the gate tower of Orleans that looked straight along the bridge to the Tourelles. The English general, the Earl of Salisbury, was peeping through the narrow window, thinking himself quite safe, as the French soldiers in Orleans had gone to dinner. But a small French boy went into the gate-tower of Orleans, and seeing a cannon ready loaded, he thought it would be amusing to set a light to the touch-hole. So he got a linstock, as it was called, lighted it, put it to the touch-hole, and fired off the cannon. The bullet went straight into the narrow window out of which the English general was peeping, and he fell back, mortally wounded.

This was a piece of good fortune for the French, but there were plenty of other English generals to take the place of Salisbury. The English built strong fortresses here and there, outside the walls and gates of the town, to prevent help and food and wine and powder from being brought to the besieged French. But the people of Orleans were brave, and were commanded by good officers, such as Dunois, young Xaintrailles. La Hire, a rough, swearing knight, and others who became true friends of Joan of Arc, and food was brought in easily enough.

The English had won so many battles that they despised the French, and so they did not take pains, and besides, they had not men enough to surround Orleans and prevent cattle being driven in from the country. The English seem to have had no more than four thousand soldiers. They were neither strong enough to take the town by storm, nor many enough to surround it and starve the French into showing the white flag, and giving up the place.

In fact, the English had been beating the French just because they believed they could beat them, and thought that one Englishman was as good as three Frenchmen at least. This was nonsense but, under Henry V., at Agincourt, a few English had beaten a great French army, because the French fought foolishly, trying to gallop to the charge over wet, heavy ploughed land, while the English arches shot them down in hundreds. But the French, you will see had learned the English way of fighting on foot, and could have held their own, if they had not lost confidence.

## CHAPTER IV. HOW JOAN HEARD NEWS STRANGELY

JOAN, far away in Domremy, would hear of the danger in which Orleans lay, now and then, and her Voices kept insisting that she *must* go and drive away the English. She used to cry, and say that she would be quite useless, as she could not ride or fight, and people would think her mad, or bad, and laugh at her.

The Voices told her to go to the nearest strong-walled French town, Vaucouleurs, and ask the commander there, Robert de Baudricourt, to send her to the Dauphin, who was then far away, at Chinon, a castle on the Loire, south of Orleans. When she saw the King, she was to tell him that she had come to save France.

This seemed quite a mad proposal. Baudricourt was a greet, rough, sensible soldier, and how could Joan go to him with a message of this kind? He would merely laugh at the sunburned girl in her short red kirtle – a girl who, probably, had never spoken to a gentleman before.

Perhaps this was the hardest part of Joan's duty, for she was modest, and she was very quick to notice anything absurd and ridiculous. Now nothing could seem more laughable than the notion that a little country wench of sixteen could teach the French to defeat the English. But there was no help for it. The Voices, and the shining cloud, and the faces of Saints and angels came, several times every week, and a Voice said, "Daughter of God, go on! I will be with you."

Joan had an uncle who lived near Vaucouleurs, and she went to stay with him. It seems that she told him she must go to the Dauphin, and the first thing needful was to get Robert de Baudricourt to lend her a few men-at-arms, who would protect her on her long journey to Chinon. The uncle must have been very much astonished, but it seems that he believed in her, for he took her to Robert. Of course Robert laughed, and told Joan's uncle to take her away, and box her ears. But she came again, and then a priest wanted to exorcise her, that is to frighten the devil out of her, with religious services and holy water, as if she had been "possessed," like people in the New Testament. But Joan was not possessed, and the priest, after trying the holy water, could only say so.

By this time the month of February 1429 had come round. The besieged French in Orleans had now a great misfortune. The season of Lent was coming; that is, a time when they were not allowed to eat beef and mutton, but only fish, and eggs, and vegetables. Now a great number of waggons loaded with herrings were being sent to feed the English who were besieging Orleans. The general of the French in Orleans knew that, and he determined to send out soldiers to attack the English who would be guarding the long line of waggons full of herrings. They would wait for the English on the road, cut them up, and carry the fish into the town for their own use.

So a great many of the Scots and some French slipped out of Orleans by night, and went to a place called Rouvray, on the road by which the herrings were to pass. Here they were to be joined by another small French army, under a general named Clermont. So they reached Rouvray, where they did not find Clermont and his men, but did see the English soldiers far away, marching by the side of the long line of waggons.

Instead of waiting hidden under cover till the English passed, by, and then rushing among them unexpectedly, Stewart of Damley cried, "Charge!" and rode, with his lance in rest at the English front. The Scots were always in too great a hurry to fight. The English saw them, coming, arranged the heavy waggons in a square, and went inside the square, so that the Scots could not get at them. Safe behind their carts, the English archers shot down the Scots, who thought bows and arrows rather mean weapons, and wanted to cut down their enemies with the sword. But they could not reach the English; they fell in piles of slain men round the square, and Clermont, the French general who was to have joined them, would not fight, and took away his army. So very many brave Scots were killed, with Stewart of Darnley at their head, and the rest retreated sadly to Orleans, where they heard the English hurraing in their camp.

This was called the battle of Rouvray, or the battle of the Herrings. It was fought on February 12, 1429. Now, on February 12, Joan went to Baudricourt, and told him that a terrible misfortune had happened that day to the army of the Dauphin, near Orleans. The news could not possibly reach Vaucouleurs for several days, for the distance between Vaucouleurs and Orleans is great, and the roads were dangerous, and might be beset by English soldiers and by robbers, who would stop messengers. Joan had been told of the defeat by her Voices.

At last, however, the bad news did come. Joan had been right, the French and Scots had been defeated on the day when she told Baudricourt of it, February 12.

So Baudricourt saw there was something uncommon in this country girl, who knew what was happening far away, and he lent her two young gentlemen and a few men-at-arms to guide her and guard her on her way to the Dauphin. Somebody gave her a horse, which, to the surprise of all men, she rode very well. She had her long black hair cut short and close, as soldiers wore it; she dressed in a grey doublet and black hose, like a boy (she wore this kind of dress till the end of her life); and then she rode through the gate of Vaucouleurs which is still standing, and away to seek the Dauphin. This was on February 23, 1429.

After riding for several days, Joan and her company reached a little town called Fierbois, near Chinon. Here was the chapel dedicated to St. Catherine of Fierbois, who was a favourite Saint of the French and Scots soldiers, and of Joan. In the chapel was a book in which the miracles of the Saint were written down. At this very time a Scottish archer, Michael Hamilton, from Shotts, was caught by some country people, and was hanged by them. During the night a voice came to the priest of the village, saying, "Go and cut down that Scot who was hanged, for he is not dead." However, the priest was sleepy, and he did not go. Next day was Easter Day, and the priest went to church and did the services. After that, he thought he might as well see about the Scot who was hanging from a tree, and seemed quite dead. To make certain, the priest took his penknife, and cut the dead man's toe. On this the man gave a kick, so the priest cut the rope, and took good care of Michael Hamilton. When he was able to ride, Michael went to this chapel of Fierbois, and took his oath that he had prayed to St. Catherine before he was hanged up, and now he came to thank her for his escape at her chapel. The book of the chapel is full of these strange stories, and probably some of them were read aloud to Joan, who could not read, and said that she "did not know A from B." She attended three Masses at Fierbois, and got some learned clerk to write a letter to the King, to say that she was coming. She also had a letter written to her father and mother, asking them to pardon her for going away without their permission. Her father she was to see once more, her mother she never saw again.

As to Michael Hamilton, you may believe his story or not, as you like. Many of the other stories told in the chapel book by Scots soldiers, and French men and women, are just as curious. I only know that the people made long journeys to thank Madame Saint Catherine in her church at Fierbois, and that their stories were written down in the book there.

## CHAPTER V. HOW THE MAID SAW THE DAUPHIN

WHEN Joan reached Chinon, she was lodged with a lady who was very kind, and she waited to see the Dauphin. His advisers were not sure that he ought to see the Maid at all; but probably he was curious, and at last she was brought to the castle, and led up the stairs to a great hall, where were many men in splendid dresses. The castle is in ruins now, and the hall has no roof over it, but you can still go in and see the walls, and empty windows, and the great fireplace. A man plainly dressed was in the crowd of magnificent courtiers in silk and gold embroidery. Joan went straight up, and kneeling on one knee, said, "Fair Sir, you are the Dauphin to whom I am come." But the man pointed to a knight, very richly dressed, and said, "That is the King."

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