

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE EXECUTIONER'S
KNIFE; OR, JOAN OF ARC

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Eugène Sue

The Executioner's Knife; Or, Joan of Arc

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Whether one will be satisfied with nothing but a scientific diagnosis in psychology, or a less ponderous and infinitely more lyric presentation of certain mental phenomena will do for him; whether the student of history insist on strict chronology, or whether he prize at its true value the meat and coloring of history; whether a reader prefer in matters canonical the rigid presentation of dogma, or whether the tragic fruits of theocracy offer a more attractive starting point for his contemplation; – whichever the case might be, *The Executioner's Knife; or, Joan of Arc* will gratify his intellectual cravings on all the three heads.

This, the fifteenth story of the series of Eugene Sue's matchless historic novels entitled *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*, presents the picture of the Fifteenth Century – a historic elevation climbed up to from the hills of the era sketched in the preceding story, *The Iron Trevet; or Jocelyn the Champion*, and from which, in turn, the outlines become vaguely visible of the critically historic era that forms the subject of the next story, *The Pocket Bible; or, Christian the Printer*.

As in all the stories of this stupendous series bestowed by the genius of Sue upon posterity, the leading characters are historic, the leading events are historic, and the coloring is true to history. How true to the facts are the historic revelations made by the author in this series, and how historically true are the conclusions he draws, as they rise in relief on the canvas of these novels, appears with peculiar conspicuousness in *The Executioner's Knife; or, Joan of Arc*, above all in this century, when the science of history has remodeled its theory, and, instead of, as in former days, basing man's acts upon impulse, has learned to plant impulse upon material facts.

In the pages of this story the central figure is the charming one generally known to history as the Maid of Orleans. If ever there was in the annals of man a figure that superstitious mysticism combined with grovelling interests to annihilate, it was the figure of the pure-minded, self-sacrificing, intrepid shepherdess of Domremy. Even the genius of a Voltaire succumbed. In righteous revolt against man-degrading superstition, his satire "La Pucelle" in fact contributed, by the slur it placed upon Joan, to vindicate the very lay and prelatical interests he fought, and whose predecessors dragged her name through the ditch and had consigned her body to the flames. Harried by the political interests whom her integrity of purpose menaced and actually thwarted; insulted and put to death by the allies of these, ambushed behind religion; the successors of both elements perpetuating the wrong with false history; and even the enlightened contributing their sneers out of just repugnance for supernaturalism; – all this notwithstanding, the figure of Joan triumphed. Even the head of the prelatic political machine, which had presumed to speak in the name of the Deity with Anathema over Joan's head, has felt constrained to fall in line with the awakened popular knowledge. The Papal beatification of Joan of Arc in this century is a public retraction and apology to the heroine born from the lowly.

Of the many works of art – poetic, dramatic, pictorial – that have contributed to this conspicuous "reversal of judgment" Sue's *The Executioner's Knife; or, Joan of Arc* has been the most powerful. The pathetic story cleanses Joan of the miraculous, uncovers the grovelling influences she had to contend against, exposes the sordid ambitions she had to overcome and that finally slaked their vengeance in her blood. The master's hand weaves together and draws, in the garb of fiction, a picture that is monumental – at once as a work of science, of history and of art.

DANIEL DE LEON.

Milford, Conn., October, 1909.

PART I

DOMREMY

CHAPTER I

JEANNETTE

Domremy is a frontier village of Lorraine that cosily nestles on the slope of a fertile valley whose pasture grounds are watered by the Meuse. An oak forest, that still preserves some mementoes of druid tradition, reaches out almost to the village church. This church is the handsomest of all in the valley, which begins at Vaucouleurs and ends at Domremy. St. Catherine and St. Marguerite, superbly painted and gilded, ornament the sanctuary. St. Michael, the Archangel, with his sword in one hand and the scales in the other, glistens from the depths of a dark recess in the chapel. Happy is the valley that begins at Vaucouleurs and ends at Domremy! A royal seigniory, lost on the confines of Gaul, it has not yet suffered from the disasters of war that for more than a half century have been desolating the center of the country. Its inhabitants, profiting by the civil broils of their sovereign and his distance from them, being separated from his main domains by Champagne, which had fallen into the power of the English, had emancipated themselves from serfdom.

James Darc, a member of a family that had long been serfs of the Abbey of St. Remy, and subsequently of the Sire of Joinville before the fief of Vaucouleurs was consolidated with the royal domain, an honest laborer, stern head of his household and rather rude of manners, lived by the cultivation of the fields. His wife was called Isabelle Romée; his eldest son, Peter; the second, John; and his daughter, born on "the day of Kings" in 1412, was named Jeannette. At the time when this narrative commences, Jeannette was a little over thirteen years of age. She was of pleasant appearance, a sweet and pious child and endowed with precocious intelligence. Her disposition was serious for her age. This notwithstanding, she joined in the games of other girls, her friends, and never gloried in her own superior agility when, as usually happened, she won in the races. She could neither read nor write. Active and industrious, she helped her mother in the household, led the sheep to pasture and was skilful with the needle and at the distaff. Often pensive, when alone in secluded spots of the woods she watched over her flock, she found an inexpressible delight in listening to the distant sound of the church bells, to the point that at times she made little presents of fruits or skeins of wool to the parish clerk of Domremy, joining to the gifts the gentle request that he prolong a little the chimes of the vespers or of the Angelus.¹ Jeannette also took delight in leading her sheep in the ancient forest of oaks, known as the "Bois Chesnu",² towards a limpid spring shaded by a beech tree that was between two and three hundred years old and which was known in the region as the "Fairies' Tree". The legend had it that the priests of the old gods of Gaul sometimes appeared, dressed in their long white robes, under the dark vaults of the oaks of this forest, and that often little fairies approached the fountain by moonlight to see their reflection in its waters.

Jeannette did not fear the fairies, knowing that a single sign of the cross would put any malignant sprite to flight. She entertained a special spirit of devotion for St. Marguerite and St. Catherine, the two beautiful saints of the parish. When, on feast days, she accompanied her venerated parents to divine service, she was never tired of contemplating and admiring the good saints, who were at once smiling and majestic under their golden crowns. Likewise did St. Michael attract her attention. But the

¹ *Trial and Condemnation, and Proceedings of the Rehabilitation of Joan of Arc, known as The Maid*, by Jules Quicherat, after the manuscripts in the Royal Library; vol. I, p. 39.

² The same.

severity of the archangel's face and his flaming sword somewhat intimidated the young shepherdess, while, on the contrary, her dear saints inspired her with ineffable confidence.

Jeannette's god-mother was Sybille, an old woman, originally from Brittany, and a washerwoman by occupation. Sybille knew a mass of marvelous legends; and she spoke familiarly about the fairies, genii and other supernatural beings. Some people took her for a witch;³ but her good heart, her piety and upright life in no way justified the suspicion. Jeannette, of whom her god-mother was very fond, drank in with avidity the legends narrated by the latter when they met on the way to the "Fountain of the Fairies" whither the former frequently took her sheep to water while her god-mother spun her hemp on the banks of a nearby stream. The narratives of her god-mother of the miraculous doings of the fairies and genii impressed themselves profoundly on the imaginative spirit of Jeannette, who grew ever more serious and pensive as she approached her fourteenth year. She was frequently subject to a vague sense of sadness. Often, when alone in the woods or on the meadows, the distant sounds of the church bells, that she so much loved to hear, struck her ears, and she would weep without knowing why. The involuntary tears comforted her. But her nights grew restless. She no longer slept peacefully as is the wont of rustic children after their wholesome labors. She dreamed much; and her visions would raise before her the spirits of the legends of her god-mother or present to her St. Marguerite and St. Catherine smiling tenderly upon her.

³ *Trial of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 40.

CHAPTER II

GILLON THE FURTIVE

On a brilliant summer day the sun was westering behind the Castle of Ile, a small fortress raised between the two arms of the Meuse at a considerable distance from Domremy. James Darc inhabited a house near the church, the garden of which bordered on that of his own habitation. The laborer's family, gathered before the door of their lodging, were enjoying the coolness of the evening; some were seated on a bench and others on the floor. James Darc, a robust man of severe countenance, spare of face and grey of hair, was in the group resting from his day's labor; his wife, Isabelle, spun; Jeannette was sewing. Large and strong for her age, lissom and well proportioned, her hair was black, as were also her large brilliant eyes. The ensemble of her features made promise of a virile and yet tender beauty.⁴ She wore, after the fashion of Lorraine, a skirt of coarse scarlet fabric, with a corsage that, looped over her shoulders, allowed the short sleeves of her skirt to escape at her upper arms, the rest of which remained bare and were well built and slightly tanned by the sun.

Darc's family were listening to the account of a stranger dressed in a brown coat, shod in tall and spurred boots, holding a whip in his hands and carrying on his shoulder a tin box held by a leather strap. The stranger, Gillon the Furtive, was in the habit of traversing long distances on horseback in the capacity of "flying messenger", carrying the correspondence of important personages. He had just returned from one of these errands to the Duke of Lorraine and was going back to Charles VII, who then resided at Bourges. While crossing Domremy, Gillon the Furtive had asked James Darc to direct him to some inn where he could sup and feed his horse.

"Share my meal; my sons will take your horse to the stable," the hospitable laborer answered the messenger. The offer being accepted, supper was taken and the stranger, desirous to pay his reckoning in his own way by giving the latest news of France to the family of Darc, reported how the English, masters of Paris and of almost all the provinces, governed despotically, terrorizing the inhabitants by their continuous acts of violence and rapine; how the King of England, still a boy and under the guardianship of the Duke of Bedford, had inherited the crown of France; while poor Charles VII, the King by right, deserted by almost all his seigneurs and relegated to Touraine, the last shred of his domains, did not even entertain the hope of ever being able to redeem those provinces from the domination of the English. Being a court messenger and therefore, naturally, a royalist of the Armagnac party, Gillon the Furtive professed, after the fashion of inferior courtiers, a sort of stupid, false, blind and grovelling adoration for Charles VII. That young prince, unnerved by his early debaucheries, selfish, greedy, envious and, above all, cowardly, never appeared at the head of the troops still left to him; and consoled himself for their defeats and his disgrace by drinking deep and singing with his mistresses. In his royalist fervor, however, Gillon the Furtive forgot his master's vices and saw only his misfortunes.

"Poor young King! It is a pity to see what he has to endure!" said the messenger at the close of his report. "His accursed mother, Isabelle of Bavaria, is the cause of it all. Her misconduct with the Duke of Orleans and her hatred for the Duke of Burgundy have brought on the frightful feud between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs. The English, already masters of several of our provinces since the battle of Poitiers, easily took possession of almost all France, torn in factions as the country was. They now impose upon the country an intolerable yoke, sack and burn it right and left and butcher its people. Finally, the Duke of Bedford, tutor of a king in his cradle, reigns in the place of our gentle Dauphin! A curse upon Isabelle of Bavaria! That woman was the ruin of the kingdom. We are no longer French. We are English!"

⁴ *Trial of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 74.

"God be praised! We, at least," said James Darc, "still remain French, all of us in this valley. We have not experienced the disasters that you describe, friend messenger. You say that Charles VII, our young prince, is a worthy sire?"

"Just heaven!" cried Gillon the Furtive, a flatterer and liar, like all court valets, "Charles VII is an angel! All who approach him admire him, revere and bless him! He has the meekness of a lamb, the beauty of a swan and the courage of a lion!"

"The courage of a lion!" exclaimed James Darc with admiration. "Then our young Sire has fought bravely?"

"If he had had his will he would by this time have been killed at the head of the troops that have remained faithful," promptly answered Gillon the Furtive, puffing out his cheeks. "But the life of our august master is so precious that the seigneurs of his family and council were bound to oppose his risking his precious days in a fashion that I shall be bold to call – uselessly heroic. The soldiers who still follow the royal banners are completely discouraged by the defeats that they have sustained. The larger number of bishops and seigneurs have declared themselves for the party of the Burgundians and the English; everybody is deserting our young Sire; and soon perhaps, forced to abandon France, he will not find in the whole kingdom of his fathers a place to rest his head! Oh, accursed, triply accursed be his wicked mother, Isabella of Bavaria!"

With nightfall Gillon the Furtive thanked the laborer of Domremy for his hospitality, mounted his horse and pursued his route. After mutually expressing their sorrow at the fate of the young King, the family of Darc joined in evening prayer and its members retired to sleep.

CHAPTER III

AT THE FOUNTAIN OF THE FAIRIES

That night Jeannette slept late and little. Silent and attentive during the messenger's narrative, she had then for the first time heard imprecations uttered at the ravages of the English, and about the misfortunes of the gentle Dauphin of France.

James Darc, his wife and sons continued long after the departure of Gillon the Furtive to lament the public calamities. Vassals of the King, they loved him; and they served him all the more seeing they knew him less and in no wise felt his feudal overlordship, having emancipated themselves with the aid of the distance that separated them from him and from the troubles that had fallen upon him. They were worthy but credulous people.

Children usually are the echoes of their parents. Accordingly, following the example of her father and mother, Jeannette, in her naïve and tender credulity, pitied with all her heart the young prince who was so beautiful, so brave and yet so unfortunate only through the fault of his wicked mother. "Oh," thought she, "he is almost without a place to rest his head, deserted by everybody, and soon will be forced to flee from the kingdom of his ancestors!" So the messenger had said.

Jeannette, who lately was subject to causeless spells of weeping, now wept over the misfortunes of the King; and fell asleep praying to her dear saints Marguerite and Catherine and to the archangel Michael to intercede with the Lord in behalf of the poor young prince. These thoughts followed the little shepherdess even in her dreams, bizarre dreams, in which she now would see the Dauphin of France, beautiful as an angel, smiling upon her with sadness and kindness; and then again hordes of armed Englishmen, armed with torches and swords, marching, marching and leaving behind them a long trail of blood and flames.

Jeannette awoke, but her imagination being strongly affected by the remembrance of her dreams, she could not keep her mind from ever returning to the gentle Dauphin and being greatly moved with pity for him. At early daylight she gathered her lambs, that every morning she took to pasture, and led them towards the oak forest where the shade was cool and the grass dotted with flowers. While her sheep were pasturing Jeannette sat down near the Fountain of the Fairies, shaded by the centennarian beech tree; and mechanically she plied her distaff.

Jeannette had not been long absorbed in her reverie when she was joined by her god-mother, Sybille, who arrived carrying on her shoulder a large bundle of hemp that she wished to lay in the streamlet, formed by the overflow of the spring, in order to have it retted. Although simple minded people took Sybille for a witch, nothing in her features recalled those usually ascribed to old women possessed of the evil spirit – hooked nose and chin, cavernous eyes and an owlish aspect. No, far from it, nothing could be more venerable than Sybille's pale face framed in her white hair. Her eyes shone with concentrated fire when she narrated the legends of the olden times or recited the heroic chants of Armorica, as her native Brittany was once called. Without at all believing in magic, Sybille had a profound faith in certain prophecies made by the ancient Gallic bards. Faithful to the druidic creed of her fathers, Jeannette's god-mother held that man never dies, but continues to live eternally, body and soul, in the stars, new and mysterious worlds. Nevertheless, respecting her god-daughter's religious views, Sybille never sought to throw doubt upon the faith of the child. She loved the child tenderly and was ever ready to tell her some legend that Jeannette would listen to in rapt attention. Thus there was developed in the young shepherdess a contemplative and reflecting spirit that was unusual in one of her years, and that was no less striking than the precociousness of her intellect. She was prepared for a mystic role.

Jeannette continued, mechanically, to ply her distaff while her eyes, with an absent minded look in them, followed her sheep. She neither saw nor heard Sybille approach. The latter, after having laid her hemp in the streamlet and placed a stone on it to keep it in place, approached Jeannette

slowly and impressed a kiss upon the bowed neck of the young girl, who uttered a startled cry and said smilingly, "Oh god-mother, you frightened me so!"

"And yet you are not timid! You were braver the other day than I should have been when you stoned the large viper to death. What were you thinking about just now?"

"Oh, I was thinking that the Dauphin, our dear Sire, who is so gentle, so beautiful, so brave and yet so unfortunate through the fault of his mother, may, perhaps, be forced to leave France!"

"Who told you that?"

"A messenger, who stopped yesterday at our house. He told us of the harm the English are doing the country whence he came; and also of the troubles of our young Sire. Oh, god-mother, I felt as grieved for him as if he were my own brother. I could not help crying before falling asleep. Oh, the messenger repeated it over and over again that the mother of the young prince is to blame for all of his sufferings; and that that bad woman had lost Gaul."

"Did the messenger say all that?" asked Sybille, thrilling at a sudden recollection, "did he say that a woman had lost Gaul?"

"Yes, he did. And he told how, through her fault, the English are heaping sorrows upon the country people. They pillage them, kill them and burn down their houses. They have no mercy for women or children. They drive away the peasants' cattle" – and Jeannette cast an uneasy glance upon her woolly flock. "Oh, god-mother, my heart bled at the messenger's report of our young King's sufferings and at the trials of the poor folks of those regions. To think that one bad woman could cause so much harm!"

"A woman caused the harm," said Sybille, raising her head with a faraway look in her eyes, "a woman will redress it."

"How can that be?"

"A woman lost Gaul," resumed Sybille, more and more dreamily, with her eyes resting on space, "a young girl shall save Gaul. Is the prophecy about to be fulfilled? Praise be to God!"

"What prophecy, god-mother?"

"The prophecy of Merlin, the famous enchanter. Merlin, the bard of Brittany."

"And when did he make the prophecy?"

"More than a thousand years ago."

"More than a thousand years! Was Merlin then a saint, god-mother? He must have been a great saint!"

Absorbed in her own thoughts, Sybille did not seem to hear the young shepherdess's question. With her eyes still gazing afar, she murmured slowly the old chant of Armorica:

"Merlin, Merlin, whither this morning with your black dog?
'I come here to look for the egg that is red and laid by the serpent that
lives in the sea.
I come here to look for the cress that is green and the herb that is golden
which grow in the valley,
And the branch of the oak that is stately, in the woods on the banks
of the fountain.'"⁵

"The branch of the oak that is stately – in the woods – on the banks of the fountain?" repeated Jeannette, questioningly, looking above and around her, as though struck both by the words and the significant expression on Sybille's face. "It looks like this spot, god-mother, it looks like this spot!" But noticing that the old Breton woman did not listen to her and was seemingly lost in contemplation,

⁵ *Song of Merlin the Enchanter*, in Villemarqué, *Popular Songs of Brittany*, vol. I, p. 219.

she laid her hand upon her arm and said, insistently, "God-mother, who is that Merlin of whom you speak? Answer me, dear god-mother!"

"He was a Gallic bard whose chants are still sung in my country," answered Sybille, awaking from her revery; "he is spoken of in our oldest legends."

"Oh, god-mother, tell me one of them, if you please. I love so much to hear your beautiful legends. I often dream of them!"

"Very well, you shall be pleased, dear child. I shall tell you the legend of a peasant who wed the daughter of the King of Brittany."

"Is it possible! A peasant wed a king's daughter?"

"Yes, and thanks to Merlin's harp and ring."

CHAPTER IV THE HARP OF MERLIN

Sybille seemed to be in a trance. "The legend," she said, "that I shall tell you is called *The Harp of Merlin*;" and she proceeded to recite in a rhythmic cadence:

"My poor grandmother, Oh, I wish to attend
The feast that the King doth give.'
'No, Alain, to this feast shall you not go:
Last night you wept in your dream.'
'Dear little mother, if truly you love me,
Let me this feast attend.'
'No, you will sing when you go;
When you come back you'll weep.'
But despite his grandmother, Alain did go."

"It was wrong in him to disobey," Jeannette could not help saying, while she listened with avidity to her god-mother's recital; "it was wrong in him to disobey!"
Sybille kissed Jeannette on the forehead and proceeded:

"Alain equipped his black colt,
Shod it well with polished steel,
Placed a ring on its neck, a bow on its tail,
And arrived at the feast.
Upon his arrival the trumpets were sounded:
'Whoever shall clear at one bound,
Clear and free, the barrier around the fair grounds,
His shall the King's daughter be.'"

"The King's daughter! Can it be!" repeated the little shepherdess wonderingly, and, dropping her distaff, she pressed her hands together in ecstasy.
Sybille proceeded:

"Hearing these words of the crier,
The black colt of Alain neighed loud and long;
He leaped and ran, his nostrils shot fire,
His eyes emitted flashes of lightning; he distanced all other horses,
And cleared the barrier with a leap neat and clean.
'Sire,' said Alain, addressing the King,
'You swore it; your daughter, Linor, must now be mine.'
'Not thine, nor of such as you can ever she be —
Yours is not our race.'"

"The King had promised and sworn," cried Jeannette, "did he fail in his word? Oh, the lovely Dauphin, our Sire, he would never break his word! Would he, god-mother?"
Sybille shook her head sadly and continued:

"An old man stood by the King,

An old man with long white beard,
Whiter than is the wool on the bush of the heather;
His robe was laced with gold from top to bottom.
He spoke to the King in a low voice;
And the latter, after he had heard what the old man said,
Struck three times on the ground with his scepter
To order silence,
And said to Alain:

"If you bring me the harp of Merlin,
That hangs at the head of his bed from three chains of gold;
Yes, if you can loosen that harp and bring it to me,
You shall have my daughter,
Perhaps."

"And where was that harp, god-mother?" asked Jeannette, more and more interested in the legend. "What must he do to get it?"

"My poor grandmother,'
Said Alain when he returned to the house,
'If truly you love me you'll help and advise me.
My heart is broken! My heart is broken!'
'Bad boy, had you but listened to me,
Had you not gone to that feast,
Your heart would not be broken.
But come, do not cry. The harp shall be loosened.
Here's a hammer of gold;
Now go.'

"Alain returned to the King's palace, saying:
'Good luck and joy! Here am I,
And I bring the harp of Merlin' – "

"Then he succeeded in getting the harp?" Jeannette asked in amazement. "But where and how did he do it, god-mother?"

Sybille, with a mysterious look, placed her finger to her lips in token of silence:

"I bring here the harp of Merlin,' said Alain to the King;
'Sire, your daughter, Linor, must now be mine.
You promised me so.'
When the King's son heard this, he made a wry face
And spoke to his father, the King, in a low voice.
The King, having listened, then said to Alain:
'If you fetch me the ring
From the finger of Merlin's right hand,
Then you shall have my daughter, Linor.'"

"Oh, god-mother, twice to fail in his promise! Oh, that was wrong on the part of the King! What is to become of poor Alain?"

"Alain returns all in tears,
And seeks his grandmother in great haste.
'Oh, grandmother, the King had said —
And now he gainsays himself!'
'Do not grieve so, dear child!
Take a twiglet you'll find in my chest,
On which twelve leaves you'll see —
Twelve leaves as yellow as gold,
And that I looked for se'en nights
In se'en woods, now se'en years ago.'"

"What were those gold leaves, god-mother? Did the angels or the saints give them to the grandmother?"

Sybille shook her head negatively and proceeded:

"When at midnight the chanticleer crowed,
The black colt of Alain awaited his master
Just outside the door.
'Fear not, my dear little grandson,
Merlin will not awake;
You have my twelve leaves of gold.
Go quickly.'
The chanticleer had not yet done with his chant
When the black colt was galloping swiftly over the road.
The chanticleer had not yet done with his chant
When the ring of Merlin was taken away — "

"And this time Alain married the King's daughter, did he not, god-mother?"

"At break of dawn was Alain at the King's palace,
Presenting him with Merlin's ring.
Stupefied the King did stand;
And all who stood near him declared:
'Lo, how, after all, this young peasant
Won the daughter of our Sire!'
'It is true,' the King to Alain did say,
'But still there is one thing I now ask of you,
And it will be the last. Do you that,
And my daughter you'll have,
And with her the glorious kingdom of Leon.'
'What must I do, Sire?'
'To my court bring Merlin,
Your wedding to sing with my daughter Linor.'"

"My God!" interrupted the little shepherdess, more and more carried away with the marvelousness of the story, "how will it end?"

"While Alain was at the King's palace,

His grandmother saw Merlin go by;
Merlin the Enchanter went by her house.
'Whence, Merlin, come you with your clothes all in rags
Whither thus bare-headed and bare-footed go you?
Whither, old Merlin, with your holly staff go you?'
'Alack! Alack! I'm looking for my harp,
My heart's only solace in all this broad world.
I'm looking for my harp and also for my ring,
Which both I lost, or they have been stolen from me.'

""Merlin, Merlin, do not grieve!
Your harp is not lost, and neither is your ring.
Walk in, Merlin, walk in,
Take rest and food.'
'I shall neither eat nor rest in this world
Till I've recovered my harp and my ring.
They have not been stolen, I've lost them, the two.'
'Merlin, walk in, your harp will be found. —
Merlin, walk in, your ring will be found.'
So hard the grandmother begged
That Merlin entered her hut.

"When in the evening Alain returned to his house,
He trembled with a great fear when,
On casting his eyes towards the hearth,
He there saw Merlin the Enchanter,
Who was seated, his head on his breast reclining.
Alain knew not whither to flee.

""Fear not, my lad, fear not.
Merlin sleeps a slumber profound.
He has eaten three apples, three red ones,
Which I in the embers have baked.
Now he'll follow wherever we go.
We'll lead him towards the palace
Of our Sire, the King!""

"And did Merlin go, god-mother?"

""What has happened in town, that I hear such a noise?"
Said the next day the Queen to the servant;
'What has happened at court, that the crowd
Are cheering so joyfully?'
'Madam, the whole town is having a feast.
Merlin is entering the town with an old,
A very old woman, dressed in white,
The grandmother she of the lad who is your daughter to marry.
Aye, Madam the Queen.'

"And the wedding took place.
Alain espoused Linor. Merlin chanted the nuptials.
There were a hundred white robes for the priests,
A hundred gold chains for the knights,
A hundred festal blue mantles for the dames,
And eight hundred hose for the poor.
And all left satisfied.
Alain left for the country of Leon
With his wife, his grandmother, and a numerous suite. —
But Merlin alone disappeared. Merlin was lost.
No one knows what of him is become.
No one knows when Merlin will return."⁶

⁶ Villemarqué, *Popular Songs of Brittany*, vol. I, p. 219.

CHAPTER V

THE PROPHECY OF MERLIN

Jeannette had listened to Sybille in rapt attention, struck above all by the singular circumstance of a peasant marrying the daughter of a king. From that moment Jeannette pardoned herself for having so often, since the previous evening, permitted her thoughts to turn to that young Sire, so sweet, so beautiful, so brave and yet so unfortunate through his mother's misconduct and the cruelty of the English.

When Sybille's recital was ended, a short silence ensued which was broken by Jeannette:

"Oh, god-mother, what a beautiful legend! It would be still more beautiful if, the Sire of Leon having to fight so cruel an enemy as the English, Alain, the peasant, had saved the King before wedding his daughter! But what did become of Merlin, the great enchanter Merlin?"

"It is said that he must sleep a thousand years. But before he fell asleep he prophesied that the harm a woman would do to Gaul would be redressed by a young girl, a young girl of this region – "

"This region in which we live, god-mother?"

"Yes, of the borders of Lorraine; and that she would be born near a large oak forest."

Jeannette clasped her hands in astonishment and she looked at Sybille in silence, revolving in her mind the prophecy of Merlin that France was to be saved by a young girl of Lorraine, perchance of Domremy! Was not the emancipatrix to come from an old oak forest? Was not the village of Domremy situated close to a forest of centennarian oaks?

"What! God-mother," Jeannette inquired, "can that be true – did Merlin make that prophecy?"

"Yes," answered Sybille, thinking that surely the time had come when the prophecy of the Gallic bard was to be fulfilled, "yes, more than a thousand years ago Merlin so prophesied."

"How did he do it, god-mother?"

Sybille leaned her forehead on her hand, collected herself, and in a low voice, speaking slowly, she imparted to her god-daughter the mysterious prophecy in the following words, to which the child listened with religious absorption:

"When down goes the sun and the moon shines, I sing.
Young, I sang – become old still I sing.
People look for me, but they find me not.
People will cease looking for, and then will they find me.
It matters little what may happen —
What must be shall be!

"I see Gaul lost by a woman. I see Gaul saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of oaks.
I see at the borders of Lorraine a thick forest of oaks
Where, near a clear fountain, grows the divine druid herb,
Which the druid cuts with a sickle of gold.
I see an angel with wings of azure and dazzling with light.
He holds in his hands a royal crown.
I see a steed of battle as white as snow —

⁷ The citation is literal. Denis Laxart, uncle to Jeannette, testified to having heard her say: "Has it not been long prophesied that France, desolated by a woman, would be restored by a woman?" (*Proceedings of the Rehabilitation of Joan of Arc*, edited by Jules Quicherat, vol. II, p. 444.) The wife of Henry Rolhaire also deposed and said: "Jeannette asked: 'Have you not heard it said that France, lost by a woman, would be saved by a virgin of the marches (borders) of Lorraine, born near an oak forest?'" (The same, p. 447.)

I see an armor of battle as brilliant as silver. —
For whom is that crown, that steed, that armor?
Gaul, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of oaks. —
For whom that crown, that steed, that armor?
Oh, how much blood!
It spouts up, it flows in torrents!
It steams; its vapor rises – rises like an autumn mist to heaven,
Where the thunder peals and where the lightning flashes.
Athwart those peals of thunder, those flashes of lightning,
That crimson mist, I see a martial virgin.
She battles, she battles – she battles still in a forest of lances!
She seems to be riding on the backs of the archers.⁸
The white steed, as white as snow, was for the martial virgin!
For her was the armor of battle as brilliant as silver.
She is surrounded by an escort.
But for whom the royal crown?
Gaul, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of oaks.
For the martial maid the steed and the armor!
But for whom the royal crown?
The angel with wings of azure holds it in his hands.
The blood has ceased to run in torrents,
The thunder to peal, and the lightning to flash.
The warriors are at rest.
I see a serene sky. The banners float;
The clarions sound; the bells ring.
Cries of joy! Chants of victory!
The martial virgin receives the crown
From the hands of the angel of light.
A man on his knees, wearing a long mantle of ermine,
Is crowned by the warrior virgin.
Who is the virgin's elect?

"It matters little what may happen.
What must be shall be!
Gaul, lost by a woman,
Is saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of oaks.
The prophecy is in the Book of Destiny."

Hanging upon the lips of Sybille, Jeannette never once interrupted her as she listened to the mysterious prophecy with waxing emotion. Her active, impressionable imagination pictured to her mind's eye the virgin of Lorraine clad in her white armor, mounted on her white courser, battling in the midst of a forest of lances, and, in the words of the prophetic chant, "riding on the backs of the archers." And after that, the war being ended and the foreigner vanquished, the angel of light –

⁸ "*Descendet virgo dorsum sagittarii*. Among other writings was found a prophecy of Merlin, speaking in this manner." – Testimony of Matthew Thomassin, given by Quicherat in the *Rehabilitation*, vol. III, p. 15.

no doubt St. Michael, thought the little shepherdess – passed the crown to the warrior maid; who, amidst the blare of trumpets, the ringing of bells and the chants of victory, rendered his crown back to the king. And that king, who else could he be but the lovely Dauphin whose mother had brought on the misfortunes of France? It never yet occurred to the little shepherdess that she, herself, might be the martial virgin prophesied of in the legend. But the heart of the naïve child beat with joy at the thought that the virgin who was to emancipate Gaul was to be a Lorrainian.

"Oh, thanks, god-mother, for having recited this beautiful legend to me!" said Jeannette, throwing herself, with tears in her eyes, on the neck of Sybille. "Morning and noon shall I pray to God and St. Michael soon to fulfil the prophecy of Merlin. The English will then finally be driven from France and our young Sire crowned, thanks to the courage of the young Lorrainian maid from the forest of old oaks! May God grant our prayers!"

"It matters little what may happen. What must be shall be.' The prophecy will be fulfilled."

"And yet," replied the little shepherdess, after reflecting a moment, "think of a young maid riding to battle and commanding armed men like a captain! Is such a thing possible? But God will give her courage!"

"My father knew one time, in my country of Brittany, the wife of the Count of Montfort, who was vanquished and taken prisoner by the King of France. Her name was Jeannette, like yours. Long did she fight valiantly, both on land and on sea, with casque and cuirass. She wished to save the heritage of her son, a three-year-old boy. The sword weighed no more to the arm of the Countess Jeannette than does the distaff to the hands of a girl that spins."

"What a woman, god-mother! What a woman!"

"And there were a good many other martial women, hundreds and hundreds of years ago! They came in vessels from the countries of the North; and they were daring enough to row up the Seine as far even as Paris. They were called the Buckler Maidens. They did not fear the bravest soldier. And who wished to wed them had first to overcome them by force of arms."⁹

"You do not say so! What furious women they must have been!"

"And in still older days, the Breton women of Gaul followed their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers to battle. They assisted at the councils of war; and often fought unto death."

"God-mother, is not the story of Hena that you once told me, a legend of those days?"¹⁰

"Yes, my child."

"Oh, god-mother," replied the enraptured little shepherdess, caressingly, "tell me that legend once more. Hena proved herself as courageous as will be the young Lorrainian maid whose advent Merlin predicts."

"Very well," said Sybille, smiling, "I shall tell you this legend also and shall then return home. My hemp is retting. I shall return for it before evening."

⁹ See "The Iron Arrow Head," the tenth of this series.

¹⁰ Volume one of this series, "The Gold Sickel."

CHAPTER VI THE LEGEND OF HENA

With the enchanted Jeannette for her audience, Sybille proceeded to recite the legend of Hena:

"She was young, she was fair,
And holy was she.
To Hesus her blood gave
For Gaul to be free.
Hena her name!
Hena, the Maid of the Island of Sen!

"Blessed be the gods, my sweet daughter,'
Said her father Joel,
The brenn of the tribe of Karnak.
'Blessed be the gods, my sweet daughter,
Since you are home this night
To celebrate the day of your birth!'

"Blessed be the gods, my sweet girl,'
Said Margarid, her mother.
'Blessed be your coming!
But why is your face so sad?'

"My face is sad, my good mother,
My face is sad, my good father,
Because Hena your daughter
Comes to bid you Adieu,
Till we meet again.'

"And where are you going, my sweet daughter?
Will your journey, then, be long?
Whither thus are you going?'

"I go to those worlds
So mysterious, above,
That no one yet knows,
But that all will yet know.
Where living ne'er traveled,
Where all will yet travel,
To live there again
With those we have loved."

"And those worlds," asked Jeannette, "are they the paradise where the angels and the saints of the good God are? Are they, god-mother?"

Sybille shook her head doubtfully, without answering, and continued the recital of her legend:

"Hearing Hena speak these words,

Sadly gazed upon her her father,
And her mother, aye, all the family,
Even the little children,
For Hena loved them very dearly.

"But why, dear daughter,
Why now quit this world,
And travel away beyond
Without the Angel of Death having called you?"

"Good father, good mother,
Hesus is angry.
The stranger now threatens our Gaul, so beloved.
The innocent blood of a virgin
Offered by her to the gods
May their anger well soften.
Adieu then, till we meet again,
Good father, good mother.

"Adieu till we meet again,
All, my dear ones and friends.
These collars preserve, and these rings,
As mementoes of me.
Let me kiss for the last time your blonde heads,
Dear little ones. Good-bye till we meet.
Remember your Hena, she waits for you yonder,
In the worlds yet unknown.'

"Bright is the moon, high is the pyre
Which rises near the sacred stones of Karnak;
Vast is the gathering of the tribes
Which presses 'round the funeral pile.

"Behold her, it is she, it is Hena!
She mounts the pyre, her golden harp in hand,
And singeth thus:

"Take my blood, O Hesus,
And deliver my land from the stranger.
Take my blood, O Hesus.
Pity for Gaul! Victory to our arms!"

"So it flowed, the blood of Hena.
O, holy Virgin, in vain 'twill not have been,
The shedding of your innocent and generous blood.
To arms! To arms!
Let us chase away the stranger!
Victory to our arms!"

The eyes of Jeannette filled anew with tears; and she said to Sybille, when the latter had finished her recital:

"Oh, god-mother, if the good God, his saints and his archangels should ask me: 'Jeannette, which would you prefer to be, Hena or the martial maid of Lorraine who is to drive the wicked English from France and restore his crown to our gentle Dauphin?' – "

"Which would you prefer?"

"I would prefer to be Hena, who, in order to deliver her country, offered her blood to the good God without shedding the blood of any other people! To be obliged to kill so many people before vanquishing the enemy and before crowning our poor young Sire! Oh, god-mother," added Jeannette, shivering, "Merlin said that he saw blood flowing in torrents and steaming like a fog!"

Jeannette broke off and rose precipitately upon hearing, a few steps off in the copse, a great noise mixed with plaintive bleatings. Just then one of her lambs leaped madly out of the bush pursued silently by a large black dog which was snapping viciously at its legs. To drop her distaff, pick up two stones that she armed herself with and throw herself upon the dog was the work of an instant for the child, thoroughly aroused by the danger to one of her pets, while Sybille cried in frightened tones:

"Take care! Take care! The dog that does not bark is mad!"

But the little shepherdess, with eyes afire and face animated, and paying no heed to her god-mother's warning, instead of throwing her stones at the dog from a safe distance, attacked him with them in her hands, striking him with one and the other alternately until he dropped his prey and fled, howling with pain and with great tufts of wool hanging from his jaws, while Jeannette pursued him, picking up more stones and throwing them with unerring aim until the dog had disappeared in the thicket.

When Jeannette returned to Sybille the latter was struck by the intrepid mien of the child. The ribbons on her head having become untied, her hair was left free to tumble down upon her shoulders in long black tresses. Still out of breath from running, she leaned for a moment against the moss-grown rocks near the fountain with her arms hanging down upon her scarlet skirt, when, noticing the lamb that lay bleeding on the ground, still palpitating with fear, the little shepherdess fell to crying. Her anger gave place to intense pity. She dipped up some water at the spring in the hollow of her hands, knelt down beside the lamb, washed its wounds and said in a low voice:

"Our gentle Dauphin is innocent as you, poor lambkin; and those wicked English dogs seek to tear him up."

In the distance the bells of the church of Domremy began their measured chimes. At the sound, of which she was so passionately fond, the little shepherdess cried delightedly:

"Oh, god-mother, the bells, the bells!"

And in a sort of ecstasy, with her lamb pressed to her breast, Jeannette listened to the sonorous vibrations that the morning breeze wafted to the forest of oaks.

CHAPTER VII GERMINATION

Several weeks went by. The prophecy of Merlin, the remembrance of the King's misfortunes and of the disasters of France, ravaged by the English, obstinately crowded upon Jeannette's mind, before whom her parents frequently conversed upon the sad plight of the country. Thus, often during the hours she spent in solitary musings with her flock in the fields or the woods, she repeated in a low voice the passage from the prophecy of the Gallic bard:

"Gaul, lost by a woman, shall be saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of old oaks."

Or that other:

"Oh, how much blood!
It spouts up, it flows in torrents!
It steams and, like a mist, it rises heavenward
Where the thunder peals, where the lightning flashes!
Athwart those peals of thunder, those flashes of lightning,
I see a martial virgin.
White is her steed, white is her armor;
She battles, she battles still in the midst of a forest of lances,
And seems to be riding on the backs of the archers."

Whereupon the angel of dazzling light would place the royal crown in the hands of the martial virgin, who crowned her King in the midst of shouts of joy and chants of victory!

Every day, looking with her mind's eyes towards the borders of Lorraine and failing to see the emancipating virgin, Jeannette beseeched her two good saints – St. Marguerite and St. Catherine – to intercede with the Lord in behalf of the safety of the gentle Dauphin, who had been deprived of his throne. Vainly did she beseech them to obtain the deliverance of poor France, for so many years a prey to the English; and she also fervently implored heaven for the fulfilment of the prophecy of Merlin, a prophecy that seemed plausible to Jeannette's mind after Sybille had told her of the exploits of the martial virgins who came in their ships from the distant seas of the North and besieged Paris; or the prowess of Jeannette of Montfort, battling like a lioness defending her whelps; or, finally, the heroic deeds of the Gallic women of olden days who accompanied their husbands, their brothers and their fathers to battle.

Jeannette was approaching her fourteenth year, an age at which robust and healthy natures, well developed by the invigorating labors of a rustic life, ordinarily enter their period of puberty. In that period of their lives, on the point, so grave for their sex, of becoming maids, they are assailed by unaccountable fears, by a vague sense of sadness, by an imperious demand for solitude where to give a loose rein to languorous reveries, novel sensations at which their chaste instincts take alarm, symptoms of the awakening of the virginal heart, first and shadowy aspirations of the maid for the sweet pleasures and austere duties of the wife and mother – the sacred destinies of woman.

It was not thus with Jeannette. She experienced these mysterious symptoms; but her simplicity misled her as to their cause. Her imagination filled with the marvelous legends of her god-mother, whom she continued to meet almost daily at the Fountain of the Fairies, her spirit ever more impressed by the prophecies of Merlin, although she never identified herself with them, Jeannette imputed, in the chaste ignorance of her soul, the vague sense of sadness that assailed her, her involuntary tears,

her confused aspirations – all precursory symptoms of puberty – to the painful and tender compassion that the misfortunes of Gaul and of her young King inspired her with.

Jeannette Darc was to know but one love, the sacred love of her mother-land.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENGLISH!

"Isabelle," one evening James Darc said to his wife, with a severe air, she and he being left alone near the hearth, "I am not at all satisfied with Jeannette. In a few months she will be fourteen; large and strong though she is for her age, she is becoming lazy. Yesterday I ordered her to draw water from the well to water the vegetables in the garden and I saw her stop a score of times with her hands on the rope and her nose in the air gaping at the eaves of the house. I shall have to shake her rudely out of the sin of laziness."

"James, listen to me. Have you not noticed that for some time our Jeannette is rather pale, has hardly any appetite, is often absent minded; and, moreover, she is more reserved than formerly?"

"I do not complain of her talking little. I do not love gabblers. I complain of her laziness. I wish her to become again industrious as she once was, and active as of old."

"The change that we notice in the girl does not, my friend, proceed from bad will."

"Whence then?"

"Only yesterday, feeling truly alarmed for her health, I questioned Jeannette. She suffered, she said, with violent headaches for some time; her limbs grew stiff without her having done hardly any walking; she could hardly sleep and was at times so dizzy that everything turned around her."

"This morning, as I went to Neufchateau with butter and poultry, I consulted Brother Arsene, the surgeon, on Jeannette's condition."

"And what did Brother Arsene say?"

"Having been told what her ailments were, he asked her age. 'Thirteen and a half, near fourteen,' I answered him. 'Is she strong and otherwise of good health?' 'Yes, brother, she is strong and was always well until these changes came that so much alarm me.' 'Be easy,' was Brother Arsene's final remark, 'be easy, good woman, your "little" daughter will surely soon be a "big" daughter. In a word, she will have "developed." At the approach of that crisis, always grave, young girls grow languishing and dreamy. They experience aches. They become taciturn and seek solitude. Even the most robust become feeble, the most industrious indolent, the gayest sad. That lasts a few months and then they become themselves again. But,' added Brother Arsene, 'you must be careful, under pain of provoking serious accidents, not to cross or scold your daughter at such a period of her life. Strong emotions have been known to check and suppress forever the salutary crisis that nature brings on. In such cases serious, often irreparable harm may follow. There are young girls who, in that manner, have gone wholly insane.' So you see, James, how we shall have to humor Jeannette."

"You have done wisely in consulting Brother Arsene; and I would blame myself for having thought so severely of the child's laziness and absent mindedness were it not that this evening, when she embraced me as usual before retiring, she showed that she no longer minded my words."

"Oh, mercy! On the contrary, I noticed that she was as affectionate toward you as ever –"

Isabelle was suddenly interrupted by violent rapping at the street door.

"Who can that be, knocking at this hour of the night?" said James Darc, rising, as much surprised as his wife at the interruption, to open the door.

The door was hardly ajar when an aged man of venerable and mild appearance, but at that moment pale with fear, hastily dismounted from his horse and cried, breathlessly, "Woe is us! Friend, the English! the English! the country is about to be invaded!"

"Great God! What is it you say, uncle!" exclaimed Isabelle, recognizing Denis Laxart, her mother's brother.

"The French troops have just been routed at the battle of Verneuil. The English, re-inforced in Champagne, are now overflowing into our valley. Look! Look!" said Denis Laxart, drawing Isabelle and James Darc to the threshold of their street door and pointing to the horizon towards the north,

where wide streaks of reddish light went up and accentuated the darkness of the night, "the village of St. Pierre is in flames and the bulk of the troop of these brigands is now besieging Vaucouleurs, whence I managed to flee. One of their bands is raiding the valley, burning and sacking in their passage! Flee! Flee! Pick up whatever valuables you have. The village of St. Pierre is only two leagues from here. The English may be this very night in Domremy. I shall hasten to Neufchateau to join my wife and children who have been there for the last few days visiting a relative. Flee! there is still time. If you do not you may be slaughtered within two hours! Flee!"

Uttering the last word, the distracted Denis Laxart threw himself upon his horse and disappeared at full gallop, leaving James Darc and his wife stupefied and terror stricken. Until now the English never had approached the peaceful valley of the Meuse. James Darc's sons, whom the violent raps given at the door by Denis Laxart had frightened out of their slumbers, hastily slipped on their clothes and rushed into the main room.

"Father, has any misfortune happened? What makes you look so frightened?"

"The English!" answered Isabelle, pale with fear; "we are lost, my dear children! It is done for us!"

"The village of St. Pierre is on fire," cried James Darc. "Look yonder, at the border of the Meuse, towards the Castle of Ile. Look at those tongues of flame! May God help us! Our country is now to be ravaged like the rest of Gaul! Woe is us!"

"Children," said Isabelle, "help to gather whatever is most valuable and let us flee."

"Let us drive our cattle before us," added James. "If the English seize or kill them we shall be ruined. Woe is us!"

"But whither shall we flee?" asked Peter, the elder son. "In what direction shall we run without the risk of falling into the hands of the English?"

"It is better to stay right here," observed John. "We cannot fare worse than if we flee. We shall try to defend ourselves."

"Try to defend ourselves! Do you wish to see us all killed? Alack! The Lord has forsaken us!"

Weeping and moaning and scarcely knowing what she did, poor Isabelle tugged at her trunks, all too heavy to be carried far, and threw about pell-mell on the floor the best clothes of herself and her husband. Her wedding dress, carefully packed up; pieces of cloth and of wool woven by her during the long winter evenings; Jeannette's christening gown, a pious maternal relic; – all lay strewn about. She put around her neck an old chain, inherited from her mother, which was her main ornament on holidays. She stowed away in her pocket a little silver cup, won long ago by her husband in a shooting contest.

Awakened, like her brothers, Jeannette also had hurriedly put on her clothes, and now entered the room. Her father and brothers, taking no notice of her, were arguing with increasing anxiety the point of fleeing or of waiting at all hazards the approach of the English. From time to time they stepped to the door and, with despair plainly depicted on their faces, pointed at the conflagration which, only two leagues away, was devouring the village of St. Pierre. The flames now leaped up only by fits and starts; evidently the fire had little left to consume.

"A curse upon the English! What shall we do?"

So suddenly appraised of the enemy's invasion, seeing the distant conflagration, and near by her father and brothers distracted with fear and her mother nervously heaping up whatever she thought might be carried away, Jeannette, overcome by terror, trembled in every limb; and a mortal pallor overcast her face. Her eyes became suffused with tears and, her blood rushing to her head, she was, for a moment, seized with vertigo. A cloud passed before her eyes, she staggered and fell almost fainting on a stool. But her weakness was short. She soon became herself, and heard her mother calling: "Come quick, Jeannette, and help me to pack up these clothes! We shall have to flee for our lives! The English are coming and will pillage everything – and kill everything!"

"Where shall we flee for safety?" asked James. "We may run up against the English on the road and that would be running towards danger!"

"Let us stay here, father," John insisted, "and defend ourselves. I said so before. It is the best course to take."

"But we have no arms!" cried Peter, "and those brigands are armed to the teeth! They will slaughter us all!"

"What shall we do?" cried in chorus James and his sons, "what shall we do? Oh, Lord, have pity on us!"

Isabelle did not listen; she heard neither her husband nor her sons. She thought only of fleeing; and she ran from one room to the other and hither and thither, to make sure that she had left nothing of value behind; and quite unable to resign herself to the giving up of her copper and tin utensils that she had so industriously polished and spread upon the dresser.

After her temporary fright and feebleness, Jeannette rose, dried her eyes and helped her mother to pack up the articles that lay about on the floor; occasionally rushing to the door, contemplating the distant and dying reflections of the conflagration that still fitfully reddened the horizon in the direction of the Castle of Ile and the village of St. Pierre. She then turned to her father and, guided by her innate good sense, said in a calm voice: "Father, there is but one place where we can take refuge – the Castle of Ile. The castellan is kind. We would have nothing to fear behind fortified walls; and his yard will hold twenty times more cattle than either we or all of our neighbors possess."

"Jeannette is right," cried her two brothers, "let us to the Castle of Ile. We and our cattle will cross over on the ferry. Sister is right."

"Your sister is crazy!" replied James stamping on the ground. "The English are at St. Pierre. They are burning and killing everything! To go in that direction is to run into the very jaws of the wolf."

"Father, your fear is unfounded," explained Jeannette. "The English, after having burnt the village, will have abandoned it. It will take us more than two hours to reach the place. We shall take the old path through the forest. We are sure not to meet the enemy on that side. We shall cross the ferry and find refuge in the castle."

"That is right," said the two boys; "their mischief is done and the brigands will have decamped and left the ruins behind them."

James Darc seemed convinced by his daughter's reasoning. Suddenly one of the lads cried out, pointing to a new conflagration much nearer to Domremy:

"See, Jeannette is not mistaken; the English have left St. Pierre and are approaching by the open road. They burn down everything on their way. They must have just set fire to the hamlet of Maxey!"

"May God help us!" answered James. "Let us flee to the Castle of Ile by the old forest road. Jeannette, run to the stable and gather your sheep; you, boys, hitch up our two cows to the wagon. Isabelle and myself will carry the bundles to the yard and put them in the wagon while you are hitching up the cows. Quick, quick, children, the English will be here within two hours. Alack! If we ever again come back to Domremy we shall find only the ashes of our poor house!"

CHAPTER IX

THE FLIGHT

The family of Darc had not been the only ones to discover the nocturnal raid of the English. The whole parish was on foot, a prey to consternation and terror.

The more frightened gathered a few eatables, and abandoning all else, fled to the forest. Others, hoping that the English might not advance as far as Domremy, took the chances of remaining in the village. Finally, others there were who also decided to flee for safety to the Castle of Ile. The Darc family soon left their house, Jeannette calling her sheep, which obediently followed, James leading the cows that hauled the wagon on which his wife was seated in the midst of her bundles of goods, a few bags of wheat and the household utensils that she had managed to get together. The two lads carried on their shoulders the implements of husbandry that were portable.

The flight of the inhabitants of Domremy, in the darkness of the night, that was reddened only on the horizon by the reflection of the conflagrations, was heartrending. The imprecations uttered by the men, the moanings of the women, the cries of the children who clung weeping to their mothers' skirts, not a few of which latter held babies to their breasts; the mass of peasants, cattle and wagons promiscuously jumbled, striking against each other and getting in each others' way; all presented a distressing picture of that desperate flight for life. These poor people left behind them their only wealth – their granaries filled with the grain of the last harvest – expecting soon to see them devoured by the flames along with their humble homes. Their distress escaped in sobs, in plaintive cries, and often in curses and expressions of hatred and rage against the English. The spectacle left a profound and indelible impression upon Jeannette, now for the first time made acquainted with the horrors of war. Soon was she to contemplate them at still closer range and in their most appalling forms.

The fugitives arrived near the hamlet of St. Pierre, situated on the Meuse. There was nothing left but a heap of blackened debris, with here and there a wooden beam still burning – nothing else was left of the village. Walking a little ahead of her herd, Jeannette stood still, stupefied at the spectacle.

A few steps from where she stood a column of smoke rose from the ruins of a cottage that had been sheltered under a large walnut tree, the leaves of which were now singed and its branches charred by the fire. From one of the branches of the tree hung, head down, a man suspended by his feet over a now nearly extinct brazier. His face, roasted by the fire, retained no human form. His arms, twisted and rigid, betokened the intensity of his dying agony. Not far from him, two almost naked corpses, one of an old man and the other of a lad, lay in a pool of blood. They must have attempted to defend themselves against their assailants; a butcher's knife lay near the old man's corpse, while the lad still held in his clenched hands the handle of a pitchfork. Finally, a young woman, whose face was wholly concealed under her thick blonde hair and who must have been dragged from her bed in her night clothes, lay disemboweled near a still smoking heap of faggots; while a baby, apparently forgotten in the midst of the carnage, crept toward its dead mother crying loudly.

Such had been the savage war waged in Gaul for the last fifty years since the defeat of the French nobility at Poitiers.

The shocking spectacle unnerved Jeannette and, seized again with vertigo, she tottered and fell to the ground; Peter, her elder brother, coming close behind, raised her, and, with the help of his father, placed her on the wagon with her mother.

The wife of the castellan of Ile and her husband, a brave soldier, allowed the fugitives from Domremy to camp with their cattle in the yard of the castle, a vast space within the fortifications that were situated between the arms of the Meuse. Unfortunately the inhabitants of St. Pierre, who were taken by surprise at night, had not been able to reach this hospitable place of refuge. After ravaging the valley the English gathered near Vaucouleurs and concentrated their forces before that place, the siege of which they pressed vigorously for a short time. A few nights later a few of the peasants who

had taken refuge in the Castle of Ile, among them Peter, Jeannette's elder brother, went out on a reconnoitering expedition and on their return reported that the enemy had departed from that part of the country. Tired of arson and carnage, the English had withdrawn from the neighborhood of Domremy after pillaging only a few of the houses and killing some of its inhabitants.

Back again at their home in Domremy the family of Darc busied themselves in repairing the damage that their house had sustained.

CHAPTER X

"BURGUNDY!" – "FRANCE!"

During her sojourn in the Castle of Ile Jeannette had been the prey of severe attacks of fever. At times during her delirium she invoked St. Catherine and St. Marguerite, her good saints, believing that she saw them near her, and beseeching them with her hands clasped to put an end to the atrocities of the English. At other times the shocking scene of the hamlet of St. Pierre would rise in her troubled brain and she would cry out aloud or would sob at the sight of the victims that rose before her, livid and blood-bespattered. At still other times, her eyes shooting fire and her cheeks aflame she spoke of a martial virgin clad in white armor and mounted on a milk white steed whom, she said, she saw falling upon and exterminating the English. At such times Jeannette repeated with a quivering voice the refrain of Merlin's prophecy —

"Gaul, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of old oaks."

Isabelle sat up night and day nursing her daughter, imputing the ravings of the poor child to the violence of the fever and to the recollections of the horrible spectacle at St. Pierre. Great dejection of spirit and extreme feebleness succeeded Jeannette's malady. Back in Domremy, she was compelled to remain in bed several weeks; but her dreams reflected the identical pictures of her delirium. Moreover a deep sorrow had fallen upon her, for, strangely, her god-mother was one of the few victims of the English raid into Domremy. Her corpse was found riddled with wounds; and Jeannette wept for Sybille as much on account of her tender affection for her god-mother as on account of her regret at being separated forever from her who told such marvelous legends.

Two months passed and Jeannette was now nearly fourteen. She seemed to have regained her normal health, but the symptoms of puberty had disappeared and she frequently suffered from intolerable headaches followed by severe attacks of vertigo.

Feeling all the more uneasy as she remembered the words of the physician, Isabelle once more consulted him and he answered that the violent emotion caused by the invasion of the English and the spectacle of their cruelty must have deeply disturbed the girl's organization and checked her sexual development; but that her ailments would cease and the laws of nature resume their course in her physical being as the mental effects of her deeply stirred emotion wore off.

The physician's answer allayed Isabelle's fears. Moreover Jeannette again busied herself with her wonted household and field labors and she redoubled her activity in the effort to conceal from public gaze the spells of sadness and absent mindedness that now no longer were wholly without cause since she had witnessed some of the disasters to which her country was subject. Jeannette reflected to herself that the horrors she had seen at St. Pierre stained with blood all other sections of the land and fell heaviest upon those of her own class, the peasants. In pitying them she pitied her own. Since that fatal day Jeannette felt perhaps sadder at and wept more over the ghastly ills, an example of which she had seen with her own eyes, than at or over the misfortunes of the young Dauphin whom she did not know. The girl looked with increasing impatience for the advent of the warrior maid who was to bring deliverance to Gaul by driving the stranger out of the country, and by restoring his crown to the King and peace and rest to France.

These thoughts ever absorbed Jeannette's mind when alone in the woods or the field grazing her herd. Then would she yield unrestrained to revery and to the recollections of the legends that had had so much to do in forming her mind.

The undefinable emotion produced in her by the chiming of the bells began to raise visions before her eyes. The distant tintinnabulations, expiring on her ears, seemed to her transformed into

a murmur of celestial voices of inexpressible sweetness.¹¹ At such moments Jeannette felt the blood rush to her head; her eyes were covered as with a mist; the visible world disappeared from her sight and she fell into a kind of ecstasy from which she recovered worn out as if awakened from some painful dream.

One day when Jeannette was grazing her herd while plying the distaff under the old beech tree near the Fountain of the Fairies a singular incident occurred that had a decisive influence over the fate of the young shepherdess. Reinforced by several bands of Burgundians, furnished by Marshall John of Luxemburg, the English had persisted in the siege of Vaucouleurs; which latter was defending itself heroically. The invasion by the English of that valley, otherwise so peaceful, incited a schism among its inhabitants. Many of them, especially the people of St. Pierre and of Maxey, who had been so cruelly dealt with by the invaders, were inclined to pass over to the English in order to save their property and lives. These formed, in the valley, the "English" or "Burgundian" party. Others, on the contrary, more irritated than frightened, preferred to resist the English. These poor people counted upon the support of their sovereign, the King of France, who, they said, would not longer leave them exposed to such miseries. The latter comprised the "Armagnac" or "Royalist" party. The children, ever the imitators of their parents, likewise became "Armagnacs" and "Burgundians" when they played war. In these games the two parties ever finished by taking their roles seriously; when imprecations and actual blows with sticks and stones exchanged by the two "armies" gave these affairs the actual semblance of war.

The people of Domremy belonged mostly to the royalist, and those of St. Pierre and Maxey to the English party; and, of course, the children of these several localities shared, or rather aped, the political opinions of their respective families. It thus often happened that the lads of Maxey, while guarding their cattle, came to the borders of the commune of Domremy and flung insults at the little shepherds of the latter village. The dispute often became heated and hard words would be exchanged, when it would be decided to settle the difference of opinion by force of arms, that is with their fists and sticks accompanied by volleys of stones that figured as cross-bow bolts or cannon balls.¹²

Guarding her sheep, Jeannette spun her hemp under the trees of the forest of old oaks. In her reverie she repeated in a low murmur the passage from Merlin's prophecy:

"For whom that royal crown? That steed? That armor?
Oh, how much blood! It spouts up, it flows in torrents!
Oh, how much blood I see! How much blood I see!
It is a lake, a sea of blood.
It steams – its vapor ascends —
It ascends like an autumn mist to the sky,
To the sky where the thunder peals and the lightning flashes.
Athwart these peals of thunder, these flashes of lightning,
That blood-red mist, I see a martial virgin.
White is her armor, white her steed.
She battles —
She battles and battles still in the midst of a forest of lances
And seems to ride on the backs of the archers – "

Suddenly Jeannette heard in the distance a noise, at first indistinct, but drawing nearer and nearer accompanied by clamorous cries of "Burgundy! England!" uttered by infantile voices and answered by the counter cries of "France and Armagnac!" Almost immediately a crowd of Domremy

¹¹ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 67.

¹² *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 87.

boys appeared at the turn of the forest's skirt, fleeing in disorder under a shower of stones fired at them by the boys of Maxey. The engagement had been lively and the victory hotly contested, to judge by the torn clothes, the bruised eyes and the bleeding noses of the more heroic ones of the urchins. But yielding to a panic, they were now in full flight and rout. Their adversaries, satisfied with their victory, out of breath with running, and no doubt afraid of drawing too close to Domremy, the stronghold of the retreating army, prudently stopped near the forest which now hid them and repeated three times the cry: "Burgundy and England!"

The cry of victory caused Jeannette to bound to her feet transported with anger and shame at the sight of the boys of her village who battled for Gaul and the King fleeing before the partisans of Burgundy and England. A lad of about fifteen years, named Urbain, who captained the fleeing troop, and who was personally a brave soldier, seeing that his scalp was cut by a stone and his cap remained in the hands of the enemy, ran past Jeannette.

"Are you running for safety, Urbain?"

"Sure! That's what I'm doing," answered the mimic captain, raising his head and wiping the blood from his forehead with a handful of grass. "We fought as long as we could – but those of Maxey are about twenty and we are only eleven!"

Jeannette stamped on the ground with her foot and replied: "You have strength to run – and yet you have no strength to fight!"

"But they have sticks, and that is not fair – we are the weaker side."

"Fall upon them and capture their sticks!"

"That is easy to say, Jeannette!"

"As easy to do as to say!" cried the shepherdess.

"You will see – Come! Come back with me!"

Without noticing whether she was followed or not, but yielding to an involuntary prompting, Jeannette walked toward the enemy, then masked by a clump of trees, and cried out in ringing tones, while brandishing her distaff in lieu of a banner: "France! France! Off with you Burgundians and English!"

With her feet and arms bare, in her short white sleeves and scarlet skirt, her little straw hat on her long black hair, her cheeks aflame, her eyes sparkling, her poise heroic, Jeannette was at that moment so inspiring that Urbain and his followers felt themselves all at once strengthened and exalted. They picked up stones and rushed after the young shepherdess, who in her rapid course now barely seemed to touch the sward with her feet, crying, with her, "France! Off with you Burgundians and English!"

In the security of their triumph, the soldiers of the hostile army, who never expected to see their adversaries rally, had stopped about a hundred yards away and were resting on their laurels; and stretching themselves on the flower-studded grass, picked wild strawberries and played with stones. Presently some of them climbed up in the trees looking for birds' nests, and the others scattered among the bushes picking and eating berries. The unexpected resumption of hostilities, the sudden cries hurled at them by the royalist army and by Jeannette, who now led it, greatly surprised the Burgundians, who, nevertheless, did not show the white feather. Their chief recalled his soldiers to arms. Immediately the plunderers of birds' nests slid down the trees, the berry pickers rushed up with crimson lips and those who had begun to fall asleep on the grass jumped up and rubbed their eyes. But before the line of battle could be formed the soldiers of Jeannette, anxious to avenge their former defeat, and carried away by the inspiring conduct of their present chief, fell valiantly upon the foe with redoubled cries of: "France! France!" Our heroes seized the Burgundians and English by the hair, boxed their ears and thumped them with such fury that the tables were completely turned; the erstwhile victors now became the vanquished, broke ranks and took to their heels.

The triumph redoubled the ardor of the assailants, who were now animated with the desire to carry off a few bonnets as spoils and trophies. The French army rushed breathlessly upon the

English, with Jeannette ever in the lead. She fought intrepidly and made havoc with her distaff, which was garnished with a thick bunch of hemp – a terrible weapon, as many discovered that day. In the meantime, the English, stupefied by the sudden apparition of the young shepherdess in scarlet, who emerged so strangely from the neighborhood of the Fountain of the Fairies, the mystic reputation of which place extended far over the valley, took Jeannette for a hobgoblin. Fear lent them wings and the French were again vanquished – but only in running. The swiftest ones of the army pushed forward in pursuit of the enemy, but were obliged to desist for want of breath. Urbain and two or three of the most resolute kept up the pursuit with Jeannette, who, now seized with heroic exaltation, no longer thought of her own soldiers or took cognizance at all of her surroundings, but kept her flashing eyes fixed upon a number of fleeing English whom she wished to capture. Could she accomplish this it seemed to her that her victory would be complete.

But the runaways had so much the lead and ran so fast that she was almost despairing of being able to come to close quarters with them, when, still running, she perceived a donkey peacefully grazing on the meadow, totally unconcerned as to the battle or its outcome. Agile and robust, as became a child of the field, she leaped with one bound upon the back of the ass, urged it with heels, distaff and voice, and forced it into a gallop. The animal yielded all the more readily to the desires of Jeannette, seeing that the direction whither it was going was that of its own stable. It pricked up its ears and kicked up its heels with great joy, without, however, throwing Jeannette, and ran toward the English, who, unfortunately for themselves, were also on the route to the ass's stable and who, still more unfortunately for themselves, in the heat of their flight had never thought to look behind. Suddenly, however, hearing the hoof beats of the animal galloping at their heels and the victorious cries of the young shepherdess, they thought themselves pursued by devils; and fearing to see some horrible apparition, they threw themselves upon their knees with their eyes shut, their hands joined as if in prayer and begging for mercy. The enemy was decidedly vanquished.

Jumping off the ass, Jeannette allowed it to continue its route; and threatening with her innocent distaff the soldiers, who surrendered at discretion, she shouted to them in a resonant voice:

"Wretches! Why do you call yourselves Burgundians and English, seeing that we are all of France? It is against the English that we must all take the field! Oh, they do us so much harm!"

Saying this, the young shepherdess, a prey to an undefinable emotion, broke into tears, her knees trembled and she fell to the ground beside the vanquished foe, who, rising in inexpressible terror, incontinently resumed their headlong flight, leaving Jeannette alone so confused in mind that she knew not whether she was awake or dreaming.

Nevertheless, her heart still palpitating from the effects of the recent struggle, vague but exhilarating aspirations began to ferment in her being. She had just experienced for the first time the martial ardor caused by a glorious victory, won to the orchestration of the cries of "France!" and "Armagnac!" Forgetting that this childish battle was but play, indignant at and aroused by the check suffered by her party, she had seen her boys cheered and re-encouraged by her voice and, carried away by her example, return to the fray and vanquish the hitherto victorious enemy.

These aspirations were vaguely mixed with the recollections of the horrible butchery in the village of St. Pierre and the prophecy of Merlin, and caused the young shepherdess to raise her thoughts to St. Catherine and St. Marguerite, her two good saints, to whom she now prayed fervently to chase the English from France and to take pity on the gentle Dauphin. The chaotic jangle of these apparently disconnected and aimless thoughts that clashed together in the burning brain of Jeannette immediately brought on one of those painful spells of dizziness to which she had been ever more subject since the profound perturbation of her health. She relapsed into a sort of ecstasy; again a misty curtain was drawn before her eyes; and when she regained consciousness the sun had gone down and it was dusk.

On arising Jeannette hastened back to the Fountain of the Fairies, near which she had left her lambs browsing. The walk was long, she lost much time in getting her scattered flock together, and

it was dark night ere she reached Domremy, trembling at having incurred the anger of her father by her delay; and above all fearing the scolding that she expected for the part she had taken in the combat between the boys. Urbain, full of pride at his victory, might, upon his return to the village, have boasted of the battle. Thus the poor child felt her heart beat with dismay when, arriving near her house, she saw the uneasy and angry face of James Darc. The moment he caught sight of his daughter he went toward her with a threatening look, saying: "By the Savior, is it in the dark of night that you must gather the sheep?" And approaching her with increasing irritation and with his hand raised over her head, he continued: "Bad and shameless child! Have you not been battling with the boys of the village against the boys of Maxey?"

In his rage James was on the point of beating the guilty girl, when Isabelle ran to him and caught his arm, crying, "James, I beg of you to pardon her this time!"

"Very well – I will be indulgent this time; but let her never again take a notion to romp with the boys. If she does it again, as sure as I am her father, I shall punish her severely; but for this time she can go to bed without supper."

CHAPTER XI

THE VISION

The fast to which Jeannette's father had sentenced her was destined to lead to grave consequences. Grieved at the reprovals he had heaped upon her, the young shepherdess led her sheep to the fold and retired to bed without sharing the family's evening meal.

At Jeannette's age hunger is peculiarly imperious. If the stomach is empty the brain is doubly active, as appears from the hallucinations of the anchorites who had long abstained from food. The poor child, overcome by her father's severity, sought solace in the recollections of the day's happenings and wept a great deal before she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. Never had her sleep been so troubled by bizarre dreams, in which the marvelous legends that her god-mother Sybille had told her reappeared in various grotesque shapes. In her dreams, Hena, the virgin of the Isle of Sen, offered her blood as a sacrifice for the deliverance of Gaul and, erect with her harp in her hand, expired amidst the flames on the pyre. But, Oh, horror and surprise! Jeannette recognized her own features in those of Hena.

Another moment, Merlin, followed by a black dog with flaming eyes, rose before her, holding his knotted staff in his hand and with his long white beard streaming in the wind, looking for the red egg of the sea-serpent upon a desert beach and chanting his prophecy:

"Gaul, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin
From the borders of Lorraine and a forest of old oaks."

Then, again, it was the infantile combat of the day that surged uppermost in her disordered mind and now assumed the gigantic proportions of an immense battle. Thousands of cuirassed and casqued soldiers, armed with lances and swords, pressing hard, undulating, combing and breaking like the waves of the sea, were hurled against each other and were cut to pieces – opposing floods of iron in mutual clash. The clash of armors, the cries of the combatants, the neighing of horses, the fanfare of trumpets, the discharges of artillery resounded from afar. The red flag of England quartered with the gold fleur-de-lis floated over the blood-stained embattled ranks. A martial maid, cased in white armor and mounted on a white steed held the French flag – and once more Jeannette recognized her own features in those of the martial maid. St. Catherine and St. Marguerite hovered over her in the azure sky and smiled down upon her while St. Michael, the archangel, with his wide wings outspread and his face half turned toward her, pointed with his flaming sword to a brilliant star-like golden crown held by two angels in dazzling white.

The long dream, now and then interrupted by periods of semi-wakefulness and feverish starts, during which it would melt into the realities of her surroundings in the disordered mind of Jeannette, lasted until morning. When it was again day Jeannette awoke exhausted, her face wet with the tears that had flowed during her sleep. She made her customary morning prayer and besought her two good saints to appease her father's anger. She found him in the stable, whither she went to take her flock to the field; but James Darc informed her with austere severity that she was no longer to take the sheep to pasture, seeing that she paid so little attention to them. Her younger brother was to lead them out and she was to remain at the house to sew or spin.

This sentence was a severe punishment to Jeannette. It was to her a grievous sorrow to renounce going every day to the clear fountain and the shady spot where she derived so much pleasure from listening to the chimes of the bells, the last vibrations of which had latterly reached her ears as a celestial whisper of silvery voices. She submitted to the paternal will, however, and occupied herself during the morning with household duties.

More indulgent than her husband, Isabelle said to her daughter shortly before noon, "Go and play in the garden until the meal hour."

The summer's sun darted its burning rays upon Jeannette's head. Enfeebled by the fast of the previous night¹³ and fatigued by her distressing dreams, she sat down upon a bench with her forehead resting on her hands and dropped into a reverie, thinking of the prophecy of Merlin. Presently, as the bells of Greux began to sound from afar, she listened to their chimes with rapture, wholly forgetful of the fact that the sun's rays beat down perpendicularly upon her head. As the sound of the bells was gradually dying away the child suddenly saw a light, so intense, so dazzling in its splendor, that the sunshine reflected from the white wall of the church opposite seemed darkness in comparison.¹⁴ At the same moment it seemed to her that the dying vibrations of the bells, instead of vanishing altogether, as usual, in an unintelligible murmur, were now changed into a voice of infinite sweetness that whispered to her:

"JOAN, BE WISE AND PIOUS – GOD HAS A MISSION FOR YOU – YOU SHALL CHASE THE STRANGERS FROM GAUL."¹⁵

The voice stopped and the dazzling splendor disappeared. Distracted and seized with an uncontrollable fear, Jeannette took a few steps in the garden and, falling upon her knees, joined her hands in prayer, invoking the aid of her good saints, St. Marguerite and St. Catherine, as she believed herself possessed of the devil.¹⁶

That July day of the year 1425 decided the future of Joan Darc. The brilliant light that had dazzled her eyes, the mysterious voice that had sounded in her ear, were the first communications of the spirits that protected Joan, or of *her saints*, as she expressed herself in later years. Differently from most other visionaries, whose hallucinations, disconnected and aimless, floated at the caprice of their disordered minds, the communications to Joan from the invisible world were ever connected with their original cause – her horror of the English and her wish to drive them out of Gaul. Finally, her spirit, nursed by the mysterious legends of her god-mother; her imagination struck by the prophecy of Merlin; her heart filled with ineffable compassion for the young King, whom she believed worthy of interest; above all deeply affected by the shocking ills to which the rustics of her condition were exposed by the acts of rapine and sanguinary violence of the English; and, finally, feeling against the invaders the dauntless hatred with which William of the Swallows and Grand-Ferre – obscure heroes, sons of the Jacquerie and precursors of the shepherdess of Domremy – pursued them, Joan was driven to look upon herself as called upon to thrust the strangers out of France and restore to the King his throne.

¹³ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 88.

¹⁴ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 88.

¹⁵ The same, p. 89.

¹⁶ The same, p. 89.

CHAPTER XII

RETURNING VISIONS

During the next three years, from July, 1425, to February, 1429, that is from Joan's fourteenth to her seventeenth year, the communications from the spirit world became ever more and more frequent. Joan saw St. Marguerite and St. Catherine approach her with smiles on their faces and tenderly embrace her.¹⁷ At other times it was the archangel St. Michael who appeared before her, holding his flaming sword in one hand and in the other the crown of France. Again, a multitude of angels played before her wondering eyes in the midst of an immense and dazzling ray of light that shot out from heaven, wherein they gamboled like the atoms that swarm before our eyes in a ray of sunlight across a dark space.¹⁸ Hardly a day went by but that, especially after the ringing of the bells, Joan heard the voice of her dear saints saying to her:

"Joan, run to the assistance of the King of France! You will drive away the English! You will restore the crown to the gentle Sire!"

"Alack! I am but a poor girl, I would not know how to ride a horse nor to lead armed men,"¹⁹ the naïve shepherdess would answer. But the recollections of the prophetic legend of Merlin at times dispelled these doubts, and she would then ask herself why she should not be called to fulfil the prediction. Was not the Lord urging her by the voices of her saints: Go to the assistance of the King? Was she not born and brought up on the borders of Lorraine and near a forest of oaks? Was she not a virgin? Had she not voluntarily consecrated herself to eternal celibacy, yielding perhaps in that matter no less to the repugnance of an invincible chastity than to the desire of giving an additional pledge to the fulfilment of the prophecy of the Gallic bard? Did she not, when only sixteen years of age, in the presence of a large assemblage, confute and prove a liar, by the irresistible sincerity of her words, a lad of her village who pretended to have received from her a promise of marriage?²⁰ The shy bashfulness of Joan recoiled at the bare thought of marriage. Finally, did she not remember how, on the occasion of the infantine battle between the urchins of Maxey and those of Domremy, her courage, her prompt decisiveness, her enthusiasm changed defeat into victory? With the aid of God and His saints, could she not be victorious in an actual battle, also?

Joan was a pious girl. She was instinct with that genuine piety that raises and connects all things to and with God, the creator of the universe. She thanked Him effusively for manifesting Himself to her through the intermediation of her saints, whom she ever continued to see and hear. At the same time, however, she did not feel for the priests the confidence that St. Catherine and St. Marguerite inspired her with. She piously fulfilled her Catholic duties: She confessed, and often attended communion service, according to the common usage, without, nevertheless, ever speaking either with Master Minet, the curate, or with any other clergymen on the subject of her communications with the beings of the invisible world.²¹ She locked in the most secret recesses of her heart her vague aspirations after the deliverance of Gaul, hiding them even from her little girl friend, Mangeste, and from her grown female friend, Hauguette, thus guarding her secret also from her father, her mother and her brothers. During three years she imposed upon herself an absolute silence regarding these mysteries. Thanks to the powerful control that she exercised over herself, Joan showed herself, the same as before, industrious, taking her part in the field and household labors, despite her being increasingly beset by her "voices," that, ever more imperiously, repeated to her almost daily:

¹⁷ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 77.

¹⁸ The same, p. 77.

¹⁹ The same, pp. 79, 80.

²⁰ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 79.

²¹ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 80.

"Go, daughter of God! The time has come! March to the rescue of the invaded fatherland! You will drive away the English, you will deliver your King, you will return to him his crown!"

The communications of the spirits became more and more pressing in the measure that Joan approached her seventeenth year. The great designs, that she felt driven to be the instrument of, took an ever stronger hold upon her. Unremitting and painful the obsession pursued her everywhere.

"I felt," said she later, "I felt in my spirit that which a woman must feel when about to be brought to bed of a child."²²

St. Marguerite and St. Catherine appeared before the young girl, encouraged her, reassured her, promised her the help of God in the deeds that she was to achieve; when the vision vanished the poor child would break out in tears, regretting, as she later expressed it, that her good saints did not take her with them to the angels in the paradise of the good God.²³

Despite these alternations between faith and doubt concerning her mission, Joan gradually familiarized herself with the thought at which her modesty and simplicity had at first recoiled, the thought of commanding armed men and of vanquishing the English at their head.

In that wonderful organism a rare sagacity, an excellent judgment, an astonishing military aptitude were, without losing any of these qualities, without losing aught of virtue, blended with the exaltations of an inspired woman. Often, recalling as she constantly did, the infantine battle in which victory remained with her, Joan would say:

"Men and children, when known how to be handled, can not choose but obey the identical impulses, the identical generous sentiments; with the aid of heaven it will be with the men of the royal army as it was with the urchins of Domremy; they will follow my example."

Or again:

"To raise the courage of a discouraged and disheartened army, to exalt it, to lead it straight upon the enemy, whatever the number of these may be, to attack it daringly in the open field or behind its entrenchment, and to vanquish it, that is no impossible undertaking. If it succeeds, the consequences of a first victory, by rekindling the fire of an army demoralized by the habit of defeat, are incalculable."

Thoughts like these revealed in Joan a profound intuition in matters of war. Joan, moreover, was not of those puling visionaries, who expect from God alone the triumph of a good cause. One of her favorite sayings was: "Help yourself, and heaven will help you."²⁴ She ever put in practice that adage of rustic common sense. When on a later occasion a captain said to her disdainfully: "If God wished to drive the English out of Gaul, He could do so by the sole power of His will; He would need neither you, Joan, nor any men-at-arms," Joan answered:

"The men-at-arms will battle – God will give the victory."

²² The same, p. 80.

²³ *Trial and Condemnation*, vol. I, p. 80.

²⁴ *Trial and Condemnation*, vol. I, p. 80.

CHAPTER XIII

WRESTLING WITH THE ANGELS

The three years of mysterious obsessions – between 1425 and 1429 – which preluded her glory were for Joan a period of secret and distressing struggles. In order to obey her "voices," in order to carry out her divine mission and fulfil the prophecy of Merlin she would have to battle – and her horror of blood was such that, as she one day said, her "hair stood on end at the sight of French blood flowing."²⁵ She would have to live in the field with the soldiers – and one of her leading virtues was a delicate sense of modesty. She would have to leave the house in which she was born, renounce her humble, domestic occupations in which she excelled, "being afraid of none at her needle or her distaff," as she was wont to say in her naïve pride. She would, in short, be forced to bid adieu to her young friends, her brothers, her father and her mother, all of whom she tenderly loved, and move – she, a poor and unknown peasant from a corner of Lorraine – to the court of Charles VII, and say to him: "Sire, I am sent to you by our Lord God; confide to me the command of your troops; I shall drive the English out of France and shall restore your crown to you!"

When these thoughts assailed Joan during her intervals of doubt when, her ecstasy over, she fell back upon actual reality, the poor child recoiled before an abyss of difficulties and of impossibilities without number. She derided and pitied herself. The past would then seem a dream; she would ask herself whether she was not out of her mind; she would beseech "her voices" to speak, and her saints to appear before her, in order that her faith in her divine mission might be revived, and prove to her that she had not been the sport of some mental aberration. But Joan's crisis had passed. Even if on such occasions the mysterious voices remained silent and she began to look upon herself as a demented wretch, the next day, perhaps that very night, she again saw her beautiful saints approaching, adorned with their golden crowns draped in brocade, exhaling a celestial odor,²⁶ and, smiling, say to her: "Courage, Joan, daughter of God! You will deliver Gaul. Your King will owe his crown to you! The time approaches! Stand ready to fulfil your mission!"

The young virgin would then again recover confidence in her predestination, until the day when fresh doubts would assail her, and again melt away. Nevertheless, the doubts were on the decrease, and the moment came when, no longer faint-hearted, but invincibly penetrated with the divine source of her mission, Joan decided to fulfil it at any price, and only awaited an opportune circumstance. From that moment on, above all, and realizing then more than ever the necessity of practicing her favorite adage, *Help yourself, and heaven will help you*, Joan turned the full bent of her mind upon quickly gathering information on the condition of Gaul, and of acquiring the elementary knowledge of arms.

Public events, together with the geographic location of the valley, joined in meeting Joan's wishes. The borders of Lorraine were frequently crossed by the messengers to and from Germany. Anxious for news, as are all people living at a distance from the country's center, James Darc often extended the hospitality of his house to these riders. They gossiped on the English war, the only concern of those sad days. Always reserved before her parents, who were foreign to the vast designs fermenting within her brain, Joan silently worked away at her distaff, losing not a single word of the reports that she heard. At times, however, she would venture one question or another to the travelers, suggested by her secret thoughts, and gradually enlightened herself. Nor was that all. The heroic resistance of the inhabitants of Vaucouleurs several times forced the English to raise the siege; towards the approach of the bad season these took up their winter quarters in Champagne, always to return with the spring. During these marches and counter-marches the hostile army ravaged anew the valley of the Meuse. James Darc and other peasants were more than once obliged to resort to the

²⁵ *Trial and Condemnation*, vol. I, p. 88.

²⁶ *Trial and Condemnation*, vol. I, p. 29.

Castle of Ile for refuge, which, on such occasions, was frequently attacked and valiantly defended. When the danger was over the peasants returned to the village.

The frequent sojourns of the family of Darc at the Castle of Ile, which was well fortified and garrisoned with experienced soldiers; the military alarms, the watches, the assaults that the garrison had to sustain – all this familiarized Joan with the profession of arms. Concentrated within herself, yielding to her martial vocation, attentively observing all that passed around her, explaining to herself the means and manoeuvres of defense, listening, meditating over the orders issued to the soldiers by their superiors, Joan learned or guessed at the elementary principles of the military art. The ideas thus conceived germinated, budded, matured in the quick and penetrating mind of the young girl. She mistrusted herself less when her voices said to her:

"The time approaches – You will drive the English out of Gaul – You are the virgin prophesied by Merlin."

Joan's grand uncle, Denis Laxart, lived in Vaucouleurs; he had long known Robert of Baudricourt, a renowned captain of the country, who abhorred the English and was ardently devoted to the royalist party. Joan often interrogated her uncle about Captain Robert of Baudricourt, upon his nature, upon his affability, upon the manner in which he treated the poor. In his simplicity, the good Denis had no suspicion of the purpose of his niece's interrogatories; he attributed them to girlish curiosity, and answered that Robert of Baudricourt, as brave a soldier as he was brutal and violent, usually sent everybody to the devil, was a terrible man, much feared by himself, and finally, that he never approached the captain but in trembling.

"It is a pity that so good a captain should be of so intractable and so rough a nature," Joan would say with a sigh, to her uncle, and sad and discouraged she would drop the subject only to return to it again.

Grown to a handsome maid, Joan was approaching the end of her sixteenth year – the time predicted by her voices had arrived.

CHAPTER XIV

"THE TIME HAS ARRIVED."

Towards the end of February of 1429, a small troop of soldiers, on their way back to their duke in Lorraine, and belonging to the party of the Armagnacs, halted at Domremy. The hospitable villagers cordially quartered the strangers at their houses. A sergeant fell to James Darc. The family gave him a friendly reception; they helped him to ease himself of his casque, his buckler, his lance and his sword, and the brilliant weapons were deposited in a corner of the apartment where Joan and her mother were busy preparing the family meal. The sight of the arms that the soldier had laid aside caused the young girl to tremble. She could not resist the desire of secretly touching them, and profiting by a moment when she was left alone, she even put the iron casque upon her young head and took in her virile hand the heavy sword which she drew from its scabbard and brandished, thrusting and cutting.

At seventeen Joan was tall and strong. The superb contours of her virginal bosom²⁷ filled and rounded her corsage, scarlet as her skirt. Her large black eyes, pensive and mild, her ebony hair, her clear complexion, slightly tanned by the sun, her cherry lips, her white teeth, her chaste physiognomy, serious and candid, imparted an attractive aspect to her appearance; as she now donned the soldier's casque the young girl was resplendent with martial beauty. The sergeant and James Darc entered the room. The latter frowned with severity; the soldier, however, charmed at seeing his casque on the head of the beautiful peasant girl, addressed to her some complimentary words. The anger of James redoubled, but he controlled himself. Blushing at being thus surprised, Joan quickly took off the casque and returned the sword to its scabbard. The family sat down to table. Although the sergeant was still young, he claimed to have often been among the royal troops that had taken the field against the English. He dilated upon his own prowesses, caressed his moustache, and threw side glances at Joan.

To the great astonishment of her family, and despite the obviously increasing though still controlled anger of her father, Joan came out of her ordinary reserve. She drew her stool near that of the soldier, seemed greatly to admire the hero, and overwhelmed him with questions concerning the royal army – its strength, its tactics, its present location, the number of its pieces of artillery, the names of the captains who inspired their soldiers with confidence.

Greatly flattered by the curiosity of the beautiful young girl concerning his military feats, even imagining that she was perhaps more interested in the warrior than in the war, the sergeant answered gallantly all the questions put by Joan. On her part, she listened to him with such rapt attention, and seemed by the fire in her eyes and the animation on her face to take so profound an interest in the conversation, that James Darc felt indignant thinking that the military carriage of the soldier was turning Joan's head. The eyes of the indignant father shot daggers at the soldier. Joan, too much preoccupied with her own thoughts, did not notice the rising anger of her parent, but plied her questions. With secret sorrow she learned then that, driven back beyond the Loire after a recent battle called the "Battle of the Herrings," the royal army had fled in disorder; that the English were besieging Orleans; and that, once the city was taken and Touraine invaded, the fate of the King and of France would be sealed, all his domains would then be in the hands of the English.

"Is there then no help for Gaul?" cried Joan, a prey to inexpressible exaltation. "Is all lost?"

"If the siege of Orleans is not raised within a month," answered the sergeant; "if the English are not driven back far from the Loire, then France will cease to exist! And this is as true as you are the most beautiful maid of Lorraine. Blood of Christ! When a little while ago you had my casque

²⁷ "*Mammae ejas erant pulcherimas*" – Testimony of the Duke of Alençon (*Proceedings of the Rehabilitation of Joan of Arc*, vol. III, p. 220).

on your head, I thought I had before me the goddess of war. With a captain such as you, I would attack a whole army single-handed!"

At these words James Darc rose abruptly from the table; he told his guest that night was approaching, and country people, who rose with the sun, also retired with the sun. Cross at being thus bade to go, the sergeant slowly picked up his arms and sought to catch Joan's eyes. But the maid, wholly forgetful of the soldier, now sat on her stool steeped in painful meditations, thinking only of the fresh disasters of Gaul, at which her tears flowed freely.

"There can now be no doubt left," the peasant said to himself, "my daughter, so chaste and so pious until this day, has suddenly gone crazy over this braggart; she is weeping over his departure. Shame upon her and us! A curse upon the hospitality that I have extended to this stranger! May the devil take him!"

After the guest had gone, James Darc's face assumed an expression of intense severity. Barely repressing his indignation, he stepped up to his daughter, took her rudely by the arm, motioned her imperiously to the stairs, and cried:

"Go upstairs! There has been enough palavering to-day. I shall talk to you to-morrow!"

Still absorbed in her own racking thoughts, Joan obeyed her father mechanically. When she regained her own room, the latter proceeded, addressing his sons, both of whom were surprised at their father's rudeness towards their sister:

"May God help us! Did you notice the manner in which Joan looked at the sergeant? Oh, if she ever fell in love with a soldier, it would be your duty to drown her with your own hands; or, I swear it, I would sooner strangle her myself."²⁸

The peasant uttered the words with such an explosion of rage that Joan heard him. She understood the mistake her father had fallen into, and wept. But soon "her voices" whispered to her:

"The time has arrived. Without you France and her King are lost – Go, daughter of God! – Save your King – Save France! – The Lord is with you – You are about to enter upon your mission."

²⁸ *Trial and Condemnation of Joan of Arc*, vol. I, p. 127.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN ROBERT OF BAUDRICOURT

Robert of Baudricourt, the commander-in-chief of Vaucouleurs, a man in the prime of life, of military bearing and of a face whose harshness was relieved by intelligent and penetrating eyes, was walking in nervous excitement up and down a hall in the castle of the town. Instructed by a recent despatch of the desperate position of Charles VII and the danger Orleans ran from the close siege of the English, the captain walked at a rapid pace, grumbling, blaspheming and shaking the floor under the impatient beat of his spurred heels. Suddenly a leather curtain, that concealed the principal entrance to the hall, was pushed aside and revealed a part of the timid and frightened face of Denis Laxart, Joan's grand uncle. Robert of Baudricourt did not notice the good man; he stamped with his feet on the floor, struck the table a violent blow with his fist near where lay the fatal despatch he had just received, and cried:

"Death and fury! It is done for France and the King! All is lost, even honor!"

At this exclamation of exasperation, the courage of Denis Laxart failed him; he dared not approach the captain at such a moment, and he reclosed the curtain, behind which, however, he remained standing awaiting a more opportune moment. But the rage of Robert of Baudricourt redoubled. He again stamped on the floor and cried:

"Malediction! All is lost – all!"

"No, sir! No, all is not lost!" said the good Denis Laxart, resolutely overcoming his fear, but still remaining behind the shelter of the curtain. A second later he pushed his head through the portiere and repeated: "No, sir; all is not lost!"

Hearing the timid voice, the captain turned around; he recognized the old man, whom he rather esteemed, and asked in a rough voice:

"What are you doing at that door? Walk in – why do you not walk in?" But seeing that Denis hesitated, he added still more gruffly: "The devil take it! Will you come in!"

"Here I am, sir – Here I am," said Denis stepping in; "but for the love of God, do not fly off in such a temper; I bring you good news – news – that is unexpected – miraculous news. All is not lost, sir – on the contrary – all is saved. Both King and Gaul!"

"Denis!" replied the captain, casting a threatening look at Joan's uncle, "If your hair were not grey, I would have you whipped out of the castle with a sword's scabbard! Dare you joke! To speak of the safety of King and France under such circumstances as we find ourselves in!"

"Sir, I beseech you, listen without anger to what I have to tell you, however incredible it may seem! I do not look like a clown, and you know me long. Be good enough to listen to me patiently."

"I know you, and know you for a good and wise man; hence your incongruous words shock me all the more. Come on, speak!"

"Sir, as you see, my forehead is bathed in perspiration, my voice chokes me, I am trembling at every limb; and yet I have not even begun to inform you why I came here. If you interrupt me with outbursts of rage, I shall lose the thread of my thoughts – "

"By the bowels of God! Come on! What is it!"

Denis Laxart made a great effort over himself, and after having collected his thoughts he said to the captain in a hurried voice:

"I went yesterday to Domremy to see my niece, who is married to James Darc, an honest peasant from whom she has two sons and a daughter. The daughter is called Jeannette and is seventeen years – "

Noticing that the captain's ill restrained impatience was on the point of exploding at the exordium, Denis hastened to add:

"I am coming to the point, sir, which will seem surprising, prodigious to you. Last evening, my little niece Jeannette said to me: 'Good uncle, you know Captain Robert of Baudricourt; you must take me to him.'"

"What does your niece want of me?"

"She wants, sir, to reveal to you what she told me yesterday evening without the knowledge of her parents, without the knowledge even of Master Minet, the curate – that mysterious voices have long been announcing to her that she would drive the English from Gaul by placing herself at the head of the King's troops, and that she would restore to him his crown."

Struck dumb by the extravagance of these words, Robert of Baudricourt could now hardly contain himself; he was on the point of brutally driving poor Denis out of the hall. Nevertheless, controlling his rage out of consideration for the venerable old man, he retorted caustically:

"Is that the secret your niece wishes to confide to me? It is a singular revelation!"

"Yes, sir – and she then proposes to ask you for the means to reach the gentle Dauphin, our Sire, whom she is absolutely determined to inform of the mission that the Lord has destined to her – the deliverance of Gaul and the King. I must admit it to you, I was struck by the sincerity of Jeannette's tone when she narrated to me her visions of saints and archangels, when she told me how she heard the mysterious voices that have pursued her for the last three years, telling her that she was the virgin whose advent Merlin foretold for the deliverance of Gaul."

"So you have confidence in your niece's sincerity?" asked the captain with a mixture of contempt and compassion, interrupting the old man whom he considered either stupid or crazy. "So you attach credence to the words of the girl?"

"Never did anyone reproach my niece with falsehood. Therefore, yielding to her entreaties, I yesterday evening obtained from her father, who seemed greatly irritated at his daughter, permission for her to accompany me, under the pretext of spending a few days in town with my wife. This morning I left Domremy at dawn with my niece on the crupper of my horse. We arrived in town an hour ago. My niece is waiting for me at home, where I am to take her your answer."

"Well! This is my answer: That brazen and insane girl should have both her ears soundly cuffed, and she should be taken back to her parents for them to continue the punishment.²⁹ Master Denis Laxart, I took you for a level-headed man. You are either an old scamp or an old fool. Are not you ashamed, at your age, to attach any faith to such imbecilities, and to have the impudence of coming here with such yarns to me? Death and fury! Off with you! By the five hundred devils of hell – get out, on the spot!"

²⁹ *Trial and Condemnation*, vol. I, p. 67.

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE CASTLE OF VAUCOULEURS

Poor Denis Laxart tumbled out of the room and the Castle of Vaucouleurs at his wits' end; but he soon returned. He did not now come alone. He was accompanied by Joan; his mind was troubled and he trembled at the bare thought of again bearding the bad humor of the Sire of Baudricourt. But so persistently had Joan begged and beseeched her uncle to take her to the terrible captain that he had yielded. The plight of the good man's mind may be imagined when, now accompanied by the young girl, he again approached the leather curtain or portiere of the hall. The captain was just conversing with John of Novelpont,³⁰ a knight who lived at Vaucouleurs, and was saying to him, evidently towards the end of a talk: "She is a crazy girl fit for a good cuffing. Don't you think so too?"

"What of it, if advantage could be drawn from her craziness!" answered John of Novelpont. "Imagine a man afflicted with some incurable disease and given up by his physicians; being by them condemned to die, someone proposes that he try *in extremis* a philter of pretended virtue, concocted by some crazy person. Should not our patient try that last chance of recovery? Soldiers and the masses are credulous folks; the announcement of celestial, supernatural help might revive the hopes of the people and the army, raise their courage, and perchance bring victory to them after so many defeats. Would not the consequence of a first success, of a victory over the English, be incalculable?"

"If but one victory were won," answered Robert of Baudricourt somewhat less determined in his first views, "our soldiers would regain courage, and they might finally overpower the English."

"Why not consent to see the girl? You could question her yourself, and then form an opinion."

"A visionary – a cowherd!"

"In the desperate condition that France is in, what risk is run by resorting to empiricism? It would be sensible to hear the peasant girl. Whether absurd or not, the prophecy of Merlin that she invokes is popular in Gaul. I remember to have heard it told in my infancy. Moreover, everywhere, prophecies are just now afloat in our unhappy country. Tired of looking for deliverance from human, our people are now expecting help from supernatural agencies. Have not the learned clerks of the University of Paris, and even the clergy, resorted to the clairvoyance of men versed in Holy Writ and habituated to a contemplative life? There are conditions when one must risk something – aye, risk everything."

"By the death of Christ! Are you there again!" cried Robert of Baudricourt, interrupting his friend at seeing the timid face of Denis Laxart appearing at the slit of the leather curtain. "Are you not afraid of exhausting my patience?"

Denis made no answer, but vanished behind Joan, who pushed the curtain aside and resolutely stepped towards the two cavaliers. Her uncle followed her with his eyes raised to heaven, his hat in his hands, and trembling at every limb.

Had Joan been old or homely she would undoubtedly have been instantly driven out by Robert of Baudricourt with contumely. But he, as well as the Sire of Novelpont, was struck with the beauty of the young girl, with her firm yet sweet expression, with her modest and yet confident demeanor. Seized with admiration, the two cavaliers looked at each other in silence. The Sire of Novelpont, shrugging his shoulders, seemed to say to his friend: "Was I wrong when I advised you to see the poor visionary?"

Robert of Baudricourt was still uncertain as to what reception he should bestow upon Joan, when his friend, meaning to test her, interpellated her, saying: "Well, my child, so the King is to be

³⁰ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 79.

driven out of France and we are all to become English? Is it to prevent all that that you have come here?³¹ Speak up! We shall listen."

"Sir," said Joan in a sweet yet firm voice that bore the stamp of unquestionable sincerity, "I have come to this royal city in order to request the sire Robert of Baudricourt to have me taken to the Dauphin of France. My words have been disregarded. Nevertheless, it is imperative that I be with the King within eight days. If I could not walk, I would creep thither on my knees. There is in the world no captain, duke or prince able to save the kingdom of France without the help that I bring with the assistance of God and His saints;"³² Joan emitted a sigh, and, her eyes moist with tears, added naïvely: "I would much prefer to remain at our house and sew and spin near my poor mother – but God has assigned a task to me – and I must perform it!"³³

"And in what manner will you perform your task?" put in Robert of Baudricourt, no less astonished than his friend at the mixture of assurance, of ingenuous sweetness and of conviction that pervaded the young girl's answer. "How will you, a plain shepherdess, go about it, in order to vanquish and drive away the English, when Lahire, Xaintrailles, Dunois, Gaucourt, and so many other captains have been beaten and failed?"

"I shall boldly place myself at the head of the armed men, and, with the help of God, we will win."

"My daughter," replied Robert of Baudricourt with a smile of incredulity, "if God wished to drive the English out of Gaul, He could do so by the sole power of His will; He would need neither you, Joan, nor men-at-arms."³⁴

"The men-at-arms will battle – God will give the victory,"³⁵ answered Joan laconically. "Help yourself – heaven will help you."

Again the two knights looked at each other, more and more astonished at the language and attitude of this daughter of the fields. Denis Laxart rubbed his hands triumphantly.

"So, then, Joan," put in John of Novelpont, "you desire to go to the King?"

"Yes, sir; to-morrow rather than the day after; rather to-day than to-morrow. The siege of Orleans must be raised within a month."³⁶ God will give us victory."

"And it is you, my pretty child, who will raise the siege of Orleans?"

"Yes, with the pleasure of God."

"Have you any idea what the siege of a town means, and in what it consists?"

"Oh, sir! It consists of besieged and besiegers. That is very plain."

"But the besieged must attempt sallies against the enemy who are entrenched at their gates."

"Sir, we are here four in this hall. If we were locked up in here, and we were determined to go out or die, would we not sally forth even if there were ten men at the door?"

"How?"

"Fighting bravely – God will do the rest!"³⁷ The besieged will sally forth."

"At a siege, my daughter, sallies are not all there is of it. The besiegers surround the town with numerous redoubts or bastilles, furnished with machines for darting bolts and artillery pieces for bombarding, and all are defended with deep moats. How will you take possession of such formidable entrenchments?"

³¹ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 435.

³² This, and the succeeding answers of Joan in this interview which are authenticated by references to the *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, are all, with the exception of two otherwise designated, taken from that portion of vol. II between pp. 436 and 439.

³³ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*.

³⁴ The same.

³⁵ The same.

³⁶ The same.

³⁷ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*.

"I shall be the first to descend into the moats and the first to climb the ladders, while crying to the armed men: 'Follow me! Let us bravely enter the place! The Lord is with us!'"³⁸

The two knights looked at each other amazed at Joan's answers. John of Novelpont especially experienced a rising sensation that verged on admiration for the beautiful girl of so naïve a valor. Denis Laxart was thinking apart:

"My good God! Whence does Jeannette get all these things that she is saying! She talks like a captain! Whence did she draw so much knowledge?"

"Joan," resumed Robert of Baudricourt, "if I grant your desire of having you taken to the King, you will have to cross stretches of territory that are in the power of the English. It is a long journey from here to Touraine; you would run great risks."

"The Lord God and His good saints will not forsake us. We shall avoid the towns, and shall travel by night rather than by day. Help yourself – and heaven will help you!"

"That is not all," persisted Robert of Baudricourt, fixing upon Joan a penetrating look; "you are a woman; you will have to travel the only woman in the company of the men that are to escort you; you will have to lodge pell-mell with them wherever you may stop for rest."

Denis scratched his ears and looked at his niece with embarrassment. Joan blushed, dropped her eyes, and answered modestly:

"Sir, I shall put on man's clothes, if you can furnish me with any; I shall not take them off day or night;³⁹ moreover, would the men of my escort be ready to cause annoyance to an honest girl who confides herself to them?"

"Well, would you know how to ride on horseback?"

"I shall have to learn to ride. Only see to it that the horse be gentle."

"Joan," said Robert of Baudricourt after a moment's silence, "you claim that you are inspired by God; that you are sent by Him to raise the siege of Orleans, vanquish the English and restore the King on his throne? Who is to prove that you are telling the truth?"

"My acts, sir."⁴⁰

This answer, given in a sweet and confident voice, made a lively impression upon the officers. Robert of Baudricourt said:

"My daughter, go back with your uncle to his house – I shall shortly notify you of my decision. I must think over your request."

"I shall wait, sire. But in the name of God, I must depart to the Dauphin, and let it be rather to-day than to-morrow; the siege of Orleans must be raised before a month is over."

"Why do you place so much importance upon the raising of that siege?"

"Oh, sir!" answered Joan, smiling, "I would place less importance upon delivering the good town if the English did not place so much importance upon taking it! The success of the war depends upon that with them; it also depends upon that with us!"

"Well, now, Sir Captain," said the radiant Denis Laxart in a low voice to Robert of Baudricourt, "should I cuff both the ears of the brazen and crazy girl? You advised me to do so."

"No; although a visionary, she is a stout-hearted girl!" answered the knight, also in a low voice. "For the rest, I shall send the curate of Vaucouleurs to examine her, and, if need be, to exorcise her in case there be some sorcery at the bottom of this. Go back home."

Denis and Joan left the hall; the two cavaliers remained in a brown study.

³⁸ The same, vol. II, p. 459.

³⁹ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation.*

⁴⁰ The same, vol. II, p. 80.

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN OF NOVELPONT

Shortly after Joan left, Robert of Baudricourt hastened to the table and prepared to write, while saying to John of Novelpont: "I now think like you; I shall forward the odd adventure to the King and submit to him the opinion that at the desperate pass of things it may not be amiss to try to profit by the influence which this young girl, who claims to be inspired and sent by God, might exercise upon the army, which is completely discouraged. I can see her, docile to the role that she will be put to play, passing before the troops, herself clad in armor and her handsome face under a casque of war! Man is captivated through his eyes as well as through his mind." Robert of Baudricourt stopped upon noticing that the Sire of Novelpont was not listening, but was pacing the length of the hall. He cried: "John, what in the name of the devil are you thinking about?"

"Robert," gravely answered the cavalier, "that girl is not a poor visionary, to be used *in extremis* like an instrument that one may break if it does not meet expectations."

"What else is she?"

"Her looks, her voice, her attitude, her language – everything reveals an extraordinary woman – an inspired woman."

"Are you going to take her visions seriously?"

"I am unable to penetrate such mysteries; I believe what I see, what I hear and what I feel. Joan is or will be an illustrious warrior-maid, and not a passive instrument in the hands of the captains. She may save the country – "

"If she is a sorceress the curate will play the holy-water sprinkler upon her, and report to us."

"I am so much impressed by her answers, her candor, her daring, her good sense, her irresistible sincerity, that if the King sends word back with your messenger that he consents to see Joan – I am resolved to accompany her on her journey."

"Ah, Sir John," said Robert of Baudricourt, laughing; "that is a sudden resolve! Are you smitten by the pretty eyes of the maid?"

"May I die if I am yielding to any improper thought! Such is the proud innocence of that young girl that however lustful I might be, her looks would instantly silence my lust.⁴¹ I am ready to stake my salvation upon it that Joan is chaste. Did you not see how she blushed to the roots of her hair at the idea of riding alone in the company of the horsemen of her escort? Did you not hear her express her wish to assume man's clothes, which she would not take off day or night during her journey? Robert, chastity ever proclaims a beautiful soul."

"If, indeed, she is chaste, she could not be a sorceress; demons, it is said, can not possess the body of a virgin! But be on your guard, dear sire; without your knowing it, the maid's beauty is seducing you. You wish to be her cavalier during the long journey; lucky chances may offer themselves to your amorous courtesy. But," added Robert of Baudricourt in answer to an impatient gesture from his friend, "we shall drop joking. This is what I think concerning the young girl: If she is not a sorceress, her brain is disordered by visions, and she believes herself, in good faith, inspired of God. Such as she is, or seems to be, the girl can become a valuable instrument in the hands of the King. Soldiers and the people are ignorant and credulous. If they see in Joan an emissary of God, if they believe she brings them supernatural aid, they will regain courage, and will make strenuous efforts to wipe out their defeats. Her exaltation, if skilfully exploited by the chiefs of the army, may have happy results. And that is the important point with us."

⁴¹ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 401.

"The future will prove to you your error. Joan is too sincere, and right or wrong, too deeply imbued with the divinity of her mission, to accept the role that you imagine for her, to resign herself to being a machine in the hands of the chiefs of the army. She will act upon her own impulse. I take her to be naturally endowed with military genius, as have been so many other captains who were at first unknown. Whatever may happen, you must write to the King and inform him of what has happened."

"I think so, too."

"Which King are you writing to?"

"Have we two masters?"

"My dear Robert, I accompanied to court the Count of Metz, under whom I commanded a company of a hundred lances. I have had a near look of things at Chinon and at Loches. I have formed my opinion of our Sire."

"From which it follows that there are two Kings?"

"There is a King of the name of Charles VII, whose mind runs only upon ruling the hearts of easy-going women. Unnerved by indulgence, ungrateful, selfish, regardless of his honor, that prince, hemmed in at Chinon or Loches by his favorites and his mistresses, allows his soldiers to fight and die in the defence of the fragments of his kingdom, but has never been seen at the head of his troops."

"It is a disgrace to the royalty!"

"There is another King. His name is George of La Tremouille, a jealous despot, consumed with malice and vainglory, resentful. He rules supreme over the two or three provinces that the kingdom of France now consists of, and he dominates the royal council. He is the real master."

"I knew that the steward of the palace of our do-nothing King was the Sire of La Tremouille; it is to him I meant to write."

"Do no such thing, Robert; take my advice!"

"You say yourself he is the master – the King in fact!"

"Yes; but anxious to remain master and King in fact, he will not tolerate that any other than himself find the means to save Gaul. The Sire of La Tremouille will, you may rest assured, reject Joan's intervention. Write, on the contrary, direct to Charles VII. He will be struck by the strangeness of the occurrence. If only out of curiosity he will want to see Joan. He finds the day long in his retreat of Loches or Chinon. The blandishments even of his mistresses are often unavailing to draw him from his ennui. The arrival of Joan will be a novelty to him; a pastime."

"You are a good adviser. I shall write direct to the King and expedite a messenger to him on the spot. Should the answer be favorable to Joan, would you still think of accompanying her?"

"Then more than ever!"

"The journey is long. You will have to traverse part of Burgundy and of Champagne, both of them occupied by the enemy."

"I shall take with me my equerry Bertrand of Poulagny, a prudent and resolute man. I shall join to him four well armed valets. A small troop passes more easily unperceived. Moreover, as Joan wisely proposed, we shall avoid the towns all we can by traveling by night, and shall rest by day in isolated farm-houses."

"Do not forget that you will have to cross many rivers; since the war, the bridges are everywhere destroyed."

"We will find ferries at all the rivers. From here we shall go to St. Urbain, where we can stay without danger; we shall avoid Troyes, St. Florentin, and Auxerre; arrived at Gien, we shall be on friendly soil. We shall then proceed to Loches or Chinon, the royal residences."

"Admit it, Sire of Novelpont, are you not slightly smitten by the beauty of Joan?"

"Sire Robert of Baudricourt, I feel proud of being the knight of the warrior-maid and heroine, who, perhaps, may yet save Gaul."

CHAPTER XVIII

"GOOD LUCK, JOAN!"

Towards sun-down of February 28 of the year 1429, a large crowd consisting of men, women and children pressed around the Castle of Vaucouleurs. The crowd was impatient; it was enthusiastic.

"Are you sure the pretty Joan will leave the castle by this gate?" asked one of the crowd, addressing at random his nearest neighbor.

"I think so – she can not go out on horseback by the postern gate. She is to ride along the ramparts with the Sire of Novelpont, who is to escort her on her long journey. We shall be able to get a good view of her here on her fine white horse."

"Our hearts all go out to her," remarked a third.

"The prophecy of Merlin is fulfilled. Well did he say —*Gaul, lost by a woman, will be saved by a virgin from the borders of Lorraine and a forest of old oaks!*" said a fourth.

"She will deliver us from the English! The poor will again be able to breathe! Peace and work for all!"

"No more war alarms; no more conflagrations; no more pillaging; no more massacres! May her name be blessed!"

"It is God who sent us Joan the Maid – Glory to God!"

"And yet a daughter of the field – a simple shepherdess!"

"The Lord God inspires her – she alone is worth a whole army. The archangels will fight on her side."

"Do you know that Master Tiphaine, the curate of the parish of St. Euterpe, undertook to exorcise the Maid in case she was a sorceress and was possessed of a demon? The clerk carried the cross, the choir-boy the holy-water, and Master Tiphaine carried the sprinkler. But he did not dare to approach the Maid too near, fearing some trick of the spirit of Evil. But Joan smiled and said: 'Come near, good Father, I shall not fly away.'⁴²

"She felt quite sure that she was a daughter of God!"

"Evidently she is a virgin. After the exorcism no clawy demon leaped out of her mouth!"

"Everybody knows that the devil can not inhabit the body of a virgin. Consequently Joan can not be a sorceress, whatever people may have said of her god-mother Sybille."

"So far from suspecting that Joan was an invoker of demons, Master Tiphaine was so edified with her mildness and modesty that the day after the exorcism he admitted her to holy communion – she ate the bread of the angels."

"That was lucky! Who, if not Joan, could eat angels' bread?"

"Do you know, friends, that while the Sire of Baudricourt was waiting for the answer of the King, and, by God, it seems the answer was long in coming, the Duke of Lorraine, hearing the report that Joan was the maid foretold by Merlin, wished to see her?"

"And did he?"

"The Sire of Novelpont took Joan to the duke. 'Well, my young girl,' said the duke to her, 'you who are sent by God should be able to give me advice; I am sick, and, it looks to me, near my end – '"

"So much the worse for him! Who does not know that the duke is suffering from the consequences of his debaucheries, and that, in order to indulge them at his ease, he has bravely cast off his own wife?"

⁴² *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 657.

"No doubt Joan must have known all that, because she answered the duke: 'Monseigneur, call the duchess back to your side, lead an honest life, God will not forsake you.'⁴³ Help yourself and heaven will help you."

"Well answered, holy girl!"

"It is said that those are her favorite words – 'Help yourself and heaven will help you!'"

"Well, may heaven and all its saints protect her during the long journey that she is to undertake!"

"Is it credible? – a poor child of seventeen years to command an army?"

"Myself and five other archers of the company of the Sire of Baudricourt," said a sturdy looking soldier, "requested him as a favor to allow us to escort Joan the Maid. He refused! By the bowels of the Pope, I would have liked to have that beautiful girl for a captain! Led by her, I would defy all the English put together! Yes, by the navel of Satan, I would!"

"Armed men commanded by a woman! That surely is odd!" observed an impressed cynic.

"Two beautiful eyes looking upon you and seeming to say: 'March upon the enemy!' are enough to set one's heart on fire! And if, besides, a sweet voice says to you: 'Courage – forward!' that would be enough to turn the biggest coward into a hero!"

"Above all if the voice is inspired by God, my brave archer."

"Whether she be inspired by God, by the devil or by her own bravery, I care as little as for a broken arrow. If one were but alone against a thousand, he must have the cowardice of a hare not to follow a beautiful girl, who, sword in hand, rushes upon the enemy."

"I can not help thinking of the pain it must give Joan's family to have her depart, however glorious the Maid's destiny may be. Her mother must feel very sad."

"I have it from Dame Laxart that James Darc, a very strict and rough man, after having twice had his daughter written to, ordering her return home, and objecting to her riding away with men-at-arms, has invoked a curse upon her. Furthermore, he forbade his wife and his two sons ever again to see Joan. She wept all the tears in her poor body upon learning of her father's curse. 'My heart bleeds to leave my family,' said the poor child to Dame Laxart, 'but I must go whither God bids me.'⁴⁴ I have a glorious mission to fill."

"The Maid's father is a brute! He must have a bad heart! The idea of cursing his daughter – who is going to deliver Gaul."

"She will do so – Merlin foretold it."

"It will be a beautiful day for us all when the English are thrust out of our poor country which they have been ravaging for so many years!"

"The fault lies with the knighthood," put in a civilian; "why did it prove so cowardly at Poitiers? This nobility is a costly luxury."

"And on top of all, oppressed and persecuted, Jacques Bonhomme has had to pay the ransom for the cowardly seigneurs with gilded spurs!"

"But Jacques Bonhomme got tired and kicked in his desperation. Oh, once at least did the scythe and fork get the better of the lance and sword! The Jacquerie revenged the serfs! Death to the nobles!"

"But what a carnage was not thereupon made of the Jacques! The day of reprisals will come!"

"Well, the Jacques had their turn; that is some consolation!"⁴⁵

"Now it will be the turn of the English, thanks to Joan the Maid – the envoy of God! She will throw them out!"

"Aye, aye! Let her alone – she promised that within a month there will not be one of these foreigners left in France."⁴⁶

⁴³ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 657.

⁴⁴ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 567.

⁴⁵ See the preceding volume of this series, "The Iron Trevet."

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Rehabilitation*, vol. II, p. 450.

"Glory to her! The shepherdess of Domremy will have done what neither King, dukes, knights nor captains were capable of accomplishing!"

"Good luck to you, Joan, born like ourselves of the common people! A blessing on her from all the poor serfs who have been suffering death and all the agonies of death at the hands of the English!"

"They are letting down the drawbridge of the castle!"

"There she is! That's she!"

"How well shaped and beautiful she is in her man's clothes! Prosperity to Joan the Maid!"

"Look at her! You would take her for a handsome young page with her black hair cut round, her scarlet cape, her green jacket, her leather hose and her spurred boots! Long live our Joan!"

"By my soul, she has a sword on her side!"

"Although not a generous man, the Sire of Baudricourt presented her with it."

"That's the least he could do! Did not the rest of us in Vaucouleurs go down in our pockets to purchase a horse for the warrior maid?"

"Master Simon, the cloth merchant, answered for the palfrey as a patient animal and of a good disposition; a child could lead it; it served as the mount to a noble dame in the hunt with falcons."

"Upon the word of an archer," again put in the archer of the Sire of Baudricourt's company, "Joan holds herself in the saddle like a captain! By the bowels of the Pope! She is beautiful and well shaped! How sorry I am not to be among the armed men of her escort! I would go with her to the end of the world, if only for the pleasure of looking at her!"

"Indeed, if I were a soldier, I would prefer to obey orders given by a sweet voice and from pretty little lips, than given by a rough voice and from hairy and coarse lips."

"Look at the Sire of Novelpont with his iron armor! He rides at Joan's right. Do you see him? He is a worthy seigneur."

"He looks as if he would guard her as his own daughter. May God guard them both!"

"He is adjusting a strap on the bridle of the Maid's palfrey."

"At her left is the Sire of Baudricourt; he will probably accompany her part of the way."

"There is the equerry Bertrand of Poulagny, carrying his master's lance and shield."

"Jesus! They have only four armed men with them! All told six persons to escort Joan from here to Touraine! And through such dangerous territories! What an imprudence!"

"God will watch over the holy Maid."

"Look – she is turning in her saddle and seems to wave good-bye to someone in the castle."

"She is taking her handkerchief to her eyes; she is drying her tears."

"She must have been waving good-bye to her uncle and aunt, the old Laxarts."

"Yes; there they are, both of them, at the lower window of the tower; they are holding each other's hands and weep to see their niece depart, perhaps forever! War is so changeable a thing!"

"Poor, dear girl! Her heart must bleed, as she said, to go all alone, far from her folks, and to battle at the mercy of God!"

"She will now turn around the corner of the rampart – "

"Let her at least hear our hearty adieus – Good luck, Joan the Maid! Good luck to Joan! Good luck! Good luck! Death to the English!"

"She hears us – she makes a sign – she is waving good-bye to us. Victory to Joan!"

"Mother! Mother! Take me up in your arms! Put me on your shoulders. Let me see her again."

"Come child! Take a good look! Always remember Joan! Thanks to her, no longer will desolate mothers weep for sons and husbands massacred by the English."

"Good luck to Joan – Good luck!"

"She has turned the corner of the rampart – she is gone!"

"Good luck to Joan the Maid! May the good God go with her!"

"May she deliver us from the English! Good luck, Joan!"

PART II CHINON

CHAPTER I THE COUNCIL OF CHARLES VII

Three of the principal members of the Council of King Charles VII – George of La Tremouille, chamberlain and a despotic, avaricious and suspicious minister; the Sire of Gaucourt, an envious and cruel soldier; and Regnault, Bishop of Chartres, a double-dealing and ambitious prelate – were assembled on the 7th of March of 1429 in a hall of the Castle of Chinon.

"May the fever carry off that Robert of Baudricourt! The man's audacity of writing direct to the King inducing him to receive that female cowherd!" cried George of La Tremouille. "And Charles considers the affair a pleasant thing and wants to have a look at the crazy girl! The fools claim she is sent by God – I hold she has been sent by the devil to thwart my plans!"

"There is but one way of eluding the formal orders of the King," observed the Bishop of Chartres. "That accursed John of Novelpont has made so much noise that our Sire is determined to see the vassal whom, since her arrival, we have kept confined in the tower of Coudray to await the royal audience. The brazen and vagabond minx feels greatly elated at the imbecile enthusiasm that she has been made the object of by the clouts of Lorraine, and is surprised at not having been presented to Charles VII! Blood of Christ! Our do-nothing King is quite capable, as a means both of ridding himself of us and of dropping all care on the score of the kingdom's safety, of tempting God by accepting the aid of this Joan – In that event, my seigneurs, it will be all over with the influence of the royal council! All that will be left for us to do will be to quit our posts."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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