

"Joan of Arc"

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Outside of the story of the Christ there is none in history which offers so complete a picture of the ^{her} lengths and depths of human character as that of Joan of Arc. So perfect is its symbolism that one coming for the first time to the records of the world might well believe it the invention of some consummate master of the intricacies of human nature intent on showing to men the extremes of evil and of good of which they are capable.

Full of subtilities and mysteries as the story is there is none in all history more perfectly documented. We have not merely the proofs of what the Holy Maid claimed to be and what she did, but the details of her childhood, the inmost experiences of her spiritual and physical life. And these events and experiences stand on the evidences of not one, but of many of those who were with her from her birth on January 6th, 1412 in the little village of Domremy some 125 miles south east of Paris to the day 19 years later May 30th when in the presence of 42 judges, bishops, and crowds of watchers she was burned at the stake because as a great body of eminent lawyers and divines of the day had found she was to put it in their restrained and Christian language: "A lair, an inventor of revelations and apparitions said to be divine, a deceiver, pernicious, presumptuous, light of faith, rash, superstitious, a soothsayer, a blasphemer against God and his saints, a contemner of God even in his sacraments, a prevaricator of divine law, and of sacred

doctrines and of ecclesiastical sanction, seditious, cruel, apostate, schismatic having committed a thousand errors against religion, and by all these tokens rashly guilty towards God and Holy Church".

The girl against whom these vindications and hysterical charges were made, she knew not A from B, was of peasant origin not yet twenty years of age. She had come to her cruel end because from the time she was thirteen years of age she had heard Voices - the voices of saints - which she never had doubted had come from God and which she had never failed to obey ^{though} the orders they gave her. were so extraordinary that they had at the beginning filled her with terror. She had wept and pled her youth, her ignorance, her unfitness for the mission on which they would send her. It was an amazing mission, nothing less than to save France from the clutches of England. Her instructions were detailed. She was to go to the governor of her province and ask for an escort to conduct her to Charles VII, who called himself King of France, though he had never been crowned, at the city of Rheims where French Kings were accustomed to be crowned, being in the hands of the English along with Paris and all the lands to the north northward east as well as much in the south west. She was to go to Charles and announce herself as sent by God to be the leader of his armies. To raise the siege of Orleans was to be her first task, then she was to conduct Charles to Rheims

where he was to be crowned. The English in the end were to be driven from all France the Voice assured her.

To Joan of Arc this mission was of the supremest importance. She was an ardent patriot and her country was suffering and degraded. Joan lived in the path of war and like many a Belgian, a French or a Polish girl of today she saw her village sacked, her family and her friends obliged to flee saving what they could. Domremy lived in constant danger of the Burgundian allies of England and of all the pitiless riff raff war breeds. Joan loved her King looking on him as sent of God. To rescue him was the noblest work to which she could be called. After the first time she accpeted the call without misgivings. It was not for her to question the "Voices" sent by God.

The key to the career of Joan of Arc is this unfaltering confidence. She did things from the start utterly preposterous by human standards of conduct. What more unlikely of success than that the Governor of a tormented district should turn over for the saking to a child of seventeen of whom he had never heard, an escort to take her to the King of the Land, Yet the Governor of Vaucouleurs did this not on the first or second asking to be sure, but on the third and Joan had never doubted that she would get her escort - "the 'Voice' had told me it would be thus".

This confidence carried her untouched through the intrigues, the flatteries, the delays which the cynical and the jealous set for her. Her mind was so full of the command laid on her that nothing could divert or frighten her. One might expect a girl of her origin to be shocked at the thought of presenting herself before a Court and a King. But not Joan, she passed unabashed though the throng had gathered to witness her first meeting with Charles and kneeling told him composedly "Most noble Lord Dauhpín I am come and am sent to you from God to give succor to the Kingdom and to you". She won Charles from the start for she was much of a person in spite of his vassilating and his weakness and he answered to the nobility of her call. She won the better part of his court and as for the people they flocked to her. She was sent to be examined by the highest religious tribunal of the country for without assurance that her "Voices" were indeed from God Charles did not dare risk it. Joan might of course be what the English and the cynical of his court declared, 'a witch and her "Voices" of the Devil!"

For three weeks the girl was questioned by the ablest lawyers and churchmen of the Kingdom. A selected body of women gave her a physical examination. The end of it was a complete justification:-"It is found and hereby declared that Joan of Arc, called the Maid, is a Christian and a catholic and that there is nothing in her presence or her words contrary to

the faith, and that the King may and ought to accept the succor she offers for to repel it would be to offend the Holy Spirit, and render him unworthy of the aid of God".

Before this ratification all opposition to Joan fell. She was proclaimed by the King as one sent by God to assist him. She was given armor, a guard, soldiers and under her orders a really theatrical campaign was conducted. Orleans fell before her, though it was so infested that Charles had ceased to hope for its recovery. The winning of Orleans converted some who had doubted her in spite of learned jurists and theologians. It was with them as with d'Aulon, her Steward: "It was not possible for so young a Maid to do such thing without the will and guidance of our Lord". Those who, because of personal ambitions, did not believe in her, those who hated her purity and the habits of restraint and temperance she imposed on the army, those who called her witch, still did not dare oppose her openly. She might be from God and whether she was or not she was in the saddle adored of the people, supported by a King, a terror to the English. The complete ascendancy Joan of Arc won in France in just two months from the time of her first interview with the King lasted from the fall of Orleans to the Coronation of the King at Rheims, on July 17th, 1429. The march which proceeded the crowning was most of it through land which the English held. There were sieges and battles, dangers and escapes. It was man-

aged by the Maid with a calm authority, an unwavering reliance on her "Voice" which lifted her even in the minds of her most cynical associates quite out of the ranks of human leaders. She was a greater general than them all. She foresaw all, she never feared nor hesitated and she a girl of seventeen, she must be of God. And when finally the impossible had been accomplished and in spite of English, Burgundians and the plotters, Charles was crowned, there were few of the French who even secretly denied her claim.

How could they when all she foretold promptly came true, It was by the success or failure of their prophesying that men of those days judged largely whether one came from God or not. It was because she told the governor of Vaucouleurs of a distant battle on the day it occurred and days before the news could reach him that he finally yielded to her demand of an escort. It was because she selected the King from a throng in which he mingled told him that which no one but he knew, that he accepted her. She had told that she would be wounded at Orleans and she was, she had warned a wicked fellow that he would be dead shortly and he was. Who could despise the holy origin of such a Maid! Certainly the average man or woman of the 15th century, certainly not the loyal and devout French she succored. As for the French who fled before her they acknowledged her powers, but they declared them to be of the

Devil. As was natural since they were the sufferers!

But outside both of the divine guidance and both military and political genius, Joan of Arc had human qualities calculated to make even the roughest men love and respect her, Peasant though she was, she was beautiful to see. This fresh, untouched young girl with the flame of inspiration in her eye and the authority of the divine in her bearing, clad in her pure white armor and mounted on a war horse as spirited as the best of them must have been a sight to stir the heart. Her sympathy for the afflicted poor of the country was as wide as her devotion to the King. They knew it and no little of her power came from their preception. There was no shadow of self-seeking in her, she never asked honor or wealth or pleasure. There were clever and designing ones who sought to trap her with such baubles - a well-known and usually quite successful method of troublesome people with ideas of their own, Joan was quite outside of all worldliness. It looked small and thin to one who consorted with saints and followed the orders of the Most High. What she took of the gifts showered upon her she gave to the poor. When at the Coronation the King told her to ask what she would she asked that Domremy be freed forever from taxes.

She was devout. No catholic in France was more faithful to her rite in the church, no one partook

of its holy mysteries with more humility or with more worship in his heart.

But good and devout and charitable as she was she was no colorless person. There are numerous delightful human outbreaks recorded in the documents of her life: "She wept like an ordinary girl when she received her first wound." She flew often into a passion when her command had been disobeyed. She was particularly hard on the wanton women who followed the camp often herself chasing them. Once she broke a sword over the head of one, and again killed one by the blow she gave.

She guarded her own divine prerogative with quite human jealousy. As there were many women prophesying in those days a company of them were enlisted to help the King after Joan's first success. Joan never liked them; "Folly and futility" was her characterization of the work of the most prominent of these women, Catherine de la Rochelle, "Send her home to her husband and children" was her order. A common enough point of view of the maid who has made a career for herself and who sees a married woman seeking to do the same! However in Catherine's case Joan suspected fraud and there seems to have been reason.

With the crowning of the King at Rheims Joan seemed to feel that her mission was at an end. She

was homesick when she saw her father and those who had come from Domremy to witness her miraculous elevation. She She prayed Charles to release her, to send her back to her spinning and her flocks, her mother and her friends. But she was too precious at the moment. The King and his counsellors would have more of her aid, but they wanted it without admitting her to their council, and without heeding the counsel slogan as coming from her "Voice". She was severe and outspoken about all this treachery. She accepted to the limit the divine character of her mission;- no fear, no compromises, no recognition of the judgment of King or counsellor.

"Truces have been made that are not pleasing to me and I know not whether I shall keep them, but if I keep them, it will be solely to maintain the King's honor".

In the winter following the failure to take Paris Joan wrought many marvels in the Loire country to which the King had retreated. The greatest was that among doubters and flatters, and in spite of intrigues and discouragements she kept her purpose clear, her confidence unshaken. She was still Joan, the Maid sent by God to drive the English from all France. But she was no longer a Maid with full power over the King. She stood it until spring, then the certainty that there was danger of France again losing Rheims and all Champagn she set out with a band of perhaps

a hundred horses and fewer archers, her objective Compiegne which the Duke of Burgundy was threatening. It was the 13th of May when she reached Compiegne. The aid she ~~seemd~~ rendered futile enough at this distance. The truth was Joan had no knowledge of the situation, and could have no plans for relief. She was not admitted into the counsels of those who defended the town. For her attack on Orleans and her march on Rheims she had the knowledge which of devout belief in her mission she had possibly unconsciously collected but at Compiegne she had nothing but her "Voices". She had almost full command from Orleans to Rheims, now she was little more than a holy figure carried in the attack so far as the commanding officers were concerned.

The result was her capture. It came at a moment when she was crying "Go forward. They are ours", though as a matter of fact all of the French but she and her little ~~gusad~~ guard had fled. If in the few months Joan of Arc held sway over the minds of the French King and his people she showed as none outside of the Christ have ever shown the divinity in men and its possible sway over hearts. Surely that which followed is the most perfect illustration of the divinity possible to men, never were human minds so put to it to prove a saintly thing evil. All the learning

that was in the University of Paris, all the authority there was in the church and the state in the part of the world where Joan was finally taken for trial was summoned to find out, not the truth - they had no interest in the truth - but plausible reasons for proving her a witch, a thing from the devil. The orders from the English government were that she should not be allowed to die save by what they called "the hand of justice". That is she must be proved a devil and burnt.

At this noble work there now was set a band of some 60 of the most learned, distinguished and noble scholars, judges and ministers to be had. There was an occasional one for whom the work was too abominable. One such declared boldly

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