

The little troop rested at one of the inns in the small town, until the king sent for Joan. Part of the room where they first met still stands, and a monument has been erected in the town in Joan's honor.



CXXIV. JOAN TO THE RESCUE.

CHARLES, the Dauphin, as he was still called, for as yet he had not been consecrated, was just then very much depressed, because an army which he had sent to capture some supplies from the English had recently been defeated in the Battle of the Herrings. Besides, the king had so little money that even his shoemaker refused to give him credit for a pair of new boots. He was also doubtful whether the rumors which he had heard might not be true, and thought that if he were not the late king's son, he really had no right to the throne; still, he did not dare express this doubt to any one, but brooded over it constantly in secret.

The reports concerning Joan had awakened the curiosity of the whole court, so Charles made up his mind to subject the girl to a test which would immediately reveal whether she was a fraud or not. He therefore placed one of his courtiers, magnificently attired, in a conspicuous position, and hid himself among the throng of spectators, whence he watched to see what Joan would do. To the amazement of all present, the peasant girl, instead of doing homage to the gorgeously clad courtier seated on the throne, glanced eagerly around her, and singling out the king, whom she had never seen, bent the knee before him! Then she informed him gravely that she had been sent to relieve Orleans, and to lead him to Rheims, then still in the hands of the foe.

This first test did not, however, entirely satisfy the king, but when Joan informed him privately that her voices declared he was rightful heir to the throne, and when a council of priests, after examining the maid, decided that she was a good girl and a true Christian, and could not therefore have been sent by Satan, he made up his mind to accept the services she offered.

By her orders, a white satin standard was made, a sword with five crosses was discovered buried in a neighboring church, and an army was prepared to march on to Orleans. But Joan was so good and pious that she insisted that the men should pray night and

morning, confess their sins, hear mass, and receive the sacrament before going into battle.

Some of the soldiers greatly objected to this, among others General La Hire (heer), who, the story runs, when asked to say an original prayer, since he did not know any by heart, roughly expressed his sentiments as follows, "Lord God, do unto La Hire today as La Hire would do unto You, if he were Lord God and You were La Hire. Amen." Joan also forbade all swearing among the troops, but La Hire, who could not entirely refrain from strong language, was allowed to swear "by my stick" (of command), when he felt that he must enforce his words by some strong expression.

At last all the preparations were completed, and the army set out to relieve Orleans. Joan had decreed that it should march right through the enemy's lines, but the generals, fearing such an undertaking, and taking a mean advantage of her lack of geographical knowledge, led the force along the southern shore of the Loire River.

When they came opposite Orleans, therefore, the river lay between them and the city, and there were not boats enough to convey the troops across the water! So Joan sent the army back, with orders to cross at the nearest bridge and return along the other shore, while she and a small troop entered the city. She promised to make a sally to escort the army safely through the enemy's lines, whenever it appeared. Now you must know that not only were the common soldiers of the French very superstitious, and believed that Joan had seen visions, but the common soldiers of the English were as well, who dreaded her appearance, and said that if Heaven had sent her, their resistance would be vain.

It was thus that Orleans, then on the verge of famine and despair, joyfully welcomed the maid with her convoy of provision boats, and hailed with rapture her promise of further aid. It was through a crowd almost delirious with joy that Joan made her way to the house where she was to lodge. A few days later she sallied forth and marched unharmed through the enemy's lines to escort the relieving forces back to the city.

This first success was soon followed by others. In spite of all opposition, Joan led out her troops, the English fleeing when she drew near, thus allowing her to take one fort after another, and finally drove the English away, thus raising the siege of Orleans, as she had promised.

Joan next joined the king and urged him to march on to Rheims, promising that the cities on the way thither would open their gates at his approach. Thus encouraged,

Charles VII began what turned out to be a triumphal march, through a land which gladly threw off the English yoke, and without striking a blow arrived at Rheims, where he was duly crowned and anointed.

Joan was present at the coronation, in full armor, and bearing her banner. When the ceremony was over, the king bade her ask any reward she wished for her services; and she unselfishly requested that her native village of Domremy should henceforth be freed from taxes, and that she might be allowed to return to her humble home.



Joan entering Orleans.

The first part of her request was readily granted, and Domremy was free from taxation until the Revolution (1792). Thus for nearly four hundred years the Maid of Orleans—as Joan was now almost exclusively called—appeared on the tax lists opposite the name of her native village, instead of the sum which it would otherwise have been obliged to pay.

But when it came to the second item, the king, in spite of her entreaties and tears, insisted that her mission was not yet finished, and that she must help him drive the English entirely out of the country. Although reluctantly, Joan consented at last to remain; but she urged Charles repeatedly to be up and doing, as the right moment had come to act. You see, now that for the first time all loyal Frenchmen believed Charles VII divinely appointed to rule France, plenty of men and money were placed at his disposal. But instead of fighting, the dilatory king signed a truce with the new duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, who was an ally of the English, and continued to pass the greater part of his time in idleness, lavishing much money on his favorite, Agnes So-rel'.

