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The Vision Comes to Joan at Domremy

(First Panel)

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Son of the Artist.

JOAN OF ARC was born on the 16th of January, 1412, at Domremy, a little village in Lorraine, a dependency of the bailiwick of Chaumont, which was in turn a dependency of the Crown of France. Her father was called Jacques d'Arc, her mother Isabellette Romee.

They were good people, mere laborers living from their work. The house inhabited by them still exists, quite close to the church, a few paces from those great and sombre forests of the Vosges in the midst of which rose the venerable abbeys of Luxeuil and Remiremont.

The child grew up there, under the eye of God.

While her brothers went to work in the fields or to care for the flocks, she stayed in the house, busying herself with sewing or spinning. She never learned to read or write; but often she prayed.

"She was a very good girl," chronicles one of the friends of her childhood, "She was simple and gentle. She went willingly to church and to holy places. She used to spin and attend to household duties like other girls. She often went to confession. She would blush when told that she was too devout, that she went too often to church." Another, a laborer, also called later as a witness, added that she cared for the sick and gave alms to the poor. "I know it well," he said. "I was a child then and she it was who cared for me."

One Summer day at noon, when she was in her thirteenth year, she heard a voice in her father's garden.

"Joan," said the voice, "be good and virtuous; go often to church." The poor girl felt a great fear.

Another time there was a great burst of light and Saint Michael, archangel of trials and battles, appeared to her. He told her of the great trouble in which the Kingdom of France lay, and that she was destined to deliver her country from the English.

"Joan," he said, "go to the aid of the King and you will restore to him his Kingdom."

She answered, all in a tremble:

"Messire, I am but a poor girl; I shall not know how to do it, neither how to ride on horseback nor lead soldiers."

"God will help you," replied the archangel. And the child, stupefied, stood bathed in tears.

Then came the white figures of saints, amid innumerable shafts of light, their heads surmounted by rich crowns, with gentle and tender voices. Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret appeared to her thus in turn, to recall to her the mission for which she was destined.

"I saw them with these eyes of mine," she recounted later to her judges, "and when they left me I was crying; I could have wished that they might have taken me with them."

In the meantime Joan kept in the innermost depths of her heart the secret of her celestial interviews. Nobody suspected what was going on within her, not even the priest who heard her confessions.

At the beginning of the year 1428, when Joan was sixteen years old, the saints became more insistent and ordered the girl to seek out the Sire de Baudricourt, Lord of Vaucouleurs, and ask from him an escort to take her to the King of France.

Not daring to tell her plans to her parents, she asked one of her uncles to take her to Vaucouleurs. Her uncle agreed. Unfortunately the Sire de Baudricourt, suspecting some devilry, received her very coldly. Only the people felt no doubts concerning her. From all sides they came to see her.

"Before mid-Lent," she said, "I must be in the presence of the King, even though, to get there, I should wear my legs down to the knees. For nobody in the world, neither Kings, nor Dukes, nor the daughter of the King of Scotland, can recover the Kingdom of France, and there is no help for him but from me, though I would prefer to stay and spin by the side of my poor mother; but since my work is not there, I must go and do it, for my Lord wills it!"

"And who is your Lord?" they asked her.

"It is God!"

A young gentleman, Jean of Metz, was touched. He promised her, "by his faith, his hand in hers, that, under the guidance of God, he would lead her to the King." Another gentleman was similarly moved and declared that he would follow this holy progress. Finally the poor people, in spite of their poverty, contributed toward clothing and arming the little country girl. They bought her a horse, a sword, and, upon the prearranged day, she left with her feeble escort.

"Go, and let come what may!" cried Baudricourt.

"God be with you!" cried the poor people, and the women wept at seeing her disappear in the distance.

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