

The Recognition of King Charles VII. at Chinon

(Second Panel)



My Enemies may be on my road," Joan had said, on leaving Vaucouleurs, "but God also is there."

Chinon was in fact far and the journey thither perilous. To reach Touraine, where the King was, it was necessary to traverse regions occupied by the English and Burgundians. Joan and her companions had to follow rude trails, to cross mountains and ravines, ford rivers, travel in the night, and hide during the day.

More than once her escort, terrified, talked of returning to Vaucouleurs. "Fear nothing," Joan told them, "God marks out my path; my brothers in Paradise tell me what I have to do."

On the eleventh day, the 6th of March, 1429, the young country girl who was to put the English to flight and restore France to the French, made her entry into Chinon.

Never had the situation been more critical. Everywhere the foreigner was triumphant. Nobles, clergy and citizens rallied to the side of the King of England. The country was dismembered, the army decimated, the treasury empty.

The King of France was selling his jewels, and he exclaimed: "Why can I not coin my heart into money? Willingly would I allow it to be torn from me to have gold pieces made out of it!"

Nevertheless, the Court of Charles VII. was far from being unanimously in favor of Joan. La Tremouille, the favorite of the hour, jealously guarding the ascendancy which he had won over his master, was resolved upon eliminating any influence that was not his own.

For two days the council discussed whether the inspired young girl should be received. Matters might have dragged along for some time yet, had not news arrived at this moment from Orleans of so disquieting a nature that the partisans of

Joan were able to prevent this last chance of good fortune from being lost.

The King finally received her in the midst of the greatest pomp; it was supposed, apparently, that this would disconcert her.

The time was evening; fifty torches illuminated the reception hall; a number of lords and more than three hundred knights were grouped about the King. Every one was curious to gaze upon the inspired one, or sorceress. The sorceress, they learned, was a young girl of sixteen years, of healthy and robust appearance. She had brown hair and a pleasing face, a sweet and penetrating voice.

She stepped forward very humbly, "like a poor little shepherdess," but recognized the King at once. Though he had mingled with the crowd of nobles and maintained at first that he was not the King, she embraced his knees. As he had not yet been crowned, however, she merely called him Dauphin.

"Gentle Dauphin," she said, "I am called Joan la Pucelle. The King of the Heavens informs you through me that you will be anointed and crowned in the city of Rheims, and that you will be the lieutenant of the King of the Heavens, who is the King of France."

The King then took her aside and, after a moment's talk, the expressions of both changed. She said to him, as she afterward told her confessor: "I tell you, at the command of the Lord, that you are the true heir to France and the son of a King."

Despite all this, her foes made fresh objections. So learned doctors and professors of theology were summoned and instructed to question Joan.

To them she recounted with a lofty simplicity how the angels had appeared and spoken to her. "Joan," said the wise men to her, "you declare that God wishes to deliver the people of France; if such be His will, He has no need of soldiers." This did not disconcert her.

"Ah, my God!" she said, "the soldiers will battle and God will give the victory." To another, who demanded of her, in his Limousin dialect, what language this so-called celestial voice spoke, she spiritedly replied: "A language better than yours!"

"God does not wish that one should believe your words," cried the savant in a fury, "unless you give us some sign." She replied: "I have not come to Poitiers to give signs or do miracles; the sign I shall give will be the raising of the siege of Orleans. Give me soldiers, few or many, and I will go there."

In the meantime what had happened at Vaucouleurs was repeated at Poitiers. Her saintliness convinced the common people. In an instant all were ranged on her side, matrons and maids of the nobility, women of the bourgeoisie, counselors and advocates, hardened old judges, who permitted themselves to be led to her without believing in her, and returned saying like the others: "This maid has been sent by God."

