

beautiful visitors had spoken vaguely of some "deliverance"

she was to bring about in the future, she had listened with trembling joy. But now they had plainly shown her the distasteful first step, and for a moment she shrank from taking it. How could a peasant brave the governor of Vaucouleurs? How was a modest girl to venture among rude men-at-arms? How could a dutiful child leave her parents and her home?

"Alas!" she pleaded, "I am a poor girl; I know neither how to ride nor how to fight." She had a short, hard struggle with her own weakness, but the voices did not alter, and she set herself to do their bidding.

Her uncle, Durant Laxart, with whom she evidently was a favourite, lived at a village near Vaucouleurs, and in May, 1428, she went to his house for a visit. After a few days she confided to him something of her plans, reminding him of the old prophecy of Merlin, but never speaking of her visions. With much difficulty she prevailed

on him to help her. He went with her to Vaucouleurs, and before the governor, to whom she made known her errand.

"Send and tell the Dauphin," she said, "to wait and not offer battle to his enemies, because God will give him help before mid-Lent. The kingdom belongs not to the Dauphin, but to my Lord; but my Lord wills that the Dauphin shall be king, and hold it in trust. In spite of his enemies he shall be king, and I myself shall lead him to be crowned."

"And who is your Lord?" demanded Baudricourt. She answered, "The King of Heaven."

The governor, a rough and practical soldier, laughed at the young peasant in her coarse red dress, and bade her uncle chastise her well, and take her home to her father.

She returned to Domremy with her heart more than eyes fixed on the work she had before her. Now and again she let fall words that revealed enough to make her parents anxious and fearful. Her father dreamed that she had gone away with the soldiers. "If I thought such a thing could happen," he said to her brothers, "I would bid you drown her, and if you refused, I would drown her myself." But she was of a marriageable age; why should she not marry, stay at home, and bring up children, like other women? A lover came forward, a bold one, who, when she rejected him, summoned her before the court at Toul, declaring that she had promised to be his wife. But she went before the judges, spoke out bravely, and defeated her persevering suitor.

As the months passed, her longing increased to be gone and do her voices' bidding. Once more she obtained her uncle's help. His wife was ill, and he came to Domremy and got leave for Joan to go back with him and nurse her. She went, keeping secret the real end of her journey. "If I had had a hundred fathers and a hundred mothers," she said later, "and if I had been a king's daughter, I should have gone." She took leave of her companion Mengette, but to Haumette, her dearer friend, she would not trust herself

to say farewell. Her uncle took her to Vaucouleurs, and gave her in charge of a wheelwright's wife, Catherine Royer, with whom she lived for some weeks. She went constantly to church, she helped her hostess in the house, and was gentle and obedient. At the same time, she spoke frankly of her mission to any who chose to hear.

She again went to the governor, who received her no better than before. But she was not cast down.

"I must go to the Dauphin," she said, "though I should go on my knees."

Many people went to see her, among others a brave gentleman of Metz, Jean de Novelonpont.

"What are you doing here, my child?" he asked her, jestingly. "Shall the King be driven out of France, and must we all turn English?"

"I am come to this royal city," she answered, "to bid Robert de Baudricourt take or send me to the King, but he does not heed my words; and yet before mid-Lent I must be before the King, though I should wear away my legs to the knees. For no one else in the world, neither kings, nor dukes, can recover the kingdom

of France, and there is no help but in me. And, indeed, I would rather spin with my poor mother, for this is not my calling; but I must go and do it, for it is my Lord's will."

Like Baudricourt, the knight asked her:

"Who is your lord?"

And she answered, "He is God."

But, unlike Baudricourt, he was touched by her words. In the old feudal fashion, he laid his hands within hers and vowed that, by God's help, he would take her to the King. Another worthy gentleman, Bertrand de Poulengy, gave a like promise.

Baudricourt was now forced to listen to Joan. The people of Vaucouleurs believed in her with the ready faith of that time, and she had at least two of his own class to take her part. But those voices of hers, were they of God or of the Devil? Was she witch or saint? The governor, like many another good soldier, had some weakness of superstition. He went to see her, taking with him a priest, who began to exorcise her,

bidding her avaunt if she were of the Evil One. Joan approached the priest and knelt before him, honouring not him, but his office; for, as she said afterwards, he had not done well; he should have known that no evil spirit spoke by her.

While she was waiting Baudricourt's pleasure, the Duke of Lorraine, who was ill at Nancy, heard of her, and, hoping for the revelation of some cure, desired to see her. He sent her a safe-conduct, and she went to Nancy under care of her uncle. But she knew only what her voices taught, and she had no power to cure any ills but those of France. This she told the Duke, promising him her prayers, and begging him to aid in her enterprise. He sent her back honourably, but did not pledge himself to the royal cause.

The people of Vaucouleurs came forward to help Joan. They gave her a horse, and the dress and equipment of a soldier; for as she was to travel with men, she wisely chose to wear man's attire. Baudricourt still doubted and delayed. The people she was sojourning with pitied her anxiety. On the day of the battle of Rouvray she went to the governor.

"In God's name," she said, "you are too slow about sending me. To-day the Dauphin has suffered great loss near Orleans, and he is in danger of yet greater if you do not send me to him soon."

At last he yielded to her urgency. He gave her a sword and a letter to the King, and let her prepare to depart. Bertrand de Poulengy, Jean de Novelonpont, and four armed men of lesser rank were to accompany her. She did not see her parents to bid them farewell, but she sent them a letter, entreating them to pardon her. She spoke cheerily to those who were afraid for

her safety. God and "her brothers of Paradise" would guard her and her little escort on their dangerous journey.

On February 23, 1429, they set out, Baudricourt bidding her "Go, come of it what may."

Her most timid well-wisher could hardly have exaggerated the perils of the journey. More than half of it was through the enemy's country, where there was continual risk of being stopped and questioned. The rivers, swollen by the winter rains, were unfordable; therefore the travellers had to cross over bridges in full sight of fortified towns.

On the eleventh day of their journey the Maid and her party reached St. Catherine de Fierbois, near Chinon, where they rested, and Joan heard three masses. She sent a letter to Charles requesting an audience, and telling him she had come a hundred and fifty leagues to help him.

An interview with Charles was no such simple affair as she had fancied. Between her and him were doubts, jealousies, intrigues. But her friends prevailed, and after two days' waiting she was admitted to the castle. As she was passing through the gate, a man-at-arms called out,

"What, is that the Maid?" and added a coarse jest and an oath.

Joan turned and looked gravely at him.

"Alas!" she said, "you blaspheme God, and you are so near your death!" Within an hour the man was drowned by accident, and those words of hers were repeated far and wide as a proof of her prophetic power.

The Count of Vendome led her into the royal presence. She entered meekly, but undismayed; in her visions she

had seen finer company than any earthly court could show her. Charles stood among the crowd of nobles, and when she knelt before him he pointed to a richly-dressed lord, saying:

"That is the King, not I."

But she knew the King, probably from descriptions she had heard of him, and answered:

"In God's name, gracious Prince, you are he, and none other." She then repeated to him the words which, like a charm, had brought her so far and overcome so much; "I am Joan the Maid, sent by God to save France," and she asked him for troops, that she might go and raise the siege of Orleans.

Presently the Duke of Alencon came in, and the King having told her who he was, she bade him welcome.

"The more there are of the blood-royal of France," she said, "the better it will be."

Alencon, who had lately returned from a three years' captivity in England, and was still paying a ruinous ransom, sympathised with the girl-champion, and was inclined to believe in her.

The King and his advisers went cautiously to work.

They sent two monks to Domremy to inquire into Joan's character and past life. They called her now and again to Court, where statesmen and churchmen questioned

her closely. Meanwhile, she was honourably treated. She was given to the charge of Bellier, the King's lieutenant, whose wife was a lady of virtue and piety, and many distinguished persons visited her at the castle where she was lodged. One day she rode with the lance before the King, and acquitted herself so well that the Duke of Alencon rewarded her with the gift of a beautiful horse. Could she have at all forgotten

her mission, the time would have passed pleasantly; as it was, she wearied for action.

At last she sought the King, and said to him:

"Gracious Dauphin"—until Charles was anointed at Reims with the sacred oil, he was no real king in her eyes—"Gracious Dauphin, why will you not believe me? I tell you, God has pity on you, your kingdom and people."

To satisfy all doubts about Joan, it was settled that she should be taken to Poitiers, where the Parliament was assembled, and be there questioned by a royal commission.

"In God's name, let us go," she said; "I shall have hard work, but my Lord will help me."

She was lodged in the house of the advocate-general to the Parliament, and committed to his wife's care. The Archbishop of Reims called together churchmen and learned doctors. The Commissioners met, and, having called Joan, showed her "by good and fair arguments"

that she was unworthy of belief. They reasoned with her for more than two hours, and she answered them so well that they were amazed. In spite of their expressed distrust, she spoke to them freely and fully, told how her voices had bidden her go into France, how she had wept at their command and yet obeyed it, how she had come safely, because she was doing the will of God.

"You require an army," said one, "saying it is God's will that the English shall quit France. If that be so, there is no need for men-at-arms, because God can drive them away by His pleasure."

"The men-at-arms shall fight," she answered, "and God shall give the victory"; and the monk confessed that she had answered well.

When the examination had dragged on for three weeks two of the doctors came one day to question her, bringing with them the King's equerry, whom she had known at Chinon. She clapped him, comrade-like, on the shoulder, exclaiming:

"Would that I had many more men of as good will as you!" Then turning to the doctors, she said, "I believe you are come to catechise me. Listen!—I know neither A nor B, but there is more in God's books than in yours. He has sent me to save Orleans and crown the King."

She demanded paper and ink. "Write what I tell you!" she said, and dictated to the amazed scholars the famous letter which soon after was sent to the English.

The grave and stern commissioners were won by the young peasant. None of them bore her any grudge for the occasional sharpness of her replies. Many of them believed firmly that she was inspired, and quoted the old prophecy of Merlin, who had foretold the coming of a maid who should deliver France. All of them trusted in her good faith, and appreciated more or less the influence she would have over the people. They advised, almost commanded, Charles to employ her. Her life, they said, has been carefully inquired into; for six weeks she has been kept near the King; persons of all ranks, men and women, have seen and talked with her, and have found in her only "goodness, humility, chastity, devotion, seemliness and simplicity." She has promised to show her sign before Orleans: let the King send her there, for to reject her would be to reject the Holy Spirit.

Besides her learned judges, she had others, whom had she been an impostor, she would have found hard to deceive. Keen women's eyes had been set to watch



her, and had seen no fault in her. The ladies who came to see the warrior-damsel were amazed to find her a mere girl, "very simple, and speaking little." Her goodness and innocence moved them to tears. She prayed them to pardon her for the man's attire she wore; but in that lawless day the most modest women must have well understood that such a dress was fittest and safest for her who had to live among men.

Towards the end of April she was sent to Tours, where a military staff was appointed her. Her brothers, Jean and Pierre, who had followed her, were included in her retinue. A suit of beautiful armour was made for her. She was provided with a banner after her own device—white, embroidered with lilies: on one side of it, a picture of God enthroned on clouds and holding a globe in His hand; on the other, the shield of France, supported by two angels. She had also a pennon, whereon was represented the Annunciation. The King would have given her a sword, but her voices, she said, had told her of the only one she might use, an ancient weapon with five crosses on its blade, which was lying buried behind the altar in the church of St. Catherine de Fierbois. A messenger was sent, and in the place she had told of was found an old rusty sword such as she had described. After being polished, it was brought to her with two rich scabbards, one of crimson velvet, the other of cloth-of-gold; but the practical Maid got herself yet another of strong leather for daily wear.

Joan, being accepted, the National party made rapid preparations for the relief of Orleans.

Her first care was that the army given her by God should be worthy of His favour. For the priests attached to it, she had a banner made with a picture of

the Crucifixion, beneath which they said mass and sang hymns to the Virgin morning and evening.

On Thursday, April 28th, the relieving army set out from Blois, the priests going before and singing the *Veni Creator* round their banner of the Cross. Joan wished to march along the north bank of the Loire, and through the line of English forts; her voices, she said, had told her that the convoy would pass them without hurt. But the captains, who had little faith in her revelations, preferred keeping the river between themselves and the chief bastiles of the enemy. They had orders, however, to obey the Maid, so, to avoid contradicting her, they misled her as to the position of Orleans; crossing the bridge at Blois, they advanced by the south bank of the stream. When night came, the army encamped on the plain, and Joan, who lay down in her armour, arose bruised and weary for the next day's march. But all her fatigue was forgotten when she saw how she had been deceived.

Dunois, with a following of knights and citizens, came up the river to welcome the convoy. When he approached Joan, she asked him:

"Are you the bastard of Orleans?"

"Yes," he replied, "and I am glad of your coming."

"And did you advise that I should be brought by this side of the river, and not straight to the English?"

He answered that it was so, he and the council having judged it safest.

"In God's name," she said, "my Lord's counsel is safer and wiser than yours. You thought to deceive me, but you have deceived yourselves, for I bring you the best help that ever knight or city had; for it is God's help, not sent for love of me, but by God's pleasure."