



Children's Stories That Never Grow Old.

JOAN of ARC

JOAN was born at Domremy, France, on January 6, 1412, which was many, many years ago. This was a very troubled and unhappy time in history, for the kings of England had been trying to make themselves kings of France for nearly a hundred years.

The king of France had one son, who was called the Dauphin, though his real name was Charles. The people of England said that he was not the son of the king, and so had no right to the throne of France, which, of course, gave the Dauphin much unhappiness.

The people of a village nearby the one where Joan lived took sides with the English, and the boys of the two places often had pitched battles with sticks and stones. Joan used to see her brothers, Peter and John, come home from these battles with their noses bleeding, and with black eyes, but she did not take part herself in them.



IN A beautiful woods near the village of Domremy stood an oak tree, which was called the Fairy Tree. There was a story that a beautiful fairy used to meet her lover beneath its branches. Here the children of the village made feasts and would hang garlands of flowers on the boughs of the tree. Joan, however, liked better to place wild flowers beneath the statues of saints in the village church.

Though Joan could run faster than the other girls and boys, and beat them when they ran races, she preferred to be quiet. Nobody could sew and spin better than Joan did, and she was very often found praying in church alone. She often left other children while at play, and would go into lonely places, where she would kneel and ask God to have pity on her beloved country, France. The services in church, the singing and music made her very happy. At the sound of the church bells across the fields she would fall on her knees and pray. Any money she might have was spent on masses to be said in honor of God, and for the good of men's souls.



SUCH was the life of Joan until she was 18. She grew to be very beautiful, and her hair was raven black.

One day she and the other girls and boys were running a race for a crown of flowers. Joan was easily the winner; and as she was running, a child, who was looking on, cried, "Joan, you are flying. Your feet are not touching the ground." After the race Joan had a curious feeling, as if she did not know where she was. Then she heard a young man's voice near her say, "Go home, my child; your mother needs you."

She did not know whence the voice came, though she obeyed its bidding at once. She found, however, that her mother had not sent for her. As she turned to go back to her friends, a bright light like a shining cloud appeared before her, and she heard a voice say:



"GO, THOU, and save France from England."

She was very much afraid, but the voice said:

"Do not be afraid. Be a good girl and go to church, and save France."

She said: "I am only a little girl, and I cannot ride, or lead the soldiers into battles;" but the voice kept on saying again and again that she must march before the soldiers and lead them to victory.

After this Joan heard other voices, and saw shining figures of the saints in heaven, and when they left her she wept bitterly, with eyes lifted to heaven. She told her friends about what she saw and heard, and seemed very happy.

TIME went on, and Joan lived at home in her village. Every day the voices told her to save France; to drive away the English. She used to cry, and say:

"Oh! I cannot. People would think me either wicked or mad."

In the meantime, the Dauphin, the rightful prince of France, fell into greater and greater misfortune, and finally only the town of Orleans remained true to him. In fact, everywhere the English were overcoming the French.

Joan, who was far away in Domremy, heard of the danger which threatened Orleans. The voices at last said:

"Go, daughter of God, to Robert de Baudricourt, the commander of the French army, and ask him to send you to the Dauphin, to whom say, 'I have come to save France.'"

Joan had an uncle who lived near Vaucouleurs. She went to him and told him she must go to the Dauphin, and that first she must ask Robert de Baudricourt to send her to him.



HER uncle, of course, was much astonished, but as he believed in her, he took her to Robert.

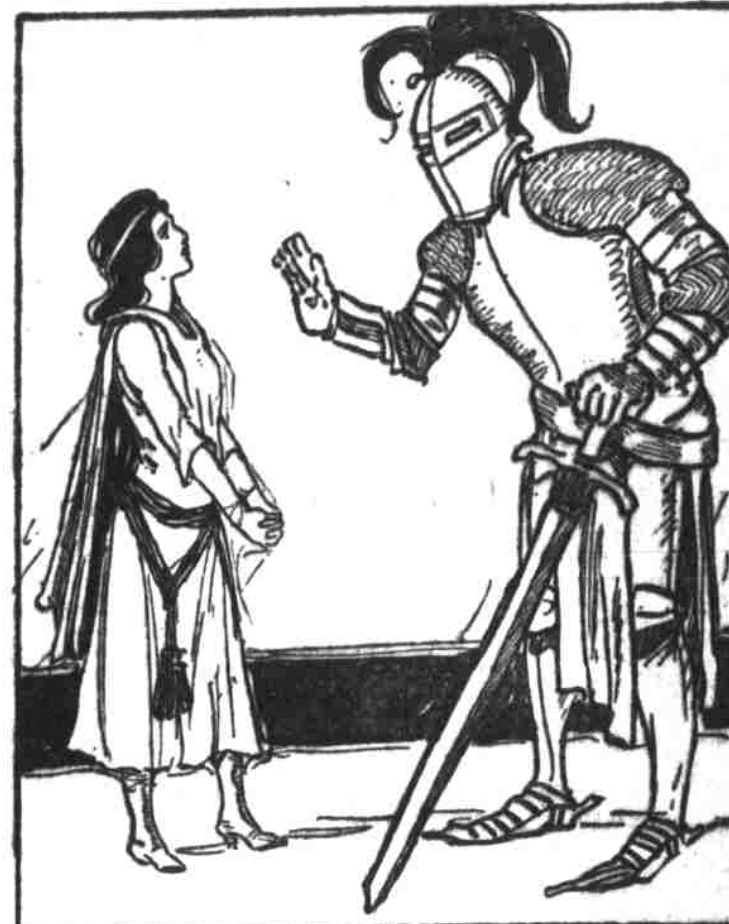
Robert laughed at her, and told Joan's uncle to take her away and box her ears. Joan then said:

"If you do not, a terrible misfortune will befall our country on the 12th of February, for so the voices have told me."

But Robert said to her:

"Go back to your home, my child."

When the 12th of February came, however, the words of Joan came true: the English defeated the French in a great battle. Robert de Baudricourt himself was forced after this to believe in Joan, and he sent her with soldiers to Chinon, where the Dauphin was.



AFTER riding for several days, Joan and her companions reached Chinon, and she was taken to the castle.

Joan went straight up to a man plainly dressed who stood among a great number of magnificent courtiers dressed in silk and gold embroideries. Kneeling on one knee, she said:

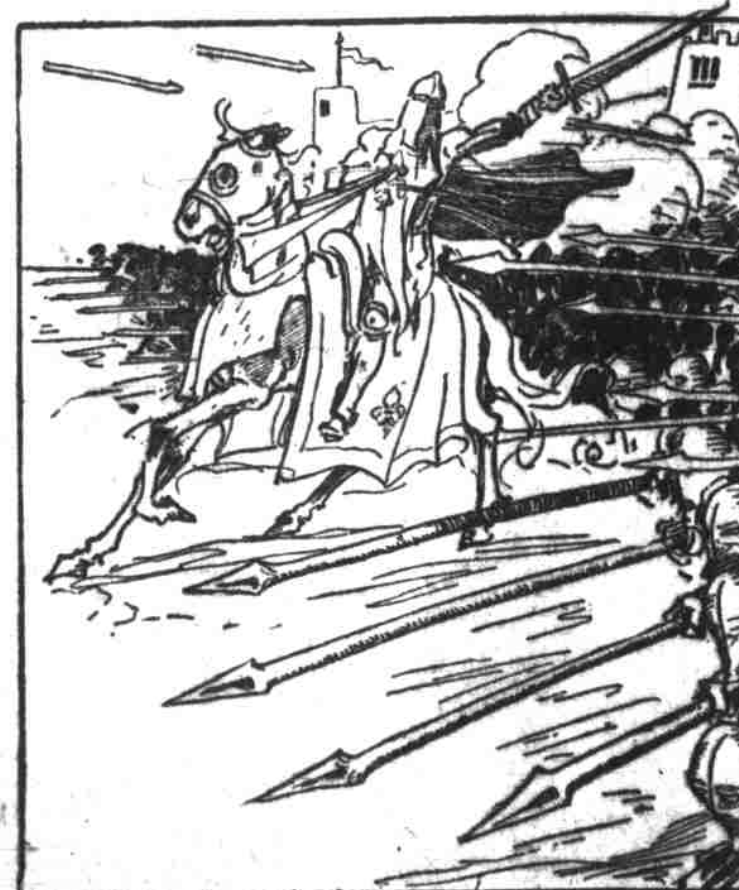
"Fair sir, you are the Dauphin to whom I am bid to come."

But this man pointed to a knight very richly dressed, and said:

"That is the king."

"No, fair sir," said Joan, "it is to you that I am sent."

The Dauphin, for he it was to whom she spoke, was greatly surprised at this, for Joan had never seen him before. He consented to talk alone with her, and no one has ever known what they said to each other that day. Some say she told him he was the rightful king of France; but this they do know, that Joan was given a beautiful suit of white armor, and that she led the army to Orleans. And further, that the battle was fought and the English were defeated.



JOAN rode a horse better than any one in France, and was most skilled in aiming cannon. So great a general was she that the English were defeated again and again; in fact, her army never lost.

She was so good that her enemies could not find anything against her. Finally they poisoned the mind of the king, who deserted her and allowed her to be cruelly killed.

The story of Joan of Arc, or the Maid of Orleans, is so strange that it seems scarcely true. But strangely true it is, and wonderful, too; the more so because Joan was only 17 when she first led the French into victorious battle against the English.