

Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc

by Mark Twain

c. 150,000 words

CASTING BRIEF:

Seeking: Male narrator, neutral American accent or light French accent, 40s–60s, with audiobook experience. Actor must have own studio for self-recording. The novel is narrated by Sieur Louis de Conte, Joan's childhood companion and page, writing in his old age and looking back on the extraordinary life of his friend with reverence, warmth, and wonder.

Celebrity comps: Lucas Bravo. Vincent Cassel. Jake Gyllenhaal.

Genre: Classic Literature, Historical Fiction, Biography

Contract: SAG-AFTRA independent publisher contract, scale (with P&H) + 10%

Publisher: The Merry Beggars

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Synopsis:

Narrated by the fictional Sieur Louis de Conte—presented as Joan's childhood friend, page, and lifelong devoted witness—this novel follows Joan of Arc from her humble origins in the village of Domrémy through her divine calling, her astonishing military campaigns that turned the tide of the Hundred Years' War, and finally her trial and execution at the hands of the English-allied Church. The book covers Joan's visions and her conviction, the political intrigues of the French court, the chaos and courage of medieval battle, the exhausting trial at Rouen, and the moment of her death. It is at once a biography, a work of historical imagination, and an act of devotion.

About the Author:

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), known by his pen name Mark Twain, was one of the preeminent American writers of the nineteenth century, celebrated for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and a vast body of journalism, satire, and travel writing. *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) was serialized anonymously in *Harper's Magazine* (Twain feared readers would not take it seriously under his name) before being published as a novel. He spent twelve years researching the book and called it his best work, the one he wrote for love rather than money.

Chapter 3: All Aflame with Love of France

Speaking of this matter reminds me of many incidents, many things that I could tell, but I think I will not try to do it now. It will be more to my present humor to call back a little glimpse of the simple and colorless good times we used to have in our village homes in those peaceful days—especially in the winter. In the summer we children were out on the breezy uplands with the flocks from dawn till night, and then there was noisy frolicking and all that; but winter was the cozy time, winter was the snug time. Often we gathered in old Jacques d'Arc's big dirt-floored apartment, with a great fire going, and played games, and sang songs, and told fortunes, and listened to the old villagers tell tales and histories and lies and one thing and another till twelve o'clock at night.

One winter's night we were gathered there—it was the winter that for years afterward they called the hard winter—and that particular night was a sharp one. It blew a gale outside, and the screaming of the wind was a stirring sound, and I think I may say it was beautiful, for I think it *is* great and fine and beautiful to hear the wind rage and storm and blow its clarions like that, when you are inside and comfortable. And we were. We had a roaring fire, and the pleasant *spit-spit* of the snow and sleet falling in it down the chimney, and the yarning and laughing and singing went on at a noble rate till about ten o'clock, and then we had a supper of hot porridge and beans, and meal cakes with butter, and appetites to match.

Little Joan sat on a box apart, and had her bowl and bread on another one, and her pets around her, helping. She had more than was usual of them or economical, because all the outcast cats came and took up with her, and homeless or unlovable animals of other kinds heard about it and came, and these spread the matter to the other creatures, and they came also; and as the birds and the other timid wild things of the woods were not afraid of her, but always had an idea she was a friend when they came across her, and generally

struck up an acquaintance with her to get invited to the house, she always had samples of those breeds in stock. She was hospitable to them all, for an animal was an animal to her, and dear by mere reason of being an animal, no matter about its sort or social station; and as she would allow of no cages, no collars, no fetters, but left the creatures free to come and go as they liked, that contented them, and they came; but they didn't go, to any extent, and so they were a marvelous nuisance, and made Jacques d'Arc swear a good deal; but his wife said God gave the child the instinct, and knew what He was doing when He did it, therefore it must have its course; it would be no sound prudence to meddle with His affairs when no invitation had been extended. So the pets were left in peace, and here they were, as I have said, rabbits, birds, squirrels, cats, and other reptiles, all around the child, and full of Interest in her supper, and helping what they could. There was a very small squirrel on her shoulder, sitting up, as those creatures do, and turning a rocky fragment of prehistoric chestnut-cake over and over in its knotty hands, and hunting for the less indurated places, and giving its elevated bushy tail a flirt and its pointed ears a toss when it found one—signifying thankfulness and surprise—and then it filed that place off with those two slender front teeth which a squirrel carries for that purpose and not for ornament, for ornamental they never could be, as any will admit that have noticed them.

Everything was going fine and breezy and hilarious, but then there came an interruption, for somebody hammered on the door. It was one of those ragged road-stragglers—the eternal wars kept the country full of them. He came in, all over snow, and stamped his feet, and shook, and brushed himself, and shut the door, and took off his limp ruin of a hat, and slapped it once or twice against his leg to knock off its fleece of snow, and then glanced around on the company with a pleased look upon his thin face, and a most yearning and famished one in his eye when it fell upon the victuals, and then he gave us a

humble and conciliatory salutation, and said it was a blessed thing to have a fire like that on such a night, and a roof overhead like this, and that rich food to eat, and loving friends to talk with—ah, yes, this was true, and God help the homeless, and such as must trudge the roads in this weather.

Nobody said anything. The embarrassed poor creature stood there and appealed to one face after the other with his eyes, and found no welcome in any, the smile on his own face flickering and fading and perishing, meanwhile; then he dropped his gaze, the muscles of his face began to twitch, and he put up his hand to cover this womanish sign of weakness.

“Sit down!”

This thunder-blast was from old Jacques d’Arc, and Joan was the object of it. The stranger was startled, and took his hand away, and there was Joan standing before him offering him her bowl of porridge. The man said:

“God Almighty bless you, my darling!” and then the tears came, and ran down his cheeks, but he was afraid to take the bowl.

“Do you hear me? Sit down, I say!”

There could not be a child more easy to persuade than Joan, but this was not the way. Her father had not the art; neither could he learn it. Joan said:

“Father, he is hungry; I can see it.”

“Let him work for food, then. We are being eaten out of house and home by his like, and I have said I would endure it no more, and will keep my word. He has the face of a rascal anyhow, and a villain. Sit *down*, I tell you!”

“I know not if he is a rascal or no, but he is hungry, father, and shall have my porridge—I do not need it.”

“If you don’t obey me I’ll—Rascals are not entitled to help from honest people, and no bite nor sup shall they have in this house.

Joan!”

She set her bowl down on the box and came over and stood before her scowling father, and said:

“Father, if you will not let me, then it must be as you say; but I would that you would think—then you would see that it is not right to punish one part of him for what the other part has done; for it is that poor stranger’s head that does the evil things, but it is not his head that is hungry, it is his stomach, and it has done no harm to anybody, but is without blame, and innocent, not having any way to do a wrong, even if it was minded to it. Please let—”

“What an idea! It is the most idiotic speech I ever heard.”