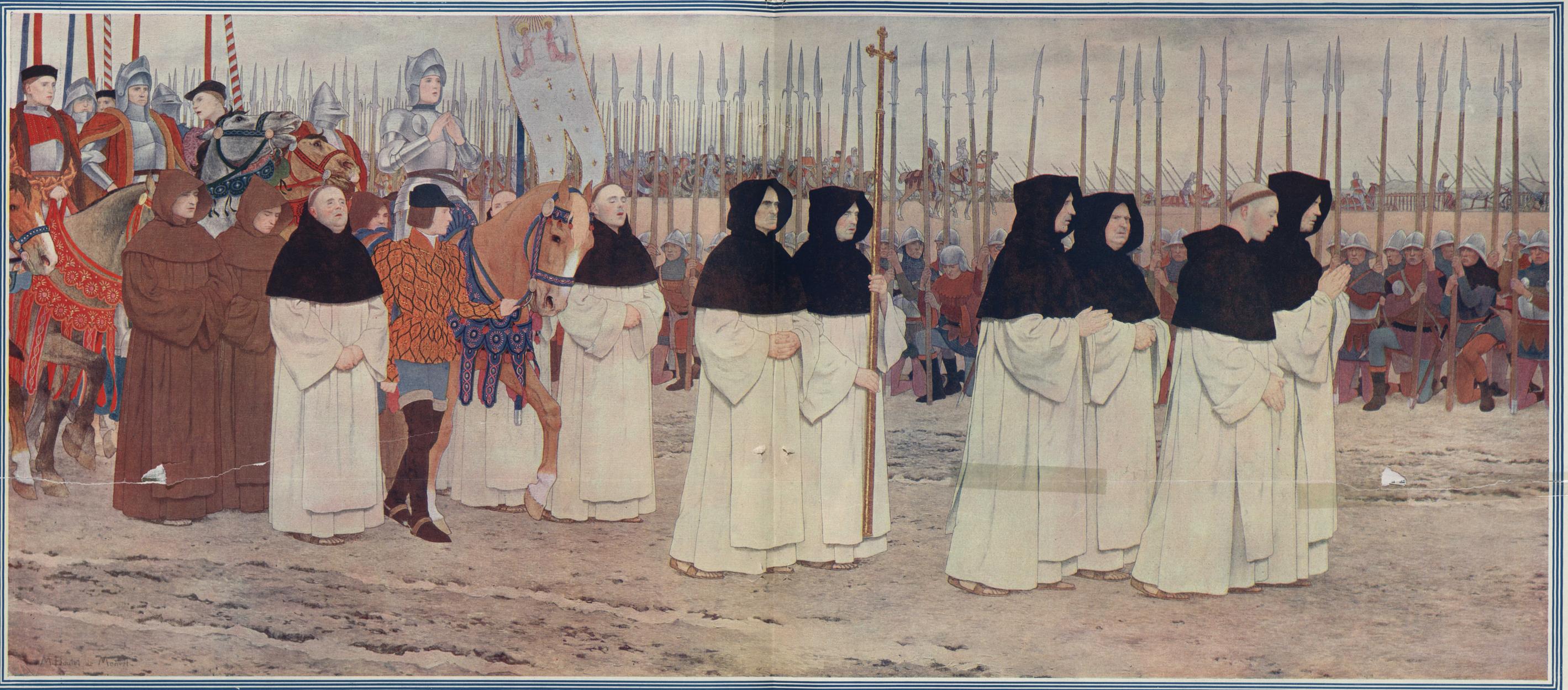
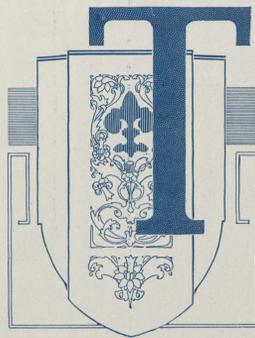


(Third Panel)



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HE troops assembled at Blois. Joan arrived there, followed by the Duke of Alencon, Marshal Boussac, the Sire de Rais, La Hire and Saintrailles. It was wonderful to see her for the first time in her white armor mounted on a great dark horse, with a little battle-axe by her side, and the sword of Saint Catherine. She had caused this sword to be sought behind the altar of Saint Catherine de Fierbois, and there indeed was it found. In her hand she bore a white standard emblazoned with the fleur-de-lis, on which God was represented with the world in His hands, and at His right and left two angels bearing a fleur-de-lis.

"I do not wish to use my sword for killing any one," she said. And she added that, though she loved her sword, she loved her standard "forty times as much."

One essential thing was lacking in the remnant of the French army, and that was unity of action, authority. Even the authority of the King failed to carry weight, for the king's captains at that time were not in the habit of obeying him always. To subjugate such savage wills, it was necessary for God Himself to descend to earth, or else to send a maiden, popular, young, beautiful and brave.

At first Joan found herself surrounded by men-at-arms inclined, in spite of everything, to hold her up to ridicule. But she quickly inspired in them respect and trust.

She begged the soldiers to ease their consciences by confessing their sins before going into battle. To humor her, many mended their ways and even refrained from swearing.

One, La Hire, denied God at all seasons. Joan reprimanded him sharply. But when he was angry, La Hire felt an irresistible inclination to swear. So Joan allowed him to swear by his baton, which he thenceforth did.

Little by little her passionate piety communicated itself to all.

On Thursday, the 28th of April, the little army started upon its way. Joan opened the march, her standard unfurled to the wind, singing, "Veni, Creator." She had desired that, in approaching Orleans, they should go to the north, along the English bank, amid the English strongholds, as she assured them that the enemy would not come forth from their ramparts. But her counsel failed to prevail; they marched by the other bank and reached a point two leagues above Orleans.



Dunois came out to meet them. "I bring you," she said, "the best aid that has ever been sent to any one, the aid of the King of the Heavens. This aid comes not from me, but from God Himself who, at the prayer of Saint Louis and Saint Charlemagne, has taken pity on the city of Orleans, and has not willed that the nemy should hold the Duke and the city prisoners at the same time."

On the 29th Joan entered Orleans. The townspeople prostrated themselves before her. Amid the light of torches, she passed through the city in the midst of such a dense multitude that she had difficulty in making a passage for herself. Every one, men, women and children, wished to get near her or at least touch her horse, and they manifested "a joy as great as if they had seen God descend

among them." They felt, says the chronicle of the siege, consoled and as if the siege were raised by the divine virtue of this simple maid. Joan spoke to them gently, promising them deliverance.

Next day her faith won over all to her side. The people of Orleans, so frightened and discouraged before, but aroused to fanaticism now by her presence, wished to hurl themselves on their foes and storm their intrenchments. But it was decided to wait for reinforcements.

One morning, however, Joan awoke, exclaiming: "O my God, the blood of our people is flowing on the ground! It is not right! Why have I not been warned? Quick, my weapons, my horse!" Helped by the women of the house, she dressed quickly and, leaping to her saddle, rode away at a gallop, her standard in her hand, making straight for the Burgundy gate, at such a speed that sparks flew from the pavement.

And, in truth, without any word to her, an attack had been launched upon the fortifications at Saint Loup. The attack had failed; the French were falling back in disorder. Joan, hastening up, rallied them and, leading them once more against the enemy, she renewed the assault.

In vain Talbot sought to bring aid to his comrades. Joan, standing beneath the ramparts, shouted encouragement to her followers. For three hours the English resisted; but, in spite of their desperate defense, the fort was taken.

The like occurred on the ensuing days at the Augustins fort, at that of Tournelles. "All is yours; enter!" shouted Joan to the soldiers, as she herself held the ladder and climbed to the assault.

Thus was Orleans, besieged for eight months, delivered in four days.

