

What was the greatest and most important work produced by Mark Twain?

Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was one of the most widely loved and celebrated American writers who lived from 1835-1910. Under the pen name Mark Twain; Sam Clemens published over 30 works of literature. Many of his writings have become favorites in both American and world literature, including Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Prince and the Pauper. However, Mark Twain considered his book Joan of Arc as his greatest and most important work.

St. Joan of Arc was born in Domremy, France in the year 1412. She was a peasant girl of pious parents. Up to the age of sixteen, Joan of Arc led an ordinary life doing her part in ploughing, sowing and harvesting the field, tending to the farm animals and at home spinning hemp and wool. She was a simple and pious girl, hearing Mass daily, making frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and often undertaking journeys of devotion to places of religious repute.

During this time, France was in the midst of a war with England called The Hundred Years' War. In 1415, three years after the birth of Joan of Arc, England defeated France at the battle of Agincourt. France emerged from the debacle divided into three parts, the majority of which was held by England and her ally, the Burgundians. The war had gone badly for France. Famine, inflation, pestilence, civil war had added to the misery of the situation. The King of France had no money, no soldiers, and no allies. His own mother had declared him illegitimate and his kingdom had shrunk to a few provinces south of Paris.

In the summer of 1425, Joan was in her father's garden, when, she heard a voice from God. As the voices continued, she also received visions of the holy Angels. At first, the messages were personal and general. Then came a specific request to leave her village and lead the French army to relieve the siege of the city of Orleans. Joan of Arc was dumbfounded! She, a poor, uneducated peasant girl, knowing nothing of the science of war or of the world, ordered to go forth and tell this mysterious occurrence to the King. The idea might well seem too absurd even for the wildest dreamer, but the visions continued and the Voices became more pressing.

She consulted her uncle and after continued insistence, he agreed to take her to the local commander in a nearby city. The commander Baudricourt was skeptical until Joan of Arc announced the defeat of the French Army at the Battle of Herrings

on the day it happened but before news had reached the commander. He began to soften his reluctance and sent Joan of Arc to see the King with a letter of explanation from him.

She traveled eleven days to reach the town of Chinon to have an audience with the King. When she entered the great hall that evening, there was a great assembly of three hundred courtiers and the true King was hidden among them as a test, with an imposter on the throne. Joan of Arc processed down the main aisle, abruptly turned and presented herself directly to the hidden King. She also communicated to the King an innermost secret that only the King would have known, in order to manifest that she in fact had received a Divine calling.

Joan of Arc told the King that she would save the city of Orleans and would compel the English to raise the siege, that she would be wounded in battle, and that the King in the course of the coming summer would be crowned at the city of Rheims.

As she took command of the army, she began by turning the expedition into a religious crusade. She put down swearing and made the men go to confession. She acted as one in authority and the stories of her prophecies soon went round the camp. In five days she raised the siege at Orleans, which had been going on for nearly seven months. Many more victories were attained with the leadership of Joan of Arc. France had become conscious of being a nation and would eventually go on to win the war and force the English off the continent of Europe.

Joan of Arc was eventually captured in battle and imprisoned. She was later falsely tried as a witch and heretic and burned at the stake. But the course of history was forever changed by this eighteen-year-old peasant girl. France under English rule would have lost the Catholic faith as a result of the Protestant reformation in the 16th century.

Mark Twain on the other hand did have a belief in God, but a God that was not personal and involved with his creation. Twain believed that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him. He also held that the universe is governed by strict and immutable laws and that God does not interfere.

This is precisely why he spent several years in France researching and writing the book Joan of Arc. Initially, he felt that he could disprove the historical record, however he soon became enamored by Joan of Arc. She does not fit the deterministic model of the universe that does not allow for the miraculous. God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.

Michael Dosen

