

ST. JOAN AND THE DOMINICANS

ON the 19th of February, 1431, when St. Joan had lain near three months in the dungeon of Rouen Castle and the preliminaries for her trial were already completed, Bishop Cauchon summoned the Dominican Jean Lemaitre, Vice-Inquisitor of Rouen, to become his fellow in judging the Maid.

In dismay, evidently realising the irregularity of the whole proceeding, the Vice-Inquisitor takes refuge in a technicality: the trial, though held in Rouen, is considered as taking place in Cauchon's diocese of Beauvais, whereas his own jurisdiction comprises Rouen only.

Thereupon Cauchon has recourse to the Inquisitor, Lemaitre's superior, then absent. 'I pray your Venerable Paternity,' he writes, 'summoning and requiring . . . that you should come immediately to this town . . . Or if you are detained by business so important as to give a real excuse for delay, please at least delegate Brother Jean Lemaitre in your stead . . .'

Such language argues considerable coercive power. The Inquisitor seems to jump at the plea of other business, but from the 13th of March the Vice-Inquisitor Lemaitre must take his place at Cauchon's side—though such tardy participation should have been sufficient to invalidate the whole trial.

'He was forced to come in,' Nicholas de Houpeville would testify thereafter, 'he was a prey to great fears. I saw him greatly perplexed and perturbed during the case.' Lemaitre's conscience must have sometimes troubled him, for it was he himself who told Houpeville that Joan had complained of the brutality of her gaolers—a brutality it was his own duty to prevent, or rather, to render impossible by removing her to an ecclesiastical prison.

St. Joan and the Dominicans

Other witnesses bear like testimony. Jean Bréhal, Grand Inquisitor of France, in summing up the case for the rehabilitation of the Maid, declares that 'the Vice-Inquisitor acted against his conscience . . . and were the sentence otherwise valid, it would be invalidated by the intimidation and terror to which he was subjected in many ways.' Cauchon's *âme damnée*, he can nevertheless not be exonerated from full share of blood-guilt, and one turns gladly from this sorry figure to the other Dominicans he brought in his train, who, as far as they dared, gave to St. Joan the succour of kindness and compassion.

Of Isambart de la Pierre it would be told how he sat by her side, signing to her how to answer her interrogators, trying to steer her through perilous places, and one day urging her to submit to the General Council of Bâle, 'for there,' he said, 'there are as many of your side as of the English.'

'Oh,' cried Joan, 'if there are some of our side there, I am right willing to submit to the Council of Bâle!'

Whereat Cauchon thundered to Isambart, 'Hold your tongue in the Devil's name!' And later the Earl of Warwick himself came upon him in a towering rage, crying, '*Mortbleu, vilain*, if I catch you trying to prompt her again, I will throw you in the Seine!' A threat which it seems might have been fulfilled, had not the Vice-Inquisitor plucked up courage to declare that in such an event he would withdraw from the case.

Brother Isambart was with the Maid at the last. It was he who sent for the cross from the parish church to hold before her eyes. At her rehabilitation he would tell how all wept, even the Cardinal of Winchester, and how 'in the flame to the end she never ceased to cry aloud confessing the Holy Name of Jesus, imploring and invoking the aid of the Saints of Paradise.

Blackfriars

And what is more when she gave up the ghost and her head fell, she proffered the Holy Name of Jesus.'

Brother Martin Ladvenu, his colleague, had heard her in confession, and it was through his urging that she was allowed the solace of Communion, so long denied her. 'I gave her the Body of Christ,' he would testify, 'Which devoutly and with many tears, in such wise as I cannot tell, humbly she received. From that moment to her last breath I did not leave her I would that my soul were in the place where I believe the soul of Joan' He had stood beside her on the pile itself, so seemingly oblivious of all else that even when the fire was kindled it needed her word to bid him descend.

To these two in their convent that afternoon came the executioner in horror and despair, saying that 'he feared much to be damned for having burned a holy woman,' telling how her heart, for all that he could do, had remained whole and unburned. To the same Dominican convent belongs that brother whom we find condemned to bread and water and imprisonment till the next Easter for having dared to say that the Maid had been unjustly slain. Evidently Dominican hearts were even then drawn to St. Joan.

Neither Isambart de la Pierre nor Martin Ladvenu (nor indeed the condemned brother, whose sentence was a mitigation obtained by abject withdrawal) were of the stuff of martyrs. Both voted with the rest in that final session when Joan was declared 'relapsed' and her abandonment to the secular arm decreed. Isambart even added that 'she should again be charitably exhorted for the salvation of her soul, and told that she had nothing to hope as regards her temporal life.' It is easy now to condemn them, yet one should remember that the scales had been weighted against the Maid by some of the most subtle intellects of Christendom, learned doctors, Fathers of Councils.

St. Joan and the Dominicans

and that even till yesterday she was a disturbing and inexplicable figure to many. Good men and true can be swept away in the heat of a *cause célèbre*, witness the Dreyfus case in our own time; and in earlier centuries mass-suggestion must have been still more irresistible inasmuch as personal individuality was less fully developed and the collective mind more generally potent. When the fever has passed, Isambart and Martin Ladvenu could see how perversely the case had been manoeuvred, and they, with two younger Dominicans who had been spectators rather than actors, are among the first to come forward to bear witness in favour of St. Joan and of her rehabilitation.

The Rehabilitation-trial centres round another and greater Dominican, the Grand Inquisitor, Jean Bréhal, who for four years laboured unceasingly, journeying all over France and to Rome itself, on Joan's behalf, and who presided, with the Archbishop of Paris and the Archbishop of Rheims, at that solemn scene in Notre Dame on the 7th of November, 1455, when in deep mourning, leaning on her two sons, Joan's mother came forward, and 'with great groans and sighs, falling at their feet made the sorrowful prayer' that justice might be done to her daughter's name; when the Cause of Rehabilitation was opened, to be brought a year later to triumphant close.

Jean Bréhal's personality, as apparent in the 'Recollectio' in which he sums up the case, is interesting and admirable. In an epoch of scholastic decadence he represents the grand tradition of St. Thomas, while his ideal of the Inquisition is so lofty that even modern sensibility can reproach it nothing.

He has generous indignation for Joan's treatment in prison. For by the law no untried prisoner should be in chains, in darkness, or want for any necessity. Like a good many notable Inquisitors of the period (a fact

Blackfriars

that may cause surprise), he does not believe in torture. 'He who is disposed to suffer death rather than torture makes only worthless avowals. And torture,' he adds with rare imagination, 'does not mean merely torments immediately inflicted on the body, but includes hunger, thirst, the horror of prison.' And with the same understanding, he can find no other word than torture for the 'many and prolonged exhortations' with which the Maid was pressed to abjure, and which, he says, might well have shaken the constancy of the most learned men, let alone a sick girl.

With even greater force he denounces the procedure of the trial. Joan has to answer demands 'hurled at her like missiles'—a method 'inhuman and iniquitous, for interrogation should be conducted with moderation and gentleness, to allow the questions to be understood, and to give assurance in answering them.' Her judges sought to entrap her in her answers, 'which is utterly despicable and iniquitous, for simplicity is the friend of truth.' They questioned her on abstruse points of doctrine, whereas no one should be questioned beyond their capacity, and such points should only be raised when they have bearing on specific heretical teachings.

With the same sound sense and sound theology he examines the charges against the Maid. Her man's dress? Human customs have not an absolute goodness in themselves, but depend on circumstances, and especially on the end that determines them. Joan's use of male attire, in itself indifferent, was good because for a good end. And he enumerates a long list of holy women who wore such, or even 'went long journeys in the company of young men.' Her departure without the consent of her parents? Had Judith had a husband, would she have waited to ask his permission? Her short hair? Bobbed hair finds its earliest champion, for 'In Picardy and elsewhere a great many women have their hair cut crown-shape, and pray in

St. Joan and the Dominicans

church bare-headed, which the Church does not forbid but allows.'

But it is in his treatment of the major issues that the greatest interest lies: of her visions, where he shows himself fully versed in the teachings of the great mystics; of the question of her abjuration, where he pleads with compassionate understanding that even if, what is doubtful, she signed the formula in the minutes of the trial, in view of all she suffered, she, 'a tender young girl,' cannot be blamed; of the axial point of her submission to the Church.

Joan had said, 'I will submit to the Church, unless she asks of me the impossible,' and by impossible she meant the denial of her visions. Jean Bréhal shows how her judges used the word 'Church' in an equivocal sense, implying now their own tribunal, now some other, now the Infallible Church Militant, which indeed, does not pronounce save on matters of faith and morals. And Joan could not have denied her visions without sin. They had indeed been approved by the clergy of Poitiers; she had moreover the inner certainty that is brought by visions born of God, maybe the gift of discernment of spirits was hers also. 'All the things she was required to submit to ecclesiastical judgment she affirmed and believed to have come through divine inspiration. But this brings with it liberty . . . Nothing authorises anyone to deny or to diminish a truth revealed by God. One may not against conscience at the order of a prelate act against a law publicly proclaimed by God, or a secret inspiration coming certainly from Him. Therefore, Joan was wholly right in saying she submitted to the Church, but God must be served first.'

And he adds magnificently, 'To go against conscience is to build for Hell,' and, quoting the Decretals, 'one must follow conscience when one has certainty rather than the sentence of the Church.'

Blackfriars

This emphasis on conscience brings to mind another great Dominican, without whom the tale were incomplete; who like St. Joan refusing to deny his visions, passed to death by fire, cut off from the Church Militant (though not from the Church Triumphant!), and like her was rehabilitated and declared clean of all heresy some years after his ashes had been scattered. 'If there can be no doubt,' said the Venerable Girolamo Savonarola, 'that the command of a superior contradicts the divine precepts, and especially the law of Christian charity, no one ought to obey it. If however the matter is not perfectly evident, so that no doubt is possible, we ought to submit.' (It is a curious fact that Pastor reads heresy into this essentially Catholic standpoint, which seems indeed the very echo of Jean Bréhal's judgment on St. Joan.)

'If you tear me limb from limb,' cried St. Joan, faced with the instruments of torture, 'I will say nothing different from what I have said. Or if I did, afterwards I would take it back, and say you forced it from me.' One thinks again of the Venerable Savonarola, each time retracting the recantation torture had wrung from him, and thus preparing for himself renewed agony. One wonders if he had ever heard of the Maid? He may have done, for he looked to France, and believed in the mission of France in the world even as did Joan herself.

There is yet one more striking parallel between them. As St. Joan had offered the realm of France to God, that the King of France should hold it from Him as from an Overlord, so the Venerable Savonarola offered Florence to the rulership of Christ. And in both cases we may divine implicit reaction to the tendency of the day, the formation of States recognising no longer co-ordinating law or corporateness of Christendom; reaction curiously comparable to the gesture with which to-day His Holiness Pius XI, faced

St. Joan and the Dominicans

with false doctrines, the logical development of that same tendency, proclaimed the whole world subject to the Kingship of Christ.

BARBARA BARCLAY CARTER.

TO HELEN

As unto the least of these——'

EVEN as from its deeps, soul calls to soul,
I called you, called you with a cry profound;
You heard and questioned: 'Whither are you bound?
Sore stricken must be you who make such dole!'—
Among thieves I had fallen, and they stole
All from me, leaving me upon the ground,
Wounded and comfortless, nor had I found
Thus stricken, one to comfort and console;
Till you came by when journeying from afar,
And stayed to lead me from the dolorous land;
You showed me your own path lit by a star;
Your cup of living waters in my hand
You placed, that I might drink, that I might stand
Within the Temple where the Blessed are.

M. E. GOLDINGHAM.