



Statue of Joan of Arc in the Luxembourg, Paris

ST. JOAN OF ARC AND THE DOMINICANS

In the history of the life of St. Joan of Arc, we find that at each critical period she is brought in contact with members of the Dominican Order. Having left her home, in answer to the call of God, "her voices," as she was accustomed to name it, we see her at the Court of Chinon; from here she is directed to the commission at Poitiers, which had been called together by the Archbishop of Rheims, Regnault de Chartres, for the express purpose of examining the mission of Joan of Arc. Now on this commission there were three Dominicans whose duty it was to question the Maid and pass judgment upon the character of her mission. Thus for the first time did the Dominicans enter into the life of the Saint.

After her brilliant victory at Orleans she was captured by the English, sent to Rouen and there placed on trial. The tribunal which here passed judgment on the Maid of Orleans had as one of its members a Dominican who acted as Inquisitor. Condemned by this unscrupulous assembly, she was sent to prison, where, during her short stay, she was continually ministered to by two saintly Friars. When at last the day had arrived for the carrying out of the unjust sentence decreed against the Maid, we see two Dominicans accompanying her to the stake.

Finally, after seventeen years had elapsed and the story of Joan of Arc has become almost a story of the past, another Dominican appears on the scene, going back over the history of the Maid of Orleans, examining all the details of the previous trials and drawing up in a clear and concise manner everything connected with the trials. He it was who after long study and assiduous examination of all the facts and testimonies, drew up in a very careful manner his "Summarium." To him may we attribute to a very great extent the result of the Trial of Rehabilitation, for he was, as contemporaneous writers have said, "the very soul of the Process." His untiring efforts and earnest zeal brought about the re-establishment of the innocence, heroism and sanctity of Joan of Arc. His judgment that the mission was divine met not only with the approval of the Papal Commission, assembled at Rouen, but also with the approbation of Pope Calixtus III himself.

I

In the early part of the month of February, 1429, Joan of Arc set out from her home at Domremy, and after having traversed a great part of the country of France, which at that time was surrounded by the English and Burgundian armies, arrived at the Court of Chinan, on the 24th of the same month. Joan presented herself to Charles VII and announced the nature of her mission. At this time she was but eighteen years old, and naturally enough, Charles and his court were somewhat amazed at her statements. Not willing, however, to dismiss her as a fanatic, the Dauphin appointed a committee to meet at Poitiers and examine the Maid and her utterances. He assured her of a hearing and sent her immediately to Poitiers.

Among the members of this committee were three Dominicans, Sequin de Sequin, Guillaume Aimeri, and Pierre Turelure. Of the last two named little is known, except that Guillaume Aimeri was Doctor of Theology at the University of Paris, and that the Holy See had appointed him Inquisitor against heretics in the French kingdom. In this capacity he acted during the trial at Poitiers. Père Turelure was a member of the commission of Poitiers and also Prior of his convent in the same city. These two, together with Sequin de Sequin, played a conspicuous part in this the first trial of the Maid of Orleans. Sequin de Sequin was Licentiate at the University of Paris and professor of theology at the Convent of Poitiers. In the chronicles we read that this Sequin de Sequin was "a very harsh man."¹ During the Process of Rehabilitation he was still living and gave a long testimony of the proceedings at the trial of Poitiers. Called upon, at the trial of Rehabilitation, by Jean Brehal, the Inquisitor-General of France, he bore witness to the fourfold prophecy of the Maid of Orleans. "She predicted," said he, "to me and to all the others who were with me, these things: that the siege of Orleans would be raised; that the English power in France would be destroyed; that the King would be crowned at Rheims and that Paris would submit to the French monarch. I who bear testimony of her have seen these four things accomplished."² Later on in the trial he gave his own personal opinion of the Maid: "As regards my own opinion, I believe she was sent by

¹ Coussinot, "Chronique de la Pucelle."

² Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, iii, p. 391.

God, since at the time when she came to the King, he, together with the French people, had lost all hope of victory."

The Council of Poitiers, which had been called together by Regnault de Chartres, Archbishop of Rheims and Chancellor of France, after a long and scrupulous examination of the Maid, brought forth its verdict and declared the mission of Joan of Arc to be divine, and urged the still uncrowned King to obey the Maid and follow her plans.

II

Joan of Arc now took her place at the head of the French army, and after some remarkable victories over the English was taken prisoner and sent to Rouen. Here an inquisitorial procedure was begun by Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais. He called a commission to examine the Maid, but found some opposition on the part of the Dominican, Jean Graverend, whom he had asked to act as Inquisitor. He was Prior of the Convent of St. Jacques and Inquisitor-General. Knowing the nature of the trial and the end desired by Cauchon and the English, he refused to act as inquisitor, avowing that it was against his conscience.

When Cauchon discovered that it was impossible to get Graverend to take part in the trial, he asked Graverend to delegate the Vice-Inquisitor, Jean Le Maitre. It is strange that Graverend, who refused to act in the trial, because it was against his conscience, should delegate an inquisitor subject to him. Jean Graverend was the official guardian of the Faith and whenever a trial was held in which there was a question of faith, his presence was required. Cauchon knew only too well that the presence of an Inquisitor was necessary for the validity and to give some show of justice to the proceedings. Hence his eagerness to secure the presence of Graverend or his delegate.

This trial, however, was far from just. Before its opening session Graverend knew that it could not be just and at the same time attain the end desired by Cauchon. The unscrupulous and almost diabolical plans of Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, were already prepared. It was a time when a man of strong character and unbiased mind should have championed the Maid of Orleans and exposed the treacherous designs of the members of that commission. We must blame Graverend, therefore, for his failure to assist at the trial, and we must also condemn him for

allowing one of his subordinates to play a part in a trial which he himself declared was against his conscience.

The question arises as to why it was against the conscience of Graverend to act as Inquisitor. It is indeed hard to answer. But it seems probable that, owing to the fact that he had taken the oath of allegiance to the existing Government by which he bound himself "to live in peace and obedience with the king of France and England,"³ he did not care to enter into a discussion which would surely offend, if he were to act according to justice. Then, again, there was another reason: In the trial held at Poitiers by Regnault de Chartres, Archbishop of Rheims, the mission of the Maid of Orleans was confirmed and sanctioned. Cauchon was Bishop of Beauvais and subject to that Metropolitan. Consequently, he had no right to hold a trial for the second time without the permission of Regnault de Chartres. This, however, does not exculpate Jean Graverend, for if he really believed these things, he was wrong in allowing one of his subjects to take up a position which, as he himself declared, was against his own conscience.

Cauchon seeing all hope vanish of securing the inquisitorial assistance of Jean Graverend, asked for Jean Le Maitre, the Vice-Inquisitor. This concession was granted him and Le Maitre, after much hesitation, reluctantly consented. In the account of the trial that opened at Rouen in 1431, we find side by side with the name of Cauchon, which history has condemned, that of the Dominican Jean Le Maitre. Because of his being Vice-Inquisitor of the city and diocese of Rouen, he strongly protested against assisting at a trial instituted by the Bishop of Beauvais. He brought forth his letters of appointment to strengthen his argument, but with little success.⁴ His objection was immediately taken up and examined, and on the 20th of February, Cauchon came forward with a statement asserting that the men to whom he had made known Le Maitre's objection were of the opinion that the Vice-Inquisitor could take part in the trial.⁵ This, however, did not satisfy him. Again he refused, saying that for the peace of his conscience and the regularity of the Process he should receive a special permission from his supe-

³ Chapotin, "Jeanne d'Arc and Dominicans," p. 141.

⁴ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, i, p. 35.

⁵ Chapotin, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

rior.⁶ Cauchon immediately wrote to Jean Graverend, the Inquisitor-General, and received permission for Jean Le Maitre to be present at the trial and to act as Inquisitor. A special commission delegating Jean Le Maitre was signed at Constances by the Inquisitor-General on the 4th of March. Le Maitre was notified of his appointment on the 12th of the same month. On the following day, having received full knowledge of the case, he took up his position in the tribunal and called together its members.⁷

Despite the fact that he was practically at the head of the trial, having no one but the Bishop of Beauvais over him, he did not act in that active capacity that one would naturally expect. His indifference and want of interest in the proceedings caused the unscrupulous Cauchon to threaten him with death. As Mauchon, one of the great writers on the period, says, "he took part in the proceedings with great unwillingness. It is but natural for one to expect a man of this disposition and power to intervene in behalf of the falsely accused. Yet the only time that he intervened was on the 24th of May, when he went to the prison to induce the Maid to don female attire and thereby save her life. This, however, did not save Joan. In order to save her honor and good name, she had to resume her soldier's dress again. This brought upon her another accusation. For a while she was considered to have recanted, but as soon as she resumed male attire she was condemned as a "relapsed sinner." She was again taken before the tribunal and without hesitation, the sentence which Cauchon and his allies desired was pronounced against her.

In the final sentence of Joan of Arc, which goes down to posterity as the most criminal act of injustice ever perpetrated, we find the name of Jean Le Maitre linked with the infamous Bishop of Beauvais and his English backers.

III

The two other Dominicans who were present at the trial of Joan of Arc, at Rouen, were Isambard de la Pierre and Martin Ladvenu. These two friars held no important position, but simply acted as socii to the Inquisitor, Jean Le Maitre. When they

⁶ Chapotin, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁷ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," pp. 134-139.

saw how hard and difficult the questions were and how embarrassed the Maid had become as a result of such difficult interrogations, they did not hesitate to prompt her replies. Their zeal was frowned upon by Cauchon. But they were not in the least intimidated and continued to prompt the Maid, though Cauchon angrily threatened to throw Isambard into the Seine. Their sympathy and devotion were true and courageous and they made every effort to free Joan from the injustice and treachery which was becoming more and more evident as the trial proceeded. On one occasion Isambard de la Pierre succeeded in inducing Jean Le Maitre to accompany him to the cell of Joan. It was at this time that the question of giving up the soldier's dress for that of a woman was being considered.⁸

So determined was Cauchon to decide then and there on the death of the Maid of Orleans that when Isambard had urged Joan to appeal and submit to the Council of Basle, Cauchon became exceedingly angry and commanded the humble friar to hold his peace, threatening to throw him into the Seine on the next offense.⁹ Joan's appeal to the General Council was ruled out and the sentence desired by Cauchon continued slowly but surely to advance. The facts, false as they were, were hurriedly gone over. Joan was accused of being a relapsed heretic, a menace to the faith and worthy of the death penalty. The judgment was pronounced and Joan of Arc was condemned to be burned at the stake on Wednesday morning, May 30.

On the morning of the execution, Martin Ladvenu, with another Dominican, Jean Toutemouville, went to the cell, at the command of the bishop, to prepare her for death. "When the poor girl heard of the hard and cruel death which awaited her she began to cry bitterly."¹⁰ As soon as she could be quieted, Martin Ladvenu heard her confession. He then went to the bishop and received permission for the Maid to receive Holy Communion. Massieu says "that on this occasion the Body of Christ was irreverently brought to her, without lights, surplice or stole."¹¹ Martin Ladvenu was horrified at such culpable disrespect and immediately sent for candles and a stole. She then received Communion. The Dominican said that when Joan re-

⁸ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, ii, p. 452.

⁹ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, ii, p. 9.

¹⁰ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, ii, p. 3.

¹¹ Quicherat, "Process de Jeanne d'Arc," I, ii, p. 19.

ceived Our Lord her lively faith and abundance of tears were beyond description.

After Holy Communion she made a short thanksgiving and then began to walk with the procession towards the place of execution in the Vieux Marché. Martin Ladvenu walked by her side and with kind words helped to console her. In spite of the resistance of the soldiers, Isambard de la Pierre was able to secure a position next to Martin Ladvenu. Isambard has left us an account of the profound impression made on the crowd by the piteous aspect, the sentiments of devotion and resignation of the Maid.

The greatest and perhaps most offensive insult offered the Maid was to be called an apostate and a heretic; for when she had heard this, she immediately dispatched Isambard to the nearby church to bring her a crucifix. This was brought and Martin Ladvenu, standing upon the already lighted pile, gave it to her to kiss. As she saw the flames beginning to rise, she bade the friar to descend and raise the cross high into the air, that she might still be able to look upon it. The flames rose higher and higher until the Saint was hidden from view. In a short while all was over and with her last affirmation that "her voices" were from God, she died. Martin Ladvenu and Isambard de la Pierre remained with her till the end and proved themselves to be real friends of the martyred girl. The facts concerning these two Dominicans cannot be denied, and history will always speak of them as friends, defenders and helpers of the Maid of Orleans.

IV

When seventeen years had elapsed and the story of the great injustice was still upon the lips of the people, the Cause of Joan of Arc was taken up again and the investigation begun in regard to the trial held at Rouen. In 1450, Charles VII actuated more by his ambition to strengthen his hold upon the French throne than the desire to vindicate the honor of Joan, ordered an examination of the whole Process. He entrusted this great task to Guillaume Bouille, Dean of the Cathedral of Nayou. The inquiry was begun at Rouen, where seven witnesses, four of whom were Dominicans, were called upon to testify. They were Jean Toutemouille, who accompanied Martin Ladvenu to the prison on the morning of the 30th of May, Guillaume Duval, Martin

Ladvenu and Isambard de la Pierre. These four witnesses gave a very vivid account of the actions of Joan while in prison, and also told of her wonderful career as a soldier and leader.

This, however, was simply preliminary to the real Trial of Rehabilitation, which began with the appearance of the Dominican Jean Brehal, Inquisitor-General of France. Jean Brehal was Doctor in Theology of the University of Paris, had been Prior in many convents of the Order and was an ardent champion of regular observance. As Inquisitor-General of France, he took a leading part in the Trial of Rehabilitation.¹²

From the opening of the sessions by Cardinal d'Estouteville on May 2, 1453, till its happy closing of July 7, 1456, Jean Brehal was everywhere. He increased the inquiries, called together the solemn assemblies, travelled back and forth through France in the service of the Papal Commission. For four long years he worked untiringly to bring about the vindication of Joan of Arc. When Cardinal d'Estouteville was suddenly called away from the Commission Jean Brehal was made its head. As an assistant he was given Philippe de la Rose.¹³

Brehal, seeing the delay that might arise as a result of un-systematic treatment of the case, composed what is known as the "Summarium." This was a carefully arranged summary of all the facts and testimonies used in the previous trials of the Maid of Orleans, from the time she was tried at Poitiers to her death in the market-place at Rouen.

Jean Brehal then took his case and placed it before Pope Nicholas V. Before any decision had been given this Pontiff died, March 24, 1455. Within a month a new Pope was elected in the person of Calixtus III, who immediately took up the case of Joan of Arc. He appointed a commission of three bishops, who summoned to their assistance Jean Brehal. The new session opened at Paris November 7, 1455. It was at this time that the mother of Joan came before the commission and in a sorrowful and trembling voice pleaded in behalf of her daughter. On December 15 the commission decided to meet at Rouen. Here they again took up the task of vindicating the Maid. The hearing and examining the witnesses continued until May, 1456.

¹² Jean Brehal, "Rehabilitation," p. 68.

¹³ Jean Brehal, "Rehabilitation," p. 23.

As a result of his great learning and extensive knowledge of the case, Jean Brehal was appointed to draw up a "memoir," which would contain all the written and verbal evidence. Then it was that he brought forth his second "Summarium." This brought forth the final judgment of the commission. On the 7th of June the commission met in the great hall of the Archbishop's Palace, and after having examined the second "Summarium" pronounced the judgment.

"Jean de Rheims, Guillaume de Paris and Richard de Constances, by the grace of God, archbishop and bishops, together with Jean Brehal of the Order of Friars Preachers, professor of Sacred Theology and one of the two Inquisitors of heresy in the kingdom of France, all four the judges delegated by our Holy Father, the Pope now reigning, declare, that having seen, read, reread and examined the original instruments, acts, notes, etc., of the trial of 1431, having compared these things and having examined also the information given by Cardinal d'Estouteville and the Inquisitor, and after having carefully weighed all these facts, they judge that the account of the trial contains propositions falsely presented as extracts from the confessions of the deceased, that on certain points these confessions have been passed over in silence or misinterpreted. Were it not for this deception the mind of the Doctors consulted and of the judges could have given a different opinion.

"Consequently, the said Process and sentence, with all that they entail are declared null, void, invalid, without effect, dissolved, destroyed and annulled."¹⁴

Thus did Jean Brehal after much labor and effort bring about the vindication of the Maid of Orleans. Although Jean Le Maitre proved himself hostile to the Maid, in the trial at Rouen, his Dominican brother fully compensated for any wrong. With the exception of Jean Graverend and Jean Le Maitre, we declare that the Dominicans were always friendly towards the martyr; that in her hour of trial, they were her supporters and after her death, her greatest defenders in the cause of vindication.

—Bro. Gerard O'Donnell, O. P.

¹⁴ Chapotin, "Jeanne d'Arc et Dominicain," p. 164.