

## WHY JOAN OF ARC WAS BROUGHT TO TRIAL

---

LEONARD CURRAN, O.P.



URING the five hundred years which have elapsed since Joan of Arc surrendered her soul to God many literary classics have been written of her. Literature has been very proud of Joan for it has striven to keep her name ever fresh in the mind of the world. No more tender devotion has ever been shown to any peer. The championship of her name has not been limited to the ordinary, for genius has labored in her honor. If however all this devotion to her would only fall like rain and freshen her memory, instead of falling like hailstones and injuring her, imperishable literature would result. Elegant language without the eternal truth amounts only to provincial legend. Yet it seems that brilliant authors often stoop to folly. It is this mistreatment of Joan that causes many to waste their talents.

Too much of the literature written about Joan detracts from her character. Satire has always been an effective tool in the hands of clever propagandists. It is with feigned sympathy for Joan that the leverage of satire finds the fulcrum and lifts the historical Joan slightly off of its accepted base. Despite the lack of injurious evidence Joan is shown to be anything but what she actually was,—a messenger of God.

It seems logical to conclude that there must be some ground whereupon these writers establish their claims. Do the charges exist as well-founded facts or is there some discrepancy in the historical data that permits error? If discrepancy does exist then it must concern records subsequent to her trial. Trial supposes examination by authority because of suspected guilt. Practically it would answer the reason why Joan was brought to trial. There is no possible chance that Joan could have fooled all of the jailers for they were patiently waiting to entrap her. It is therefore in Joan's active military life that we seek the reasons why she was suspected of guilt. Why was Joan brought to trial?

Burdened with miseries resulting from the Hundred Years War, buffeted by the petty pillaging of numerous bandit chiefs, suffering

from pestilence and enforced submission, broken by the Queen-betrayer of her son and her nation, was the drab perspective of France in 1412. The French Kingdom was in a fair way to dissolution. Of all that had once been France only a few castles and some adjoining lands were now loyal to its lawful heir, the Dauphin Charles VII. Time alone was all that was necessary to turn France over to its ancient enemies, the English invaders. Crowning the tragedy was the traitorous conduct of the then ruling queen, Isabelle of Bavaria. For the sum of "2,000 francs a month" Isabelle agreed to have her son named "The so-called Dauphin." This agreement gave to the English a claim on France. The Treaty of Troyes, which Isabelle, the Duke of Burgundy and La Tremoille, inspired, presented to Princess Catherine of France upon her marriage to Henry V of England the heirship of France. Isabelle was known to have been unfaithful to her husband. As a result it was easy to make the people believe that Charles VII was not the legitimate son of Charles VI. Naturally this made the English cause rather easy. Because France was betrayed by a woman, rumor had it that it would be restored by a woman.

In 1425 "Voices" were heard by a girl of thirteen, who was tending a flock at pasture. These "Voices" were representatives of God Who revealed to this girl that she was to revivify the dormant spirit of France. It was decreed that no more was that torn country to submit itself to the victor's lash. These "Voices" were Joan's counsellors. They were three Saints, Michael the fiery leader of the celestial band, and two martyrs, Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine.

Joan was born in 1412, in Domremy, on the northeast border of France, on the west side of the Meuse River. She was a healthy, normal girl, intelligent and pious. Joan never shared in the childish fancies of other girls, but rather thought of life as something serious. When the nature of her future mission was revealed to her she was frightened and doubted her ability to carry out the wishes of God. Upon the assurance that God willed her to command the army of France, Joan's confidence in her work was strengthened. Repulsed and ignored, she met with many disheartening adventures before she even obtained a meeting with the King. At length the Dauphin, Charles, consented to interview her, with the result that she was successful. Time and again she submitted herself to exorcisms, to petty trials and to insults from the courtiers of Charles. Even though Joan had proved to Charles that her mission was divine he never protected her against the indignities proffered by his court to her. In fact Charles was a weakling who rarely decided for himself and more

rarely kept a promise. Joan could only have won with the help of God.

Foremost in the plotting, plundering and self-aggrandizement was the ever ambitious treasurer of the court, La Tremoille. To remove him, would be for Charles a serious calamity. La Tremoille kept making loans out of his own plunder to the Dauphin for interest as high as 100%. His reason for this was to make the Dauphin so obligated to him that it would be impossible to pay off the debts. Eventually, it would happen that La Tremoille would completely go over to the English. Thus it was to his advantage that no legitimate enterprise be waged in the interests of the rightful ruler. When Joan of Arc presented evidence that she was a messenger of God, La Tremoille with the keen sense of a scoundrel realized that his position was insecure. He therefore placed every obstacle that was possible in the path of Joan. He whispered stories about her; attempted to turn military leaders against her and balked her by influencing the Dauphin's decisions at critical moments.

Why the Dauphin should be so taken with Joan after his first conversation with her is not so puzzling when her gift of prophecy is considered. She easily identified the Dauphin from the Count of Clermont, who was pretending to be Charles for the very purpose of trying her. This, however, is insignificant compared to the revelation she made to him about a vow which he had made to God. During the conversation Charles asked her, "How am I to know that you speak the truth? What proof have you brought to show me that you will carry out your promises?" Joan replied, "That proof I have. But I am permitted by my Lord to reveal it to you only in secret." For once the vacillating man made a decision. He ordered his court to retire while he listened to Joan. Joan picked up the conversation, "Do you recall one night not long ago when you rose from your bed, while all around you everyone was asleep, and you could not sleep because your mind was wrought up with the great troubles of your Kingdom?" This was forcibly brought to his mind, for upon that day news of serious disaster to his army had reached him. She continued, "You rose on your bare knees and with folded hands stooped before your bed and prayed to God." Joan questioned him, asking if he had ever revealed in confession or to any confidant the "three prayers." He replied that he had never done so. Joan then revealed the prayers the first of which was, "Is it I, O Lord, who am the cause of my land's desolation? . . . if that be so then cause me to lose health and strength so that I shall cease to carry on this disastrous war. . . ." The second prayer was, "If I am true heir . . .

cease to afflict my land and let me alone bear the full force of Your just anger." The third prayer continued, "If, however, it is the sinfulness of my people . . . O, Lord, I beg You forgive them their sins. . . ." Joan then revealed many things both past and future to him. Of greatest comfort to him was the revelation that he was legitimate.

With the Dauphin's friendship it would seem that Joan's troubles should have ceased. Unfortunately, it was but the beginning. The Dauphin recognized Joan as an agent of God, but his court was another thing. He was weak and accustomed to being influenced. They were biased and united against her cause.

Finally, upon royal command, she with a small band started off for Poitiers. Court influences had selected this place because it was there that she was to be subjected to trial by an Ecclesiastical Court. At Poitiers she met the group and complained to the questioners, "Look, you masters, I know not A from B, but I have duties to perform by the command of God. I am tired of so many interrogations. . . . I have work to do, much work and only a year in which to do it." Joan knew of their antagonism and resented it. She, however did not realize exactly what it was that the end of the year would bring. All that she knew was that she had one year in which to complete the program designed for her.

The influence of La Tremoille continued to injure the successful prosecution of the campaign. It was just as the soldiers whispered among themselves, "When the court leads Jeanne, she fails; when she leads, guided by her saints, no enemy can withstand her." Now it would be that the wily treasurer would have her activities curtailed. Or he would have her campaign directed at some personal enemy of his own. At another time it would be the King's advisors instituting a scrap-paper treaty. Again it would be some visionary fool who insinuated himself into the graces of Joan's enemies. Even such a tremendous victory as Joan won in getting the Dauphin to Rheims for the coronation ceremonies meant to her only the reanimation of France's weak national spirit, and not the personal approval of herself.

In the eyes of the English Joan was placed upon a mythical pedestal. Her successes had so disorganized the once stalwart English troops that only one explanation occurred to them,—she must be a witch. In fact terror had so stricken the English troops that an edict had to be read to them threatening punishment and confiscation to any soldier not present at the coronation ceremonies of their own King Henry.

Ultimately as happens any person who courageously defends order against anarchy, Joan was marked for a holocaust. She was the paramount factor in the English fiasco. Such men as Bedford, the great English general and his staff, all clever leaders, were inferior to her. Yet they were naturally military commanders. What could be the reason, then, why Joan overcame these men? France was in a state of collapse; yet out of a small village came a young girl, who commanding but a miserable band threw confusion into the English ranks. The strong English forces, combined with the Burgundians and Iagoes in Charles' court, were stampeded. There was only one answer to these men who did not or would not believe in the divine assistance given to Joan,—she was a witch.

Witchcraft in the Middle Ages meant direct assistance of the devil. Hence it happened that Joan of Arc, not being considered an instrument of God for the restoration of France, was believed to be a tool of the devil who wished the illegitimate Charles to rule a desolate land. As it was the custom to seize such persons reputed to be evil, the greatest of care was taken to capture Joan. She, the reputed witch who exerted her magic charm must be removed from power. To capture this witch resort was made to treachery.

On the 23rd of April, 1430, Master Pierre Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, a master hand of treachery, ambitious, made his bow before the English King, who landed at Calais. Cauchon, by his presence at Calais, introduces himself as the English King's most zealous partisan, Joan's most personal enemy. He was the Bishop of Beauvais while the English were the conquerers of that part of France, but relinquished his see when Joan seized the town in August, 1429. Violently partisan to Henry, Cauchon remained in Beauvais until he found it prudent to leave. Having to part with his coveted possessions, his see and dominion, his antipathy to Joan increased. He aided in the treaty of Troyes, and was not at all pleased by the knowledge of Charles' legitimacy. Opportunely, he had spread his gold upon favourable soil. He would make it bear his revenge.

It happened in Compiègne that a political associate of Cauchon, Guillaume de Flavy, a cruel tyrannical murderer, was the agent in the cabal. The best that can be said of Flavy is that he is not mentioned by name as the one responsible for the betrayal. Political developments however point to Flavy. He had made his way to wealth through the murder of his father-in-law and his mother-in-law. He was a half brother of Regnault de Chartres, an enemy of Joan, and La Tremoille's political associate. As governor of the town from which Joan sallied forth to her ill-fated enterprise, his was the re-

sponsibility of her safe conduct. He had been in the past more than friendly to the Burgundians, causing Joan to be active against him. It seems that he bore ill-will to her. When she came on the King's duty he kept her out of Compiègne until all her troops had left her with the exception of her 200 loyal peasant soldiers. She knew that treachery was about to be committed for she said to the people of the town, "My good friends, my dear little children, I have been sold, I have been betrayed. Soon I shall be delivered to my death. Pray God for me, for I shall no longer be able to serve France and my King." Joan realized that she was to be taken prisoner but did not know in what manner nor by whom. She therefore decided to leave her military operations in the hands of her captains, one of whom was Flavy. On this particular day, May 23rd, 1430, Joan was told to make a sortie. She left the walls of Compiègne and as if by design, troops came upon her from all sides. Flavy made no attempt to cover her retreat, and seemingly to protect the town, even shut the gates before she could enter. She fought nobly even refusing to surrender. Burgundian reports of her bravery reveal: "surpassed the nature of woman, she did great feats and took great pains to save her company, staying behind them facing the enemy with the bravest of the troop."

Her countrymen, the Burgundians, had captured her. Many men went out of their way just to catch a glimpse of the notable captive, Joan. It was as if a very strange and fiendish person had been seized and placed upon exhibition. Now that she was placed in chains they had no fear of her. To these troops her capture meant the open sesame to their old form of life. They thought that Charles would never be able to raise any more troops now that his great leader had been captured. Obviously the court of Charles would remain as friendly to the English cause as ever, with but few exceptions. But—as always happens in the history of the world—the oppressors ignored the fact that God was the administrator of justice. True it is that Notre Dame Cathedral was the scene of a *Te Deum* chanted in thanksgiving to God for the capture of the maid. Yet this is not the first instance where a mistake had been made. Many men hostile to her before they met her suddenly changed to be her most devoted friends. These men were sincere, the others were ambitious, unmindful of justice.

Joan was soon transferred from prison camp at Compiègne to Beaulieu where it was felt that she would be secure until the notorious barter would have been made with the English. She never gave her word that she had surrendered, nor did she promise to remain a

prisoner. While at Beaulieu she succeeded in slipping out of a wooden barricade and almost escaped. Her guards arrived just as she had succeeded in getting behind them. She locked them in and was about to make a break for freedom when a porter captured her. To make sure that she would not escape, she was transferred to Beaurevois.

The story was now current that in as much as Joan refused to remove her male attire she was a manifest witch. It is true that she did refuse to doff her assumed garb and put on female clothes, but the reason for this was that she had persistently refused to surrender. As her work was not yet complete and as God had not revealed to her that she should cease to be of aid to France, she refused to give herself over. As she herself said: "I have not received permission from my Lord. For a woman's tasks there are women enough."

The prelude to the trial was now beginning. Negotiations for the sale of Joan to the English were begun. While all were not in favour of this sale, expediency drove most of them to the barter. Cauchon, naturally, was foremost. Jean de Luxembourg was prevailed upon by the University of Paris, through the agency of Cauchon, to deliver Joan into their hands. Part of the missive reads: "It would be . . . a most intolerable offense against the Divine Majesty were this woman to remain a prisoner or even to be delivered or lost . . . we pray you most humbly . . . to send her here to the inquisitor of the faith . . . or else to deliver her to our most honoured lord, Bishop of Beauvais. . . ." This offer came with plenty of material consideration in the form of gold, an incentive of the Bishop himself, 10,000 livres.

When the news that the sale had become a fact was confirmed Joan feared for France and herself. In a frantic moment she jumped from a sixty foot tower. The force of the blow merely stunned her. Remorsefully, she appealed to her "Voices." Saint Catherine advised her to go to confession and to pray to God for forgiveness.

King Charles should have recalled her faithfulness to his cause and been most grateful, but he remained indifferent to her. Indeed, he did not even suggest paying a ransom for her. Perhaps, his court had its way once again. It may be that the old prejudices about Joan were finding their marks. The fact remains that Joan was abandoned.

Carried to Rouen in a cage she was soon transferred to a dismal cell in a tower. Here she was chained to a heavy log, from which she was only to be removed into the cage when transferred for trial.

Joan's last opportunity for freedom came when Jean de Luxembourg, the English lords, Warwick and Stanford, and the Bishop of Therouenne, Chancellor of France in the cause of Henry of England, visited her with an offer that she should surrender. Luxembourg said: "Jean, I have come to put you up for ransom, provided you will promise me never again to arm yourself against us." Luxembourg insisted that he was sincere, but Joan thought differently. She said: "I know very well that the English will put me to death in the belief that after my death they will win the Kingdom of France, but I say were there an hundred thousand more than there are they will not get the Kingdom. . . ."

The only possible means to remove Joan from her effective work was to bring her to trial on the charge of witchcraft. History is positive in its denial of any injurious facts in the life of Joan. The one charge of witchcraft has been refuted by the infallible authority of the Church, which pronounced her a saint. There is nothing left of which to accuse her. All of the other charges are absolutely unfounded, because she proved them false during her lifetime. She saved her beloved France. She performed God's Will valiantly.

The stream of literature goes flowing on, every now and then bearing an unfavorable book about Joan to the literary market. Old matter long since disproved is resurrected, revealing little of any value or originality. Perhaps 20th century progress demands the facts to examine in its own fashion. This of course involves the trouble of brushing aside irrefutable data and subscribing to the very fallible notions of what moderns think ought to be instead of what actually is.

The chief reason why Joan is doubted today is because she represents the Church. That is why so many authors put themselves to great labor about her. Believing as they do that Joan represents any "ism" they wish to prove, she is used to drive home their points.

Abstract from the national unity of our government today and a strikingly similar condition is seen to exist that Joan combatted. We have miseries resulting from the last world war, just as bad, and in many ways worse than in 1412. Pillagings were quite common in those days, but wholesale plunderings by racketeers are quite common today. Breadlines are very common today. There can be little reason for casting aspersions on the Middle Ages just to prove a thesis, for there seems to be little improvement today in so far as social life matters.

True it was ambitious officials of the Church who brought Joan to trial. There is no secret about this fact. Even Joan herself said



to Bishop Cauchon, "Bishop, I die through you." The Church has condemned the actions of these men, and has declared Joan to be a saint. God permitted Joan's martyrdom in order that she might be rewarded in eternity for her faithful work. While Bishop Cauchon betrayed Joan for an Empire, Judas betrayed a far greater Person for a few pieces of silver. Joan but followed in her Master's footsteps, "The disciple is not above the master, nor the servant above his lord."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Math. x, 24-28.