

A NOTE ON SAINT JOAN AND BERNARD SHAW

TO use the dialect Shaw loves and uses so well, he is 'as cute as a pet fox,' and I for one believe him when he says that many Catholics approved of his treatment of *Saint Joan*. What I refuse to believe is that a man of his cool judgment on so many matters could go 'blind and bald-headed' into that intricate subject. Amazing, truly, in the trial scene of his play is the elaborate care with which he states the case for the established order. Yet lo! the snare spread in full sight of the bird, and the birds of the less experienced order have been caught—with chaff. Shaw's chaff in this case is an error in a matter of fact and a misreading of even the fact under his eyes. He dismisses in a word the whole rehabilitation of Saint Joan, he whitewashes Cauchon thick as plaster of Paris, and he muddles the end of the trial to justify his view of Cauchon.

In a recent article in *BLACKFRIARS* it was well and truly shown how the Dominicans befriended the Maid as much as the said Cauchon would let them, which was very little indeed. It is all very fine for Shaw to ignore *everything* in the Rehabilitation, which was commanded by the Pope to be reopened after it had failed twice over. It is all finer still for him to ignore the pulverization administered by Andrew Lang to Anatole France's (whatever his real name was) two-volume sneer at everyone of Joan's century, but the man who says that all men are liars even on oath in a 'superstitious' age, cannot himself escape being thought a somewhat excessive liar. All this Shaw gladly risks, at the expense of ruining the best dramatic points in the muddled trial scene of his play, in order to get at the Church, and not the Church of those days, but of all time.

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I never resented the introduction of the dapper clergyman in the epilogue reading the Bull of Canonization; it is legitimate fun on the part of a perfect outsider, who is entitled to his point of view, even if it be a facetious one. Catholics who are too thin-skinned to endure this are likely enough to be too thick-headed to undertake the Church's defence. Shaw contrives to miss the main point of the condemnation through ignorance of a matter of fact. It is the point which damns Cauchon to all eternity, and destroys his character throughout the last act. The blundering brute, alias the honest Englishman, John de Stogumber, is given a good deal of amusing futile 'fat' for no other purpose than to cover up the cracks in the Shaw presentation of Cauchon at the trial. He also entirely suppresses the action of Jean Lohier, who condemned Cauchon as having no power to try the case, disqualifying his whole court! This Lohier was Dean of the Rota in Rome at the time of the rehabilitation! The Church has a longer memory than Shaw. She also has only one case to make out. It is this her case which Shaw is attacking, and he does violence to history, like all his tribe, in order to make his points.

Eliminate all falsehood and rancour from Cauchon; destroy the Inquisitor of Protestant fiction, as it is the wrong century and the wrong country for him; and forget all about the forged recantation and the faked relapse which was really Cauchon's masterpiece, and you have what Shaw wants you to have, *a truly representative Ecclesiastical tribunal* which the Universal Church can never disown. Forget, also, that the Court knew it was sitting in the wrong place, with much-questioned if not void, jurisdiction, to try a prisoner of war for her private and personal misdemeanours (their name was legion in the allegation!). Forget that Cauchon, in his preambles and summaries formally anticipates these disabilities, and you may, by

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making believe, 'kid yourself' that Cauchon has some rags of convention to cover his naked and determined villainy. But you cannot alter the long deadly purpose of the trial as recorded officially at Cauchon's own behest. Two copies (originals) are in the French National Library, and the English King's own copy is in that of the Corps Législatif.

Cauchon was so proud of his work ! He had blinded the prisoner, his assessors, Warwick, and even Shaw ! The whole tribunal, protesting too much, took upon itself in addressing St. Joan, to represent the Universal Church. Shaw, at this hour, takes it at its own false valuation ! The sempiternal mingle-mangle, in which first one, then another, then some, then all, some in bad faith, others in good, exhorted her to 'submit to the Church,' in reality to plead guilty to their unproved and unprovable charges, the whole jungle of them, St. Joan baffled in her simple way, by appealing to her God. Cauchon had suppressed all her appeals to the Church Universal, and Martin Ladvenu said in the Rehabilitation, that Cauchon had been in deadly rage with him for suggesting it to her. Manchon, to whom we owe the texts of the trial, testified in like manner at the Rehabilitation to having incurred the wrath of Cauchon for refusing to alter the official report to suit the English report written behind the curtain, in which everything favourable to the Prisoner was left out. But Cauchon's game went deeper than all. He was out to convict St. Joan of heresy and schism, and in every sense of the word he found it the very devil's work. Cauchon knew that *Joan could not be burned for sure* unless she relapsed and withdrew her recantation. So during the sermon—before her formal condemnation as heretic, etc., we see the Bishop's catspaw Loyseleur so busy 'exhorting' Joan that it interrupted the preacher ! (Oh ! those sermons ! Talk of being preached to death by wild

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curates—Joan was preached to death by mad doctors). Then she recanted all that left her in peril of the stake, and at once Cauchon ordered her back to the military prison, in spite of her advancing that she had recanted in view of being imprisoned in the Church prison, and in spite of several petitions from the assessors. (So they say in the Rehabilitation, and who will dare to doubt it?).

Warwick was furious and violent, even to Cauchon. His ragged army follow his example with the assessors because it seemed as if Cauchon had really muffed the Great Affair. But that little point about the prison had done it. We know the tale about her special ill-treatment on remand, and how the male attire was forced upon her who had promised to put it off in token of submission to the 'Church.' So back goes the Bishop in person and examines *over again* on all the chief points of the long, long trial. 'He knew what he would do.' This was all the process Joan went through as to relapse. To atone for the slight informality of a secret cross-examination in prison, she was very solemnly handed over to the secular arm in the market-place and there and then burnt alive without further sentence, even of any kind of death, being passed upon her. The secular arm had overreached all laws and forms in its eagerness.

These are points too fine for a great dramatist with a case to make out. Yet his case is subtle and no one seems to have grasped it. It is the expiring kick of the great chimera of Martin Luther about the supremacy of conscience. Conscience is not supreme except under conditions. Would you obey the conscientious commands of a very ignorant or wicked man? Is it not possible, again, for a man's ignorance or wilful baseness to be a public danger and nuisance? In the matter of Prohibition, for instance? Is not the general conscience surer than the particular?

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Sometimes, often, maybe. Is it infallible? Yes, when the One Supreme Oracle directs it. But if you have Voices? Must you follow them or the Living Voice? So long as they do not contradict the Living Voice, you may; but if they vary, it is always the Living Voice that has it. Saint Joan's voices jeopardised the cause of Burgundy, England, Cauchon, so they had to be made to contradict the Living Voice. Therefore Cauchon constituted a Living Voice of his own to oppose those of Joan. The preternatural patience and acumen of the Maid led him on to manifest himself more and more, at least to an impartial onlooker, until finally, drawn to the prison by the outcry of 'male attire' planned by himself, he begins at once about the Voices! This is his own official account, remember. To kill Joan, and by fire, he really set up his voice against the Living Voice, and therefore garbled her trial and her answers and suppressed all her appeals to that Voice. Small wonder then, that he and Shaw embrace across the ages and call each other jolly good fellows. I should believe Cauchon for Shaw, but I refuse to believe Shaw for Cauchon. He is in the true apostolic succession of Pope Robert of Geneva.

JOHN O'CONNOR.