

**PAINS AND PENALTIES:
THE DEFENCE OF
QUEEN CAROLINE. A
PLAY IN FOUR ACTS**

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Pains and penalties: the defence of Queen Caroline. A play in four acts by Laurence Housman

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LAURENCE HOUSMAN

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Pains and Penalties:

The Defence of Queen Caroline

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS ~ ~ ~

By Laurence Housman ~ ~

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PREFACE

THOSE who defend a bad cause have to defend it blindly: otherwise its life would be short. Driven from one false argument to another, they still find sufficiency in the last that is left to them. It is the thing, not the reasonableness of the thing that they are defending.

Last year this play of "Pains and Penalties" (excepting only the first scene of Act IV, which I have since incorporated for the sake of dramatic completeness) was privately and confidentially condemned by the Lord Chamberlain: for some months the author was given no reason for the condemnation which he could make public. Yet before a word of the play was printed defenders of the censorship supported the Lord Chamberlain's decision with blind and headlong enthusiasm, and industriously set themselves to assert that their beloved official must be in the right. The author had dared to pass unfavourable comments on the character of King George IV; and hostile reference upon the stage to the great-grand-uncle of our present Sovereign was declared incompatible with respect for the institutions of monarchy.

But at last the Lord Chamberlain was persuaded to give his reason publicly; and then, hey, presto! the

defence of our monarchy in the person of so bad a representative as this happily distant relative of our present King was sent to the limbo of untenable foolishnesses, and a brand-new reason was fitted out for public consumption.

The Lord Chamberlain, it then appeared, had refused to license my play, not for the supposed reasons at all—on those I had been “misinformed”—but because it dealt with “a sad historical episode of comparatively recent date in the life of an unhappy lady.” The “unhappy lady,” as I at once pointed out, had been dead for ninety years, and during the whole of that period her memory had rested under a cloud which the main trend of my play was calculated to remove. Driven to give a public reason for his action, the Lord Chamberlain decided that such an attempt to rehabilitate her character was not to be allowed.

And so the pro-censorists must adapt their attitude of adulation and agreement with the Lord Chamberlain's thoughts, words, and actions to the new substitute for a reason which he has given them. Now it is no longer respect for the monarchic principle, but high-toned chivalry which bids them stick their stings into me for endeavouring to secure production for this play. A few days before my persistency won me the trick, the *Referee* declared that I was “guilty of trifling” when I asked the Lord Chamberlain to state publicly in what respect my play offended under the terms of the Act he was supposed to administer; it also accused me of “not playing the game” because I had refused to submit, without protest, to an unexplained veto.

But my "trifling" has after all brought me the plain publishable statement which I set out to secure, and which I announced that I would secure when I began agitating. And the only thing I wish to add here is my hope that the Lord Chamberlain keeps an uncooked record, not only of the published, but also of the private and confidential communications which pass between his officials and others in connection with the suppression of modern drama, and that a time may soon come when those documents will be collated in the light of day.

L. H.

