

CHARLES PÉGUY. *Basic Verities. Prose and Poems. French/English Edition. Introduction and English Versions by Ann and Julian Green.* (Kegan Paul; 10s. 6d.).

LE PROPHÈTE PÉGUY. *Première Partie: le Poète de l'Incarnation Par André Rousseaux.* (Editions La Baconnière. Neuchâtel, 1942. Printed in Canada. Edition de l'Arbre.).

Here are two good books on Péguy, alike in that the author of each is convinced of the greatness of Péguy; alike, too, in a certain over-statement of a good case, a certain over-seriousness, and a certain excess of virtue which ends by being prejudicial rather than otherwise to the cause they support.

As an anthology, the first book is admirable. And here let me say at once how much I disagree with the critic who gave several columns to a consideration of the book in the *Times Literary Supplement*, but betrayed his own prejudices and marred his case by pleading that Péguy the socialist was so much more interesting than Péguy the Catholic. What is interesting, of course, is the complete and thorough transition from one to the other, carried through already to a remarkable degree quite early in Péguy's career, only deepened and intensified as time went on. His was a naturally religious soul, and his way back to the Church, difficult as it was and only reaching its goal shortly before his death, was, like Chesterton's, essentially a way home. Julian Green's selection is as representative as one could wish. The excess of virtue here is in too much humility in the English translations which face the French page by page: how Péguy's vigour and urgency of conviction is lost in trying to keep merely word-true to the original. How deflated most of it seems. But an artist once said to me that he considered a bad reproduction more useful than a good one in that it did not give you the illusion of having seen the original or dispense you from the necessity of doing so: on that plea these translations may be commended, and there the original lies on the opposite page, so why complain!

The introduction to the book is interesting: too literary to convey fully the extent to which Péguy's mind dissociated itself from literary habits (he could use the professorial tone boorishly or effectively, though). He becomes a bit picturesque here, and that is a pity, for he prided himself on his penny-plainness, was above all serious, and above all enjoyed himself in prose and verse. But it is a sympathetic and useful study, and we see both the author's difficulties and the quality of his appreciation in a passage such as this from page 33:

' . . . God the Father, as presented by Péguy in these Mysteries, speaks somewhat like an elderly French peasant well served in his catechism, rather than like a professor who has read St. Thomas, as we might have dreaded. . . . What characterizes them (the speeches), I think, is a sort of supernatural common sense and an internal rhythm, a rhythm of thought which lends them majesty

and pathos. There is in them a beauty of reasoning and a sort of medieval instinct which we seem to have lost for thinking in terms of the universe. Charity and intellect go hand in hand, intellect always ready to efface itself before charity, which is, after all, nothing but a superior form of understanding. . . . His God the Father, although he is as strict a logician as a Frenchman can be, never discourages a joke, provided it is neither rude nor unkind, nor is he adverse to joking himself, for his pre-eminent wisdom never stands in the way of his sense of humour.'

The second book is an admirable, most painstaking and probing, but rather dull, *lecture-expliquée* of one of Péguy's essential themes: the relation of time and eternity, the temporal and the eternal, the once-for-all and the ever-returning: of which the climax is superb passages on the Incarnation, particularly from *Eve*, but also from the *Mystères* and *Clio*.

Péguy himself would possibly have preferred fewer assertions about his greatness and more enjoyment of his daring: there is always something of the Jongleur de la Sainte Vierge about Péguy.

The author warms to his subject. After the first pages we are less discomforted by the solemn glimpses of the obvious and by the overpressing of the point that each instant of life is uniquely valuable. Those in whom intellectual ardour burns very brightly may relish the somewhat esoteric and rarified approach: my middle-aged and terre-à-terre mind ploughs on and sighs with relief at the too rare glimpses of Péguy himself, in brief extracts which are so much more clear, concentrated (sic) and effective than the *explication de texte*.

However, this little book is on a high plane. I will quote its final paragraph entire to show how much the present reviewer is to blame for not having entered more fully into the spirit in which it is written:

'Car le prophète Péguy entre toujours par en haut, par le plus haut, *a Deo in excelsis*, dans la vision de la vie humaine. C'est par le modèle divin qu'il éclaire l'homme image de Dieu. Nous avons vu que l'Incarnation de Jésus, si elle est totalement comprise et partagée par notre entendement, commande l'ordre temporellement éternel dans lequel Péguy nous fait entrer. Voici qu'au moment où nous allons aborder à sa suite le mystère de la naissance l'homme, le poète se réfère à la Nativité de Jésus. Le religion fervente du Fils de Dieu fait homme continue d'inspirer, de soutenir, et d'accompagner la pensée en marche de Péguy, avec une rigoureuse fidélité.'

We may look forward to second and third studies by the same author, on 'Le Poète de la Naissance et de la Mémoire,' and 'Le Poète de l'Honneur et de la France.'

RUTH BETHELL.