Charles Peguy D'Apres Son Oeuvre Poetique

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CHARLES PÉGUY D'APRÈS SON OEUVRE POÉTIQUE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the moral ideal presented by Charles Péguy in his poetry. More specifically the aim will be to seek answers to the following questions:

1) What is the specific nature of his ideal of moral beauty?
2) What evidence is there in his own life that he himself accepted the ideal?

The present war with its emphasis on the heroic sacrifice of our young manhood has called attention anew to the great figures of World War I. Among these there stood out a group of intellectual young Frenchmen whose death won for their writings an attention that they might otherwise have had to wait a century to gain. Of this number, Charles Péguy counts among the most gifted.

This study will be based on Péguy's own writings. It will be restricted to his poetry because it is in this phase of his work that we can find his own self-revelation; his prose occupied largely with polemics is more objective and offers less material adapted to the purpose of this thesis. The method of the study will be largely biographical, by topics rather than by chronology: dealing successively with Péguy, the peasant, the polemic writer, the poet, the patriot and the prophet.

The writer first became interested in Charles Péguy in a class of French literature. Study led to conviction of the value of Péguy's message to our time, both from the ethical and literary point of view. This message concerns itself with the eternal struggle between man's two great powers:
flesh (nature) with its fearful exigences and the spirit (grace) with its pure "impalpables" exigences. Their correlation became for Péguy first a hobby then a conviction, which colored his whole life. Each successive work developed more fully his progressive understanding of the need for the eternal in our temporal life. His method of presentation is that of recitative prose, growing like prose, with the slowness and repetitive logic of prose.

The importance of such a work may be gathered from the following considerations: 1) Stability of character joined to great poetic talent is not a usual combination. 2) Péguy possessed another extraordinary combination, "He thought his life," says Mounier, "and lived his thought." 3) Thirty years after his death the apocalyptic value of his message, which he himself said was written for twenty years hence, is being acclaimed. 4) Péguy gave his works an immortality of glory and fruitfulness by daring to live them even to death.

One of the earliest studies of the poetry of Charles Péguy was published by René Johannet. In this work Péguy's style both as a prose writer and as a poet is dealt with. During the same year of 1914 François Porché published his Poètes Français depuis Verlaine which includes a good criticism of Péguy. In 1919 Mme. Duclaux hails Péguy as a great prose writer saying that some of

his prose is real poetry. Two years later the *Itinéraires d'Intellectuels* of Johannet⁶ appeared including essentially the same matter which had appeared in *Les Lettres*. Also in 1921 Turquet-Milnes⁷ compared the virile language of Péguy with that of Milton. Sargent⁸ finds Péguy great as a lyricist but greater as an epic poet. It is as an outstanding poet that Keeler⁹ treats of the life and literary work of Charles Péguy. Others have presented divers aspects of Péguy’s thought. Seippel¹⁰ published a résumé of this thought.

Also in 1915 Poucel¹¹ traced the thread of hope through the thought of Péguy. Ten years later Péguy’s own son, Marcel,¹² interpreted *La Vocation de Charles Péguy*. Péguy’s nephey, Theodore Quoniam,¹³ followed justice and charity in Péguy’s thought. His religious, political and social thought has been delineated by Emmanuel Mounier, Marcel Péguy and Georges Izard.¹⁴ It is Péguy’s

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religious striving which Pfleger gives. Zeller has traced the struggle for justice in Péguy's mind and art.

The life of Péguy through a study of Cahiers was first made by Johannet in Les Lettres of 1914. An appreciation of Péguy's life and work by Suarés appeared in 1915. The Tharaud brothers, friends of Péguy at Sainte-Barbe, presented in 1926 a more detailed study of this same subject. More recently Secrétaín has admirably written of Péguy's life and work as a soldier of liberty.

The diverse literature about Péguy thus includes works on his poetry, his prose, his thought, his life and his character. It does not, however, include a study of that character as revealed in his poetry. Such a character sketch is necessarily a portrait of him between the years 1900, when his first great poem Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc was published, and 1914 in which year he published Eve and died a hero's death.

The word "character" originally meant the mark impressed on a coin or seal indicating its nature and value and distinguishing it from others. It

20 Roger Secrétaín, Péguy Soldat de la Liberté, Brentano, New York, 1941.
may also be defined as "life dominated by principles." In this study we will attempt to underline those principles as they appear in the poetry of Charles Péguy. The Tharauds use beauty and greatness almost as synonymous for character in referring to Péguy. This work will be a seeking for what is beautiful and great in Péguy, i.e. his character as manifested in his poetry.

Because the subject matter of his poetry is likewise the subject matter of this entire work, in the chapter entitled The Poet we shall not deal with inspiration, but rather with Péguy's technique.

In order to maintain uniform interpretation for all philosophical terms the following definitions give the meaning of the words as they are to be understood in this study:

**Moral Beauty** is goodness or virtue.

**Intelligence** is the intellect in as much as it recognizes self-evident truth and makes immediate inferences.

**Intuition** is immediate or direct apprehension. The root-idea of the term is that of directness in contrast to knowledge by abstraction.

**Instinct** is knowledge that is inborn and antecedent to experience.

**Attribute** is an essential characteristic of a being.

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22 Ibid., 11.

23 Tharaud, op. cit., 1, 35.
CHAPTER II

THE PEASANT

Even if we had not known that Péguy was a peasant on both sides of his family, his work would reveal him as such. His father was descended from the Boubonnais woodsmen and his mother from the 'vignerons' of Orleans. He himself is the anxious vine-dresser watching over his rich fields. This preoccupation of the great artist runs through his work, while the secret anguish of the poor dwells in it. He seems to see clearly that nature's exuberance and fullness of self-expression are her effort to reflect the bounty of the Creator.

He has drawn his material for his poetry from his own childhood. The furrows he had seen plowed became his verses, often their very form is that of a furrowed field, each one resembling the other, yet individual; one feels that were even one row omitted the harvest would not be complete. The ever anxious questioning leads him gently on to the deep-reasoning which concludes:

Toute vie vient de tendresse; toute vie vient de ce tendre, de ce fin bourgeois d'avril, et cette sève qui pleure en mai, et de la côte et de ce fin bourgeois blanc qui est vêtu, qui est chaudement, qui est tendrement protégé d'un flocon d'une toison d'une laine d'arbre.

Et ce flocon cotonneux est le secret de toute vie. La rude écorce à l'air d'une cuirasse en comparaison de ce tendre bourgeois. Mais la rude écorce n'est rien que de bourgeois durci, que du bourgeois vieilli! Et c'est pour cela que le tendre bourgeois perce toujours, jaillit toujours dessous la dure écorce.
Sans ce bourgeon qui n'a l'air de rien, qui ne semble rien, tout ne serait que du bois mort.¹

It would seem almost an apologia for his peasant ancestry, as if he were saying that the hard bark of his peasant stock did not keep him from bringing forth new fruit. It is as if he were trying to make clear that unless there is something forever new coming forth from the old, something eternal present and vivifying the material, there cannot be any life.

He sought and found this life in daily contact with his maternal grandmother, Mme. Guéré, the woodcutter's daughter from Bourbonnais, who filled his mind with tales of long ago, of which he speaks in Pierre Commencement d'une Vie Bourgeoise.² In her he saw a "Paysanne, qui ne savait pas lire et qui première m'enseigna le langage français."³ In teaching him she evidently made him understand the sterling peasant quality of love of truth, for he recalls later that he had liked best the amusing stories she told, because "elles etaient vraies."⁴ Nor was this all for both his grandmother and his mother made him realize the necessity of work well-done. So true was this that he made it a guiding principle "qu'il faudrait faire des drames et des tapisseries, des dialogues et des notes comme on rempaille des chaises."⁵

However, he applied this principle not only in aiding his mother and his grandmother in their lowly work but above all in the classroom, where he

3 Secrétain, op. cit., 34.
4 Péguy, Pierre, 38.
5 Secrétain, op. cit., 34.
first came into contact with that double allegiance which perhaps holds a clue to his later struggles.

In 1880 two fascinating paths in the faubourg Bourgogne opened out before the seven year old Charles. The one he took on Sundays and Thursdays led him to his parish church of Saint-Aignan named for a fifth century Bishop who had saved Orléans from the Huns, and which had been desecrated during the French Revolution. These facts must have enkindled Peguy's youthful enthusiasm for the heroic. He himself describes the path he took to his catechism classes. He had to climb half-way up the faubourg, then half-way down the rue Bourgogne, turn to the left on the rue de l'Oriflamme, walk under a cold cloister beneath spreading chestnut trees in order to reach the church of Saint-Aignan from his home. Although he made his First Communion in the chapel of the lycée of Orléans, his religious remembrances seem to cling to Saint-Aignan, as the above description shows.

The second road, the one which he traversed on week days, led to the antipode of the first, namely the grammar school taught by government apprentice teachers. Sargent well describes the feelings which a small boy must have had: "Priests have a tendency to look as old as the Church itself. The lay teachers looked as new as the new Third Republic." M. Naudy, the director of this school, was zealous in removing the crucifix and replacing Christ with 'La Raison et la Science' each with a capital letter. At this period of his life there appeared nothing strange in this double allegiance, those two purities, to which he held it was necessary to remain true. Of the

first he said, "Dieu seul sait combien nous sommes engagés d'honneur et de coeur dans cette République, et combien nous sommes résolus à y rester engagés, parce qu'elle fut une des deux puretés de notre enfance." The second was taught him by his mother who as a little girl had attended the sisters school in Moulins. She knew and appreciated the Catholic religion sufficiently to see that Charles was baptized, learned his catechism well and made his First Communion; yet she sent her seven year old boy to an anticlerical school.

Another influence besides those of home, parish and school now made itself felt in the formation of the character of Charles Péguy; it was that of Louis Boitier. He had an enormous influence on Péguy. The blacksmith Boitier was an anticlerical atheist, with ardent nationalistic tendencies. He lived opposite Number 50 and Secrétain well expresses Péguy's attraction for this man when he says, "dans la forge de Boitier soufflait un vent de justice." Péguy at twelve placed all his hopes in Boitier for greater justice in a more harmonious city. The principles laid down by Boitier's militant republicanism and imbibed at his fiery fountain became sources of future rivers of thought for the fatherless boy. In the last year of his life, Péguy dedicated a book of poetry "A mon plus ancien maitre, à mon premier et plus fidèle ami...", Boitier. A copy of Hugo's Châtiments

7 Secrétain, op. cit., 55.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 57.
10 Ibid., 26.
was the gift of this same friend. Boitier was a veteran of the war of 1870 which he discussed with young Charles. The thought of war became for Péguy an abiding preoccupation. His son, Marcel, says that all his life Péguy expected war and prepared himself to take an active part in it when it would come, as is shown by numerous articles in his Cahiers on this subject.

In connection with Péguy's early days it is interesting to note that in Pierre, recollections of his own childhood, he makes no mention of two influences on his own character (very important according to several authorities on Péguy), namely: catechism classes at Saint-Aignan, and Louis Boitier. The first is comprehensible, because in 1900 when he wrote Pierre, Péguy was an atheist. The omission of Boitier shows either that a Commencement d'une Vie Bourgeoise should not include memories of a ten year old (Péguy was about ten when the friendship with Boitier began) or that the blacksmith did not have the influence on Péguy which is attributed to him. Nevertheless the man who gave Péguy a copy of Hugo was laying deep foundations for future poetic greatness as we shall see in the chapter on the poet.

Apparently it was not the anticlerical lycées but rather home, church, and catechism which were the seeds that brought forth flowers of poetry. When Péguy makes Madame Gervaise speak of Our Lord's boyhood, it is redolent of his own in the faubourg Bourgogne:

11 Marcel Péguy, La Vocation de Charles Péguy, 30.
12 Secretain, op. cit., 55; Marcel Péguy, op. cit., 28.
Et ensemble ils faisaient un si bon ménage
Le garçon et la mère
Ils avaient été si heureux dans ce temps-là
La mère et le garçon.13

From the world of his own childhood and that of his children Péguy has drawn material for his poetry. This world remained the greatest experience of his life. He once said, "Nous avons connu un temps où quand une bonne femme disait un mot, c'était sa race même, son être, son peuple qui parlait."

Péguy is himself the woodcutter in La Porche who worked hard all day and thought of his children, and of how they would one day replace him.
"Il pense avec tendresse à ce temps où il ne sera plus."15 And people would only think of him because of his children. They will replace him in:

Sa place dans la paroisse et sa place dans la forêt.
Sa place dans l'église et sa place dans la maison.
Sa place dans le bourg et sa place dans la vigne.
Et sur la plaine et sur le côteau et dans la vallée.
Sa place dans la chrétienté. Enfin. Quoi.
Sa place d'homme et sa place de chrétien.
Sa place de paroissien, sa place de laboureur.
Sa place de paysan.
Sa place de père.
Sa place de Lorraine et de Français.16

It faut que la paysannerie continue.
Et la vigne et le blé et la moisson et la vendange.
Et la labour de la terre
Et le patour des bêtes.17

14 Tharaud, op. cit., 1, 20.
16 Ibid., 35.
17 Ibid., 36.
Continuity is necessary. The woodsman is worried. Péguy explains by saying, "Il [the peasant] pense a ses enfants qu'il a mis particulièrement sous la protection de la Sainte Vierge un jour qu'ils étaient malades."\(^{18}\)

The faith of a French peasant led Péguy to make several pilgrimages on foot to Notre Dame de Chartres. Once it was to obtain the cure of his son Pierre who had diphtheria. He received his request. Again in June 1912, accompanied by Alain Fournier, he made the trip, and it is this one that he described for us in *La Tapisserie de Notre Dame*.\(^{19}\) After the death of Péguy two of his friends continued to make these pilgrimages because of his request.\(^{20}\)

With his sick children still in mind the peasant woodcutter continues:

> Il en avait tremblé dans sa peau.  
> A l'idée seulement qu'ils étaient malades.  
> Il avait bien compris qu'il ne pouvait pas vivre comme cela.  
> Avec des enfants malades.  
> Et sa femme qui avait tellement peur.  
> Si affreusement.  
> Qu'elle avait le regard fixe en dedans et le front barré et qu'elle ne disait plus un mot.  
> Comme une bête qui a mal.  
> Qui se tait.\(^{21}\)

Péguy, though sick at heart like the woodcutter, knows one sure remedy. By prayer he takes them and places them:

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18 Ibid., 56


Tout tranquillement dans les bras de celle qui est chargée de toutes les douleurs du monde.
Et qui a déjà les bras si chargés.
Car le Fils a pris tous les péchés.
Mais la Mère a pris toutes les douleurs.22

He is a hard working man and he is exhausted. He tells Our Lady that She will have to take care of them for him. Certainly the Mother of Jesus Christ could also be the Mother of these two little boys and one small girl, who are the brothers of Jesus for whom He came into the world. Surely Péguy's child-like, country-like simplicity could not fail to disarm and enchant the Mother of God.

This same peasant simplicity marks Péguy's fascination for childhood. He praises it throughout Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, on the very first page of which the virtue of hope appears as a little girl. In the following pages God refers to her as "Ma petite espérance...."23 Again his affection is shown when He says:

Dans toute famille, dit Dieu, il y a un dernier-né
Et il est plus tendre.
Cette petite espérance qui sauterait à la corde dans les processions,
Elle est dans la maison des vertus
Comme était Benjamin dans la maison de Jacob.24

After discussing the story of Joseph in Egypt Péguy continues with the praises of childhood and innocence:

22 Ibid., 58.
23 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 12ff.
24 Ibid., 113-14.
Or c'est l'innocence qui est pleine et c'est l'expérience qui est vide.
C'est l'innocence qui gagne et c'est l'expérience qui perd.
C'est l'innocence qui est jeune et c'est l'expérience qui est vieille.
C'est l'innocence qui croît et c'est l'expérience qui décroît.
C'est l'innocence qui naît et c'est l'expérience qui meurt.
C'est l'innocence qui sait et c'est l'expérience qui ne sait pas.
C'est l'enfant qui est plein et c'est l'homme qui est vide,...

God is linked to Péguy's thoughts on childhood. Thrice he tells us that nothing in this world is as beautiful as a child at prayer, and the third time he cannot resist describing the beauties of the world in contrast with those of a little child who falls asleep while saying his prayers. The following gives some idea of the beauty of the whole:

Rien n'est beau comme un enfant qui s'endort en faisant sa prière, dit Dieu.

25 Ibid., 179-80.
Could there be any doubt of Péguy's reverence for children after reading the above? Nevertheless after again speaking of the gospel incident when Our Lord blessed the little children, and said that ".... of such is the kingdom of heaven," Péguy finally comes to the account of the baby-martyrs, and puts into the mouth of God seven reasons why God chose the Holy Innocents, whom Péguy identifies with those who will sing the "new canticle" in heaven. He then concludes his picture of childhood with the baby-martyrs playing games in heaven, a peasant's paradise, which Peter Brughel might have painted.

Péguy too was a painter. Once while he was sitting for his portrait by Laurens, Péguy said: "I too am painting a portrait." "Of whom," inquired the artist. "Of God," replied Péguy. In Péguy's portrayal of the Almighty, as a true peasant, we seem to see all the characteristics of the author himself. The thoughts and feelings of the peasant Péguy are put into the mouth of God, but never in an irreverent way, for Péguy's is never merely human, but is at the same moment both eternal and young:

Et Dieu lui-même jeune ensemble qu'éternel
Se reposait penchée sur sa création.
Et l'amour filial et l'amour paternel
Se nourrissaient d'hommage et de libation.29

26 Ibid., 182-183.
27 Ibid., 186
28 Sargent, op. cit., 45
29 Charles Péguy, Eve, 19.
This attribute of God returns as a refrain for the next five pages then it is
alternated with phrases such as "Un Dieu lui-même auteur ensemble qu'éternel.
...Un Dieu lui-même neuf ensemble qu'éternel...." 30 These are characteristic
equally above nature.

With a peasant's insight and practicality, the God of Péguy speaks to
man and tells him that the examination of conscience is an excellent thing,
but that he must not abuse it by spending the whole night reviewing the
ingratitude of the past day. God wishes to keep the Book of Judgment; man
will profit by this, "Vos péchés sont-ils si précieux qu'il faille les
cataloguer et les classer...?" 31 One wonders if Péguy, who evidently had a
clear and correct idea of the evils of scruples and the beauty of confidence
in God, was not simply unable to practice what he saw so clearly, for Le
Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc has for its theme, "...qui faut-il
donc sauver? Comment faut-il sauver?" --questions which he spent his life
trying to answer. 32

Not only does this incorrigible Péguy make God the Father speak with
the beautiful simplicity of a peasant, but he also says that God the Son,
having lived so long among men, "...a rapporté dans le ciel un certain goût
de l'homme, un certain goût de la terre." 33 He does not, however, leave the
thought on the purely natural plane, but transcends it to the supernatural

30 Ibid., 25-26, passim.
31 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 27.
32 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 161.
33 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 38.
with, "Mon fils qui les a tant aimés, qui les aime éternellement dans le ciel." 34

That Péguy is of the soil and will return to it is evident from the following:

Ce n'est pas ces badauds et ces messieurs très dignes
Qui viendront nous chercher dans notre pourriture.
Ce n'est pas ces bedeaux et ces porte-bouture
Qui viendront nous chercher dans nos blés et nos vignes. 35

Péguy intends to be found in his beloved Orléans on the last day, for, after listing all the places where he will not be found, he concludes:

Mais c'est beaucoup plus près, dans notre plate Beauce,
Que nous avons dressé la flèche inimitable.
Et c'est ici tout près, dans une étroite fosse,
Que viendra nous chercher notre grand comital. 36

A last trace of the peasant is found in Péguy's dilemma:

Et comme on ne sait pas parmi tant de bonheurs
Ce qu'on aime la mieux, si c'est un bel orage,
Ou si c'est la saison du profond labourage,
Ou le balancement des vastes moissonneurs... 37

He even places God in the same situation, probably because when Péguy has God speak it is really Péguy himself speaking, not in a sense of pride, but simply because it is Péguy's way:

Ainsi Dieu ne sait pas entre tant le beaux temps
Ce qu'il aime le mieux, si c'est le doux avril
Ou la feuille d'automne et le rêve d'exil,
Ou le mélancolique et volage printemps. 38

34 Ibid., 48.
35 Charles Péguy, Eve, 308.
36 Ibid., 321.
37 Ibid., 385.
38 Ibid.
Nothing could more fittingly conclude these traces of the peasant in Péguy's poetry than a few of his beautiful verses entitled "Présentation de la Beauce à Notre Dame de Chartres." Chartres is affectionately referred to by the people of the surrounding country side as 'la Blonde aux yeux bleus,' because of the stained glass windows and the golden grain of the Beauce country. Péguy sings thus:

Étoile de la mer voici la lourde nappe,
Et la profonde houle et l'océan des blés
Et la mouvante écume de nos greniers comblés,
Voice votre regard sur cette immense chapelle....

Nous sommes nés pour vous au bord de ce plateau,
Dans le recourbement de notre blonde Loire,
Et ce fleuve de sable de ce fleuve de gloire
N'est là que pour baiser votre auguste manteau....

Nous sommes nés au bord de votre plate Beauce
Et nous avons connus dès nos plus jeunes ans
Le portail de la ferme et les durs paysans
Et l'enclos dans le bourg et la bêche et la fosse....

Nous ne demandons rien, refuge du pécheur,
Que la dernière place en votre Purgatoire,
Pour pleurer longuement notre tragique histoire,
Et contempler de loin votre jeune splendeur.39

39 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Notre Dame, 47, 65, passim.
CHAPTER III

THE POLEMIC WRITER

During his school days Péguy delighted in classic culture. Although not a musician he loved all that was warlike or pastoral in the peasant choruses of Attica, as well as those of OEdipe-Roi and Antigone. The Tharauds well express this inclination of Péguy's when they say: "Homère, Eschyle, Sophocle étaient des familiers, des compagnons de la cour rose."¹ But before reaching the 'cour rose' of Sainte-Barbe, Péguy spent a year at the lycée of Orléans and then attended Lakanal near Paris.

It was during this period of his life that an incident occurred which led him to give up the practice of his religion. As a cause, it seems too small for the result which followed. One wonders if it was not simply the occasion for his ceasing to go to mass. Yet Péguy was "tout d'une pièce" and what for ordinary mortals could never bring about such a drastic result did produce that for Péguy.

A miner, Calvinhac, was elected mayor of Carmaux defeating the candidate set up by the mining company. The mine owners and all the citizens who wished peace were in horror at his election. "He was a fomenter of, and a leader in class warfare."² He was dismissed by the mining company and the miners went on a strike. Albert Mathiez, future historian cited.

of Robespierre and the Revolution, then a student, took up a collection among his comrades in favor of the strikers. Péguy was the first to contribute against the company, which in his opinion, had violated the syndical right. The clerical press took the side of the employers. This aroused Péguy's wrath. He wished to rebuke the Church. He stopped attending religious services in the chapel of the lycée where previously he had been very regular. From this time on he called himself a socialist.

The socialism of Péguy was much more akin to that of Saint Francis of Assisi than of Karl Marx. It was a disposition of heart acquired in the faubourg Bourgogne, where he had been brought up in the midst of poor people, who were serious, honest, and held work in high esteem. Péguy realized and proclaimed that poverty, when used correctly, ennobles, but that destitution or "misère" degrades. Another link with Saint Francis was the faith that Péguy's socialists were to have, not in God for in those days Péguy was an atheist, but in the 'cité Harmonieuse.' No rich were to be admitted to this harmonious city were Lady Poverty was queen or rather "socialistic" poverty held sway. No priests were welcome there for Péguy then was anti-clerical. Socialistic solidarity replaced Christian charity, for Péguy, and like it Tharaud well says, "ne se démontrait pas par des raisonnements et des textes, elle se sentait, elle s'éprouvait par le coeur."  

3 Tharaud, op. cit., 1, 19.
4 Ibid., 1, 245.
Péguy although no longer a socialist when he wrote *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* there manifests nevertheless his socialistic solidarity on Christian charity, the terms are practically synonymous as understood by Péguy. He pictures Jeannette consumed with sorrow because of the horrors of war, the damnation of souls, and the pitiful condition of France during the Hundred Years' War.⁵ He has little Hauviette, her friend, speak thus to her:

...tu fais la charité...tu soignes les malades...
tu consoles ceux qui sont affligés...tu es tou-
jours là avec ceux qui ont de la peine....⁶

In autobiographical strain Péguy depicts Jeannette giving her bread to "deux enfants, deux gamins, deux petits qui descendaient tout seuls par le sentier là-bas," crying, "j'ai faim, j'ai faim, j'ai faim...."⁷ Surely this incident recalls that of Péguy's own life when while still an atheistic, anti-clerical socialist at Saint-Barbe his friend Louis Baillet had him elected President of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society which including its president went out even on cold winter nights to feed the poor of Paris. Thus Jeannette's sentiments were those of Péguy. It was truly the poor feeding the poorer. He, too, gave "tout mon manger de midi et mon manger de quatre heures" yet the joy of the two children saddened him like-

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⁷ [Ibid.], 34-35.
⁸ [Ibid.], 36.
leur joie m'a fait mal, encore plus mal, parce que tout d'un malgré moi... j'ai pensé, j'ai compris; j'ai vu; j'ai pensé à tout les autres affamés qui ne mangent pas, à tant d'affamés, à des affamés innombrables; j'ai pensé à tous les malheureux, qui ne sont pas consolés, à tant et tant de malheureux, à des malheureux innombrables. 9

Who could know better, the sufferings of the poor, than one of their number.

This love of solidarity seems clearly manifest further on in this same work when discussing the eternal salvation of souls Péguy says:

Il faut se sauver ensemble. Il faut arriver ensemble chez le bon Dieu. Il faut se présenter ensemble. Il ne faut pas arriver trouver le bon Dieu les uns sans les autres. Il faudra revenir tous ensemble dans la maison de notre père. Il faut aussi penser un peu aux autres; il faut travailler un peu pour les autres. Qu'est-ce qu'il nous dirait si nous arrivions si nous revenions les uns sans les autres. 10

Hope, Péguy's favorite virtue, also had a place in his socialism. His hope was grounded on this planet, it was to realize here below an earthly paradise, the 'cité harmonieuse.' His fellow socialists would of course help him establish it.

Thus Péguy's socialism was characterized by faith, hope, and charity and another christian virtue, namely poverty. All this was to be based on reverence for the human personality. This surely sounds like Catholicism parading under an assumed name.

Halevy gives a clear picture of Péguy's socialism:

9 Ibid., 37.
10 Ibid., 53.
C'était un mouvement fort incertain quant aux doctrines, plutôt qu'un socialisme, un sentiment de charité sociale, incliné vers le christianisme, incliné vers le peuple, et peu attentif cette double réalité qu'en arrière du christianisme il y a une Eglise, et en arrière du peuple un Parti.

Herein lies the key to Péguy's break with the socialists. But chronologically several incidents intervene. Péguy, still at Saint-Barbe, studied Vallet de Viriville's history of Charles VII, and began his first Jeanne d'Arc.

Péguy, the socialist, pasted a notice on this mysterious manuscript: "Prière de ne pas toucher," and kept it locked in his trunk. This book appeared in 1897, the year of Marcel Baudoin's death and Péguy's marriage; a word of explanation about each.

Péguy left the Ecole Normale Supérieure in December 1895 just a year after he had quit his companions of the Cour Rose. He wanted to spend a year in Orléans so that he might better fulfill his self-imposed tasks for the socialistic cause, namely: found a socialist center, learn printing, and work on his Jeanne d'Arc in more suitable surroundings. Having accomplished his purpose he was back at the Ecole the following November.

Marcel Baudoin, who had worked with Péguy on the first half of Jeanne d'Arc, died while taking his military service in July, 1897. Remarks made by Baudoin in letters to Péguy convinced the latter that his friend's death was caused by ill treatment at the hands of a certain non-commissioned


12 Secretain, op. cit., 192.

officer. Impetuous Péguy called two friends to be his seconds and set out for Dreux supplied with swords and pistols to avenge the death of Baudoin. Conversation with the soldier in question clearly showed to Péguy, lover of truth, that the officer was as sorry over the demise of Baudoin as was Péguy and equally innocent. The thought that Baudoin's death was a wrong to the 'mystique' of their friendship haunted Péguy. He would right that wrong by taking the dead man's place. This he did in October, 1897 when he married Charlotte Baudoin, Marcel's sister.

The following month Péguy, now married, reappeared at the Ecole Normale. The more he learned of the Sorbonne the angrier he grew. He excoriated the Sorbonne as a teacher of unculture, error, and barbarism. He accused these teachers, who studied the classics after their own fashion, of killing culture, of turning the Sorbonne into a political machine. It was a wealthy tyranny, eager not for learning but for power. It was a cabal, malicious and underhanded. "Such a group was not even worthy to read Corneille."14 The errors of the intelligensia of the Sorbonne Péguy seems rightly to attribute to their philosophy. He had no quarrel with those "who pursue philosophy in the accurate, i.e., the honorable and morally noble sense of the term."15 His quarrel was with those modern scientists who hating the eternal philosophy of mankind, kill the spirit and leave the letter entitled, "modern freedom from prejudices."16 Péguy's quarrel with the intellectuals

14 Sargent, op. cit., 23.
15 Pfleger, op. cit., 92.
16 Ibid.
has been stated thus:

The battle is not being fought between the heroes and the saints; it is being fought against the intellectuals who scorn equally the heroes and the saints.... Everything whose mission it is, a mission officially bestowed, to safeguard culture, everything whose appointed task it is to protect culture and the humanities is betraying culture and the humanities. Culture and the humanities are now defended only by us who have received no commission to defend them. Once again the Sorbonne has capitulated to scholasticism, and it is to the scholasticism of materialism the worst of all scholasticism.17

The case might be stated thus: the Sorbonne was all for intelligence, Bergson was all for intuition. Péguy had had enough of the heartless philosophy of the Sorbonne. In Bergson he found that for which he was seeking, namely the exaltation of intuition. Here was a philosophy, Péguy felt, that left room for what the philosophy of the Sorbonne excluded, room for geniuses, heroes, and saints.18

Halévy energetically describes what Péguy denounces in the Sorbonne:

...Cette sureté d'instinct du médiocre, mise au service de l'état, qui est devenu tout puissant dans le monde moderne, cette sureté d'instinct (le seul qu'il ait) de l'envieux, du médiocre contre tout ce qui est culture. La barbarie scientifique (on la dissimule sous le beau nom d'érudition) l'inculture (on l'appelle esprit pratique), voilà les fins ou nous acheminé la nouvelle Sorbonne, ses méthodes vides boutent l'ancienne éducation de son contenu de culture et de liberté.19

17 Ibid., 92-3.
18 Ibid., 92.
19 Halvey, op. cit., 60.
Interspersed in Peguy's poetry are jibes such as the following:

... Et la maigre Sorbonne et ses pauvres petits....
   Les armes de Satan c'est la fausse culture....20

... Les armes de Satan c'est la supercherie,
   Un aplomb infernal, une aigre droseerie,
   Le savoir des savants et la cafarderie.21

... Les autres sont perdus parmi tant de sagesse
   Qu'ils ont le coeur plus sot qu'un coeur historien....22

... Et ce ne sera pas ces distingués cloportes
   Qui viendront nous chercher dans notre enterrement....
   ... Et ce ne sera pas par leur usage externe
   Que nous nous lèverons de notre pourriture.
   Mais la Foi qui nous sauve et seule nous discerne
   Saura nous retrouver dans la fange et l'ordure....23

He made fun of the Sorbonne, false culture, historians and lastly scientists in general, pouring scorn on those miserable insects, the "Puissants mille-pieds" of the university in their laboratories and archives.24 He was impelled thereto because as far as he could judge the philosophy of the Sorbonne excluded room for geniuses, heroes, and saints.25

Having broken with the Church and fought with the university professors, Peguy's fears of living in a period instead of in an epoch were shortly to be allayed. A period for him was a time when things were quiet, no history making events looming on the horizon; whereas an epoch was a vital time such

21 Ibid., 70.
24 Loc. Cit.
as 1789, 1830, 1848, 1870, and now in 1898 the whole Dreyfus Case was to be retried.

Dreyfus, a French Army Captain was a Jew. He had been accused of selling artillery secrets to the Germans and condemned to Devil's Island. The anti-Dreyfusards held that even were the Jewish Captain innocent, which they denied, he should not be freed as this would impugn the reputation of the high military tribunal which had sentenced him. For Péguy, even though he ardently believed that an innocent man had been condemned, the burning question was not the innocence or guilt of an individual man nor was it the innocence or guilt of a specific military tribunal. His love of truth and justice made him formulate a much larger question. Would his beloved France have the nobility of soul to humiliate herself, to publicly recognize her crime? Would she courageously follow her destiny (in which he firmly believed) of spiritual leadership in truth? He wanted to know if "France was ready to lose the whole world to gain her soul."26 The Tharauds apropo of this affair expressed themselves thus: "il [Peguy] ne voulait pas que la France perdit son âme en sacrificant un innocent à son salut temporel,"27 while Péguy, mouthpiece of the Drefusards, says:

Nous disions une seul injustice, un seul crime, une seule illégalité, surtout si elle est officiellement enregistrée, confirmée, une seule injure à l'humanité, une seule injure à la justice et au droit, surtout si elle est universellement, légalement, nationalement, commodément acceptée, un seul crime rompt et suffit à rompre tout le pacte social, tout le contrat social, une seule forfaiture, un seul des-honneur suffit à perdre l'honneur, à déshonorer tout un peuple. C'est un point de gangrène qui corrompt tout le

26 John Murray, op. cit., 96.
27 Tharaud, op. cit., 1, 137.
corps. Ce que nous défendons, ce n'est pas seulement notre honneur. Ce n'est pas seulement l'honneur de tout notre peuple, dans le présent, c'est tout l'honneur historique de notre peuple, tout l'honneur historique de notre race, tout l'honneur de nos aieux, l'honneur de nos enfants.28

The ardor and disinterestedness with which he flung himself into the fight for truth and justice can best be judged by his own words:

Pendant tout le temps qu'elle dura, négligeant non seulement nos affaires et nos intérêts mais nos droits même et l'action qui nous était particulière, tout le temps, tous les soins, tout le travail, tous les efforts, toute l'action furent au service d'une justification individuelle.29

Péguy, in his impetuous enthusiasm in the fray, did not stop to inquire if all his companions shared his high ideals. In fact they did not as he soon realized. However, he was not surprised that Socialists such as Lucien Herr and Jaurès were Dreyfusards, but he was astonished that Dreyfusards such as Zola, for example, did not become Socialists.30

Halevy gives the key to Peguy's break with the Socialists which was bound to follow. He says that Peguy did not realize or attend to the fact that behind the people there is a Party.31 Péguy now saw that "ce dreyfusisme, devenant gouvernemental, politique, parlementaire, cessait d'être un véritable dreyfusisme...."32 He also saw the people following power rather than justice. He saw them following Jaures. He saw too that Jaures wanted to draw political profit from the affair, so he broke with him.

29 Charles Péguy, Pour Ma Maison, Oeuvres Complètes, I, 276.
30 Secrétain, op. cit., 106.
31 Halévy, op. cit., 19-20.
32 Charles Péguy, Notre Patrie, Oeuvres Complètes, II, 283.
Johannet gives an illuminating explanation of the cause of the difficulty:

Péguy avait admiré plus que de raison la "droiture," "la généreïsté," de Jaurès; quand il s'aperçut que Jaurès ressemblait à Jaurès et non à une idole, il l'appela Jaurès comme Boileau appelait Rollet, Rollet. Et cela nous valut, dans Notre Jeunesse un pamphlet extraordinaire.33

Then follows a most interesting division of Péguy's pamphlets with names of the gentlemen attached in each.

Le pamphlet grave (Laudet)
Le pamphlet rosse (Lavisse)
Le pamphlet badin (Lanson, Rudler)
Le pamphlet furibond (Langlois)

and last the best

Le pamphlet bouffon (Jaurès)34

Johannet goes so far as to say that if Jaurès ever enters the history of French literature it will be because Péguy has immortalized him.35 Each of the five types of pamphlets which Péguy wrote, or rather which he was impelled to write, for whenever he wished to praise anything he had written he would say "c'est dicté,"36 was another means by which this fighter for truth sought to punish those politicians or rhetoricians, it mattered little what one called those who deceived the people.

Secrétain thus summarizes the situation:

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33 René Johannet, Itinéraires d'Intellectuels, Nouvelle Libraire Nationale, Paris, 1921, 76.
34 Ibid., 76-7.
35 Loc. cit.
36 Tharaud, op. cit., II, 6.
Tout ce dont Péguy eut à se plaindre dans le tour que prirent les affaires publiques, ce "dessaisissement" par quoi la Mystique du dreyfusisme avait abouti à un combisme politique, c'est Jaurès qu'il en rend responsable. 37

For Péguy great and noble causes begin by having a "mystique" and end by having a "politique" and when this happens they are dead. He gives the following example himself: "La mystique républicaine, c'était quand on mourait pour la République; la politique républicaine, c'est à présent: qu'on en vit." 39 Péguy dreamt of a moral and spiritual revolution and the reality broke his heart, as it did that of Jeannette in his Mystère.

The first of May, 1898, Péguy using his wife's dowry, opened in the Rue Cujas, the Librarie George Bellais. Even the name was borrowed from a friend, Georges Bellais, who had been one of the seconds Péguy had commanded on his trip to Dreux. 40 Things did not go well financially for Peguy. He felt that the five administrators: Lucien Herr, Léon Blum, Mario Roques, Hubert Bourgin and Simiand, who were named when under financial stress "La Librairie Bellais" became the "Société Nouvelle de Librairie et d'Édition," were no longer his comrades, which was true. 41 Péguy, put out of his bookstore penniless, went to the Tharauds to seek shelter for his new venture the Cahiers de la Quinzaine. 42

37 Secrétain, op. cit., 126.
38 Tharaud, op. cit., 1, 228.
39 Green, op. cit., 108.
40 Tharaud, op. cit., 156-57.
41 Ibid., 183-197, passim.
42 Ibid., 196-97.
Although the majority of Péguys polemic writing is found in his prose, nevertheless no picture of the man would be complete with only a cursory glance at the three great struggles of his life:

1) That with the Socialists, from which he emerged stripped of his store, money, friends, but clinging to his ideals of truth and justice which shone even more brilliantly after the fray than before;

2) That with the Sorbonne, whence he came forth carrying the banner of Bergson's philosophy of intuition, which was even to influence his style of writing, to combat the standard of the rhetoricians' intellectuality;

3) That most mysterious of all combats: Péguys spiritual life, embittered by his quarrel with the Church, resolved itself only in the utter abandonment of his last days, in the enthusiasm of his acceptance of total sacrifice.

It has been said that he did not believe in hell yet that it was due to the dogma of hell that he lost the faith.43 Far from not believing, it was the terrible realization of it with which he struggled for about twelve years. Educated as he was at anti-clerical institutions, although he had a child's knowledge of the catechism, he apparently failed to grasp that hell is the next worst thing to sin. He said himself, "We are one with the eternally damned,"44 which sounds as though he believed in hell, but he immediately adds, "We cannot admit that there are human beings who must be thrust away

43 Secrétain, op. cit., 83.
44 Pfleger, op. cit., 92.
from the entrance of any community, which leads one to surmise that he simply refused to accept the idea of hell. Whether he believed in it or did not believe in it he was haunted by the thought and struggled with the idea through years of anguish.

That the problem of evil tortured Péguy's soul is seen in the "qui donc faut-il sauver?" and the "Comment faut-il sauver?" which appears in Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc with the insistence of waves lapping the shore. Jeannette addressing God says:

C'était la terre, hélas, quelquefois, souvent c'était la terre qui préparait à l'enfer. Aujourd'hui ce n'est plus même cela; ce n'est plus la terre qui prépare à l'enfer. C'est l'enfer même qui redéborde sur la terre.

By this Péguy doubtless meant that 'misère' is in the material would what 'l'enfer' is in the spiritual. This 'misère' or destitution has flooded the world. Péguy makes a distinction between 'la misère' and 'la pauvreté.' Poverty ennobles but destitution degrades a man.

Péguy wished to save all men and he makes Madame Gervaise, speaking for Jeannette's friends and relations, tell her:

Tu as connu qu'ils sont lâches tous, et complices du Mal universel; complices, auteurs du Péché; complices, auteurs de cette universel perdition; et qu'ils ne sont donc responsables. Comptables. Responsables des âmes qui se damnent à ces âmes elles-mêmes, et responsables à Dieu, car les âmes sont à Lui, et vous les laissez damner sans rien faire, et vous vous damnez vous-mêmes à laisser ainsi damner les âmes de Dieu. Un silence. Ainsi, c'est ainsi une énumération et une détroulement sans fin de damnations une explication des damnations sans fin; un enchaînement, une danse affreuse des perditions.

45 Ibid., 92
46 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 161.
47 Loc. cit.
48 Ibid., 48.
49 Ibid., 74-5.
Poor Péguy had certainly described 'une ronde infernale.' It is small wonder that after refusing to accept the conditions laid down by the Church for his return to the sacraments, with such a profound realization of his responsibility, he was at death's door when Lotte came to see him in 1908, that Péguy said to him, "J'ai retrouvé la foi... Je suis catholique." That was two years before Péguy published Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, which is filled with the question of suffering and evil in the world. He puts into the mouth of Jeannette his own wish to perish in hell if he can thus save the damned. She says:

O s'il faut, pour sauver de la flamme éternelle
Les corps de morts damnés s'affolant de souffrance
Abandonner mon corps à la flamme éternelle,
Mon Dieu, donnez mon corps à la flamme éternelle;
Mon corps, mon pauvre corps, à cette flamme qui ne s'éteindra jamais.

Jeannette is consumed with grief at the thought of so much wasted suffering and Madame Gervaise tells her that that is what hell is, wasted suffering, and that if it were not wasted then the damned could merit and they would no longer be in hell. This is no comfort and Jeannette repeats her statement, to which she receives this reply, "C'est un mystère, enfant,..." After dwelling on the childhood of Jesus, the passion of Our Lady when she lost the Child Jesus for three days, the descent from the cross, Péguy returns to the thought of salvation which haunts him and has Jeannette say:

50 Jean Calvet, Le Renouveau Catholique, Lanore, Paris, 1931, 144.
51 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 80.
52 Ibid., 87.
C'est que le Fils de Dieu savait que la souffrance
du fils de l'homme est vaine à sauver les damnés.
Et s'affolant plus qu'eux de la désespérance,
Jésus mourant pleura sur les abandonnés.
...Jésus mourant pleura sur la mort de Judas.
Mourant de sa mort, de notre mort humaine, seulement
Il pleura sur cette mort éternelle.53

Madame Gervaise then asks Jeannette a telling question: "Pourquoi vouloir,
ma soeur, sauver les morts damnés de l'enfer éternel, et vouloir sauver
mieux que Jésus le sauveur?"54 To which Jeannette, Péguy's mouthpiece,
responds by simply repeating her first question, "Qui faut-il sauver?
Comment faut-il sauver?"55 Is this not a manifestation of pride in Péguy?
This wishing to save more than a heaven-sent Savior did, namely, to do the
impossible.

Apropos of the problem of evil, in Eve Péguy addresses the mother of man-
kind this: "Vous n'avez plus connu..."56 and he enumerates all the things
that Eve lost and what she received in consequence:

Vous n'avez plus connu ce climat de la grâce...
" " " " " la terre maternelle
Fomentant sur son sein les faciles épis....
Vous n'avez plus connu le pampre florissant...
" " " " " les fleurs nouvelles-nées...
" " " " " l'innocence du monde...
" " " " " les jours impérissables...
" " " " " la jeunesse du monde...
" " " " " les bois silencieux...
" " " " " qu'un sévère destin...
" " " " " que des biens périsssables...
" " " " " que des pas tortus...

53 Ibid., 156-57, passim.
54 Ibid., 161.
55 Lés. cit.
56 Charles Péguy, Eve, 13.
Vous n'avez plus connu qu'une éternelle absence... " " " " " qu'une pauvre décente... " " " " " que des laborieux... " " " " " qu'une lente agonie... " " " " " que cette vilénie... " " " " " qu'un peuple qui dit non...57

Péguy liked to think that, in spite of all his quarrels and the loss of his friends, he never changed. In a sense this was true, for was he not all his life seeking truth and moral grandeur and then expressing his findings in a variety of ways?

In the opening pages of Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc "la Misère" is flooding the earth and in the last "des souffrances" are a treasure and God hears suffering as He hears prayers.58

Dwelling on Christ's abandonment by government and people, Péguy seems to be depicting his own inward experience when in a similar way he was deserted by the party of his friends. He says:

Il est bien rare que le gouvernement et le peuple soient d'accord...
Elle [Our Lady] voyait bien que tout le monde était contre lui.
Le gouvernement et le peuple. Ensemble.... Quand on a l'un pour soi, l'autre contre soi quelquefois on en réchappe. On s'en tire... Qu'est-ce qu'il avait donc fait à tout le monde?
Je vais vous le dire: Il avait sauvé le monde.59

Had not Péguy chosen Christ as his model in how to save? For speaking of Christ he says, "Il devait savoir, lui. C'était son métier. De sauver.

57 Charles Péguy, Eve, 13-42, passim.
58 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne D'Arc, 199.
59 Ibid., 118-120, passim.
C'était son office. Il devait savoir. Il est notre maître à sauver. 60 The problem of evil, then, loomed large in Péguy's poetry, as in his mind and heart and life; it was a sore torment to him, a scandal to his faith, and yet, does it suffice as a full explanation of his long deferred acceptance of the truths he had come to believe? It would hardly seem so. The explanation is too simple and obvious for a problem complicated and obscure in its terms. Many other solutions have been suggested and quite recently, a masterly analysis of the mystery that was Péguy has been offered by the two who are probably the best qualified to speak of it, the Maritains. As daily witnesses of his intimate conflict the Maritains know whereof they write. It is Raissa who writes, but she quotes Jacques and evidently transmits his message. The reasons that Mme. Maritain gives for Péguy's religious difficulties may be roughly summed up as three-fold:

1) The opposition of Péguy's wife and his sense of mistaken loyalty to an engagement made in his pre-Christian period.

2) The special form of anti-clericalism, to which his upbringing had exposed him.

3) His resulting failure to see the Church's inner mission and a concentration on the outer.

The first difficulty, that with his wife, is often given as the most important. He had married when he was a socialist and revolutionary, and no longer had the faith; his wife shared his ideas; their marriage was only a civil one. Therefore, having engaged himself in this manner, Péguy felt he

60 Ibid., 87.
had made a kind of contract to respect always the convictions of his wife, who came from old revolutionary stock and was indifferent to Catholicism; his wife never wished to regularize their marriage or to have their children baptized. Péguy waited for grace to do its work, living in hope; for as Raissa Maritain says: "Little by little Péguy persuaded himself that the requirements of the Church were just in themselves but not in regard to him. He built up a justification for his attitude. Nevertheless from his own work it would seem that he was the pilgrim ever seeking truth, with boundless hope, which he expressed so movingly in his *Prière de Confiance*. The path of the wanderer caused him to fall into the "trap of that old Catholic anti-clericalism which he cherished as a popular French tradition..." Thus "the shell hid the substance from him, 'the clerics' kept him from seeing the Church in its profundity and supernatural reality. To sum up, it was concerning the mystery of the Church that between Péguy on one side, and Father Clerissac and ourselves on the other, the opposition was fundamental."  

As for his anti-clericalism, the solution was not easy for there was present that discord between infused faith and the acts and thoughts of a man who has received this gift from God. In consequence a long time would be needed for the supernatural faith conferred by baptism in infancy and later

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63 Péguy, *Oeuvres complètes*, IX, 125.

64 Maritain, *Adventures in Grace*, 68.
driven back into the depths of the subconscious, to break away and little by little to take possession of all the faculties. He had written in 1905 that the thirteen or fourteen centuries of Christianity in his ancestors, the eleven or twelve years of Catholic instruction and even education sincerely and faithfully received had passed him over without leaving a trace.65

The third difficulty was the old stumbling block of natural body hiding divine soul, which caused Péguy to fail to see the Church as a person. He missed the vision of the mystical Body, although its call to action sounded in his ears and the power of truth compelled an unwilling assent (consent). He had not the full view of the interior mission of Christ's spouse, but the exterior was almost self-evident. This is the explanation hinted by Raissa Maritain when she says:

Péguy did have a very deep intuition of one thing: that he should bear witness to the temporal vocation of a Christian. He was conscious of the mission and the dignity which belonged to lay persons in the Church and in Christendom. He was a Catholic of deep faith, a man of prayer absorbed by the idea of temporal task of the Christian, of his own temporal work to be accomplished, and of his mission in the work of "carnal" realities, and who was in a way left unbalanced in the midst of difficulties that were too great, and by heart-rending conflicts.66

Despite all this he never lost his great confidence in God, which he expresses in his own questioning way thus:

S'il n'y a que la justice, qui sera sauvé?
Mais s'il y a la miséricorde, qui sera perdu?
S'il y a la miséricorde, qui peut se vanter de se perdre?
Se sauver est impossible à l'homme; mais rien n'est impossible à Dieu.67

65 Charles Péguy, Tourjours de la grippe, Gallimard, Oeuvres complètes, I,165.
66 Maritain, Adventures in Grace, 69.
67 Péguy, Mystère des Saints Innocents, 46.
To follow out this self imposed task of saving, Péguy wrote pamphlets to chastise those politicians and rhetoricians who lied to the people. He pursued his solitary course in imitation of the deserted Christ and Saint Joan of Arc who were both deserted and apparently forgotten by those who should have upheld and helped them. Thus living what he preached, he courageously undertook his new venture, the publishing of a magazine which would, to quote his own words on the subject, "dire tristement la vérité triste, ennuyeusement la vérité la vérité ennuyeuse, bêtement la vérité bête..."68 In this manner he armed himself for the fray and his weapons were the issues of Les Cahiers de la Quizaine. There he first published all his poetry with the exception of his first Jeanne d'Arc of 1897.

Péguy's poetry is not primarily polemical in fact only a limited portion of it could be so interpreted. Polemics are nevertheless such a part of Péguy that no study of the man would be complete without a portion of it being devoted to this aspect of his character. A defense of one of his poems he did publish in the Cahiers under the title Un Nouveau Théologien M. Ferdinand Laudet. It was written in reply to a most unfavorable criticism of Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc made by François Le Grix under the pen name Ferdinand Laudet. Thus having seen something of Péguy as a polemical writer let us now consider not primarily the sources of his poetry but rather his methods of composition.

CHAPTER IV

THE POET

Although not primarily concerned with the sources of Péguy's poetry, nevertheless it is interesting to note the impression made on one of his contemporaries when Péguy after writing prose for fourteen years suddenly published poetry:

Voici que, tout à coup, dérangeant l'habitude qu'ont les hommes graves de le [Péguy] classer parmi les prosateurs, il perdait la tête, il écrivait en vers. Le cas, il faut l'avouer, est unique dans la littérature française.... Et, commençant par la prose, il a abouti au vers traditionnel par l'intermédiaire du vers libre.¹

This was all the more astonishing because as Porché says, it was unique in French literature; yet it was the natural way. As the ballad form grew into the 'Chanson de Geste' and finally into polished alendrines, so too Péguy's 'vers libre' led him to this form in Eve. His earliest works used assonance, repetition, alliteration to produce his flute-like effects. He was the heir of the innovating XIXth century; we cannot therefore expect to find him adhering closely to the strict classicism of the Parnassian or to the anarchism which followed it. Yet there are evidence of both to be glimpsed in his work. The boy to whom Boitier gave a copy of Les Châtiments

¹ François Porché, Poètes Français depuis Verlaine, La Nouvelle Revue Critique, Paris, 1929, 142-44, passim.
was now striving to find the answers to many questions which this reading had aroused in him. That he had made a study of the rhymes of Hugo, Corneille and Racine is obvious from a perusal of Victor-Marie, Comte Hugo. In it one feels not the literary critic's ideas, but those of the moralist. Again, like the great French poet in La Légende des Siècles, Péguy's Eve, Jeanne d'Arc, and all his Mystères become biblical expositions. The Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc is written half in prose and half in blank verse, yet has alexandrine rhythm. Thus we see that Péguy, following this great model, was a poet indifferent to rules, even writing a 'sonnet' of two quatrains and one hundred tercets. Thus whether he wrote in blank verse or in alexandrines, it is not enough to say that Péguy was original; he was unique.

There are, however, more striking evidences in Présentation de la Beauce à Notre Dame de Chartres where Péguy writes:

«Quand nous aurons jeté le masque et le couteau.»

and Hugo in Tristesse d'Olympe had said:

«L'un emportant son masque et l'autre son couteau.»

Yet it is not only in Hugo that we must seek Péguy's sources. In his presentation of the foil in close relationship with the heroine is there not a touch of the classical? Hermione and Andromaque have their counterparts in Mme. Gervaise and Jeannette. Also there are those rapid changes of rhythm from the long alexandrines to the 'impair' of nine feet, followed by as rapid a reversion to the former, as one finds in Louis Mercier's poetry.

His verses have sometimes a short quick rhythm, but most often the

movement is sparkling with vigor, living beauty, and richness of thought. All that is needed is patience to follow the development of that thought, through the repetitions which succeed one another like the waves lapping the seashore. Thus it was that the poetic muse took hold of Péguy, yet one might still ask from whence this came, and find his only ample answer in his peasant simplicity and deep religious insight, for "le style de M. Péguy est lui-même, il représente la marche et la démarche de sa pensée." 3

Yet there are other explanations also, for in 1904 he read in the Mercure de France, Charles van Lerberghe's Chanson d'Eve, of which we find so many evidence in Péguy's Eve of 1913. Moreover Romain Rolland's spirit in Jean Christophe particularly the earlier volumes: l'Aube, le Matin, la Révolte, is very evident not only in Eve, but more especially in Jeanne d'Arc. The question one asks oneself, especially with reference to this last work, is whether or not Péguy had read Jeanne d'Arc by Gabriel Hanotaux, before he published his second version, for Hanotaux speaks specifically of the four mysteries of Jeanne's life: first, her formation or origin; second, her mission; third, her abandonment; and fourth, her condemnation. We find practically the same arrangement in Péguy's work: Domremy, her battles, Rouen. Another influence may have been Anatole France's Jeanne d'Arc of 1908. 5 Be that as it may, Péguy's own was an excellent literary production.

amply attested by the fact that in 1911 the French Academy conferred the Estrade-Delcros award of 5,000 francs on Péguy, besides publishing a Pages choisies edition of his works to date, containing as a frontispiece a portrait by Pierre Laurens.6

Yet it would seem that the most powerful source sprang from folklore. For we find the 'Chanson de Geste,' in his Tapisserie de Sainte-Geneviève and de Jeanne d'Arc. The apotheosis of the desert in Saintes Innocents was first found in Terres de Soleil et Sommeil of Ernest Psichari, his great friend.7

However, as a man's style is himself, so we shall see how Péguy gathered up all these crumbs from so many varied sources and produced poetic works which show forth his character. As Truc says: "Le style de M. Péguy est lui-même. Il représente la marche et la démarche de sa pensée."8 Péguy himself maintained that he need not sign his name to either his prose or his poetry because his very style betrayed him. Raissa Maritain compares his style, with its uninterrupted flow and counter currents, to a river with its eddies, to a river's abundance, persistence in following its course, and to its perpetual insistence. She also compares it to a tapestry which has even the tiniest spaces covered with adornment of wool or silk and in this closely woven whole it is the colors which mark the differences. This is clearly seen in La Tapisserie d'Eve, composed of quatrain after quatrain each like a

8 Raissa Maritain, We Have Been Friends Together. Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1942, 55-6, passim.
stitch in the tapestry and covering four hundred pages. 8

Of Péguy's art Madame Duclaux says: "Péguy is more really poetic in his prose." 9 She then cites three instances to prove her point: the description of rural life on the banks of the Loire, in Victor-Marie Comte Hugo, the death of Bernard Lazaire in Notre Jeuness, but her third example is Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, which in Les Oeuvres Complètes, is classified as poetry. 10 She says of this last that in the prayers and elevations of Jeannette as well as in her conversations with Hauviette we see the true genius of Péguy. These conversations are like those of Antigone and Ismene. The two young women are like Martha and Mary, the personification of Charity and Piety. 11

That incomparable stylist André Gide compares Péguy's style to that of the very ancient litanies, to the monotonous songs of the Moor, to Arab chants, to the desert where every grain of sand resembles the next one but each is different, to the Arab flute which pipes the same phrase, i.e. almost the same one during the whole concert. 12 Again Péguy's style is compared to the literary methods of the psalmists, of liturgy composers, of writers of Buddhist legends, of Joannes Scotus Erigena preaching at the court of Charles

8 Raissa Maritain, We Have Been Friends Together. Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1942, 55-6, passim.


11 Duclaux, op. cit., 147.

the Bald. Porché compares the poetry of Francis Jammes to a May altar of the Blessed Virgin covered with roses, that of Paul Claudel to all the pomp and ceremony of High Mass celebrated in Saint Peter's, and that of Charles Péguy to the flowing monotonous cadence of plain chant.

Turquet-Milnes writes that "many share Péguy's ideas but detest his style," yet adds those who love the virile language of Milton will also delight in Péguy. He wanted to make his style Bergsonian, to render it so flowing as to necessitate the quoting of pages should one desire to cite even a short sentence. The Tharauds in speaking of the Dreyfus Affair pay an incidental tribute to the poetry of Péguy when they write:

C'est en lui qu'elle est montée à ces hauteurs qui sont celles de la grande poésie, celle qui intéresse à la fois l'individu et la cité, et qui est proprement la poésie de la tragédie grecque et de la tragédie corneillienne.

This would be in accordance with the principles laid down by Aristotle in his Poetics for the writing of true tragedy. More praise for Péguy's style is given by Stephens who quotes Halévy's belief that the works of Péguy will live not only because of the elevation and beauty of thought and abundance of poetic imagery, but on account of his style. However, the difficulty of

14 Porche, op. cit., 149.
16 Tharaud, op. cit., II, 156.
17 Winifred Stephens, "Charles Péguy," The Living Age, XV, 1919, 89.
separating prose from poetry is greater in no other writer. The rhythmical prose has often as much 'lyrisme' as the 'vers libre' in which the 'mystères' are written. Murray voices the same opinion when he asserts that there is no firm dividing line between literary forms in Péguy's works. It is said of him:

Il s'était fait une manière dont la répétition était la base. Il répétait inlassablement les idées, les mots avançant insensiblement chaque fois, comme les flots sur le rivage... De cette réitération monotone, souvent obsédante, il a tiré parfois des effets puissants.19

Secrétain feels that Péguy's major trait is digression, which deforms his work because he does not know how to choose.

Il voulait tout écrire, il tenait à tout, en paysan avare, qui aime mieux voir se gâter sa récolte que distraire un seul fruit. Il lui fallait donc ouvrir de multiples parenthèses, greffer les œuvres et les idées les unes sur les autres. La plupart de ses livres ne sont que les digressions assemblées, encore qu'il ne perde jamais de vue, dans son méandrin vagabondage, le sujet central.20

Words were his secret vice. He was a philologist, "au sens amoureux." He had a love for "la famille de mots, de l'association par racine, par étymologie, par sonorité." He exhausted the grammatical forms, he marshalled lines of prefixes, horrid groups of privatives which changed the sense from affirmative to negative: for example, the 'invincibles,' the

19 Gustave Lanson, Paul Tuffrau, Manuel de la Littérature Française, Boston, Heath, 1935, 718.
20 Secrétain, op. cit., 280.
21 Ibid., 283-6, passim.
impolitiques', the 'inclairvoyants,' the 'immetaphysiques.' Yet this was more from a fear of not making his meaning clear than from a mere indiscriminateness. He seemed to believe that the flow of thought should be unrestrained and unspoiled by exterior discipline.

However, Péguy in the unequal but powerful vers of his 1897 Jeanne d'Arc gave promise of the future 'vers libres' of the 'mystères', the rhythmic prose of Porché and the finished alexandrines of Eve. Secrétain concludes with an analysis of La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc:

Le premier grain de ce chapelet est un sonnet régulier: 'Comme elle avait gardé les moutons à Nanterre ....' puis vient un second sonnet régulier, mais sur des rimes féminines puis un troisième auquel a poussé, en appendice, un quinzième vers; puis un quatrième, avec un tercet supplémentaire. Le huitième ne compte pas moins de trois cent vingt tercets et la dernière pièce s'allonge en une interminable série de quatrains, avec deux tercets finals.

He feels that this work is not concluded, and Eve he calls a forest of quatrains; nevertheless he appraises the beauty of each.

Johannet calls Péguy "one of our most powerful writers." Péguy's style has profound depths and high summits, large sections given over to pictures, ideas, and sound too weak to express the whole yet when they have vanished only the essential remains. Here and there things stand out like a picture

22 Ibid., 285.
23 Ibid., 291.
24 Ibid., 293.
seen through a microscope, but when read aloud the fog clears and beauty appears and carries one off.26 La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc. Johannet considers Péguy's most representative poem because not only is Péguy manifest therein but likewise, Hugo, Corneille, de Vigny, Baudelaire, Ronsard, du Bellais, and Verlaine.27 The Hugo who wrote most beautifully when aroused to anger or touched by the innocence of a child, the Hugo who expressed in Les Chatiments the belligerent patriotism of his great heart, the Cid of a Corneille who seeks 'la gloire' in regular alexandrines, the symbols of a De Vigny, which are so well chosen, striking in their simplicity and strength, the rhythm of a Baudelaire, the association of nature with man's feeling of a Ronsard, who when he felt himself inspired obeyed his impulse, not knowing how to choose or to delete, Du Bellay's dialogues between shepherds, Verlaine's mystique religiosity, as well as his principle that poetry is only subtle music, with capricious rhythm, without composition or eloquence—all these are present this exquisitely written poem. Johannet goes on to say that although in his prose Péguy is truly poetic yet sometimes in his poetry one finds an abominable prosaism, for example when Péguy writes, "Comme elle avait gardé les moutons à Nanterre et qu'on était content de son exactitude."31 Péguy goes on and on in this way as though riding on a train when suddenly a delightful picture appears:

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 101-102, passim.
28 Ibid.
Les saints ont sur la tête un léger cerceau
Pour bien voir que c' est eux, une sorte d' arceau
Ouvre le Paradis; Jésus dans son berceau.
Regarde Saint Joseph et par espièglerie
Veut lui tirer la barbe et le vieux se récrie
Et fait semblant de mordre afin que l' enfant rie. 29

Continuing the ride, gradually one grows to like the trip. Another
picture then presents itself which has all the appearances of being autobiographical and is suggestive of the woodcutter in Le Porche du Mystère de la

Deuxième Vertu:

Les armes de Jésus, c'est les enfants bien sages
Assis au coin du feu, c'est les belles images
Qu'on voit sur les vitraux et c'est les trois rois mages;

Les armes de Satan c'est les magiciens
Et la magicerie de les faux entretiens
Et les libres discours au conseil des anciens;

Les armes de Jésus c'est la pauvre famille,
Les frères et la sœur, les garçons et la fille,
Le fuseau lourd de laine et la savante aiguille. 30

In contrast with the last picture of a poor but not unhappy family is that of

Eve in her unhappiness:

Vous n' avez plus connu que cette vilenie,
O pâle aieule assise entre des pâle fleurs.
Vous n' avez plus connu que la longue abiance,
Aïeule déplorable aux yeux pâlis de pleurs. 31

It reminds one of Ophelia as portrayed by Redgrave seated on the river bank, pale and distraught, her arms filled with flowers.

Of the "Présentation de la Beauce à Notre Dame" Johannot writes that

30 Ibid., 100.
31 Eve, 40.
that although it has little construction and is not polished, nevertheless it is uplifting and robust. He praises Peguy thus: "C'est une âme ancienne qui parle d'une voix unique."32 This same thought is seconded by the Tharauds. Peguy believed that when he or anyone so born spoke as a peasant, all France spoke through him, i.e., "quand une bonne femme disait un mot, c'était sa race même, son être, son peuple qui parlait."33 Johannet says in reference to Eve that in 1912 Peguy, the poet, reappeared, "alors il se vit de toute sa force. Une fringale d'alexandrins l'a saisi, il se rue dans le poème classique, dans le tercet, dans le sonnet."34

Lasserre, differing from Johannet, considers La Tapisserie de Notre Dame as Peguy's greatest poetic work quoting as an example "La Présentation de la Beauce." Aside from the faults found in Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc and in Eve, if we study Peguy in

...des entreprises plus limitée et où il s'inspire d'expériences directes et des visions proches, alors, il faut le déclarer bien haut, nous trouvons chez lui un grand poète que nul, en somme, ne me paraît avoir surpasse, un poète généreux, puissant, scandé, d'un souffle robuste et qui donne d'autant plus d'ampleur et de hauteur à sa matière qu'il l'a trouvée à portée de sa main et de ses yeux. Le plus bel exemple en est "La Présentation de la Beauce à Notre Dame de Chartres."35

Truly this is high praise from one well qualified to speak on this subject and in a book dealing with two other excellent poets, namely Paul Claudel and

32 Johannet, Itinéraires d'Intellectuels, 108.
33 Tharaud, op. cit., I, 20.
34 Johannet, op. cit., 100.
Francis Jammes.

Péguy is not a musician, André Sauret tells us, but his poetry has a natural song-like quality similar to the rush of a river under a bridge or the whisper of the wind in the wheat fields. Péguy thinks by digressions and the only unity in his works is himself. A sonnet for him was used only to begin another sonnet and in the second the third began, linked together not only by ideas but by words. Péguy told Sauret once that he had a repertoire of rimes and that he put in one poem all the rimes of two or three of the consonants most frequent in French, without skipping one. It is easy to believe this after reading in [Eve] twenty-six pages with the rime ending in the infinitive, thus: "Il allait commencer...encaisser...essuyer...supporter...défier..." In self-justification Péguy added that the Chansons de Geste and the 'laisse' had only one rime.

Péguy's poetic technique takes one back to the land of the Chanson de Geste and the "mystères en vingt journées" by means of his abundance, diffusion, "méconnaissance du plastique, énumérations forcées," absolute lack of taste, and contempt for the critical sense. Enumeration is Péguy's favorite process. It is fundamental with him and almost unique in its varieties. One reason for his devotion to this device is his scrupulous

37 Ibid., 39-48, passim.
38 Charles Péguy, Eve, 226-52, passim.
40 Johannot, op cit., 98.
41 Ibid., 87.
desire to make his meaning perfectly clear, i.e., his love of truth. Another is his love of marching for his repetitions give the impression of the rhythm of a march. A third possible motive for his frequent use of repetition is that it can have a cumulative effect in polemics and in this Péguy was frequently engaged. Apropos of these repetitions Seippel says:

Il faut reconnaître d'ailleurs que, par ces répétitions, qui ne sont pas identiques, mais chaque fois un peu modifiées et graduées, Péguy atteint une intensité d'expression extraordinaire. Il fait songer à un charpentier tapant à coups redoublés sur des clous pour les enfoncer dans le bois dur. Il n'y a pas à dire, cela tient, c'est 'de la bonne ouvrage.'

Barrès speaks of "Ses [Péguy's] phrases redoublées et fidèles aux mouvements les plus vrais de son coeur."43

Eve is an enumeration from beginning to end where there is not only repetition of words but of whole phrases: "Vous n'avez plus connu..." then follows an enumeration of all the things that Eve no longer knew, twenty-one of them in the first forty-two pages. The phrase "Que n'avez vous rangé..." is repeated nine times on one page as well as both before and after that.44 The same is true of "Et c'est au vieux..."45 Within three pages "Vous qui savez ranger..." is found seventeen times.46 The reiteration of ideas is likewise common as for example that of "ranger" on about every other page

42 Seippel, op. cit., 34.
44 Charles Péguy, Eve, 45.
45 Ibid., 50.
46 Ibid., 58-60, passim.
from sixty-four to ninety-eight. A similar idea in slightly different guise is that of "...Seule vous le savez...." and "Les autres n'ont connu que..."\textsuperscript{47}

Péguy loved interior rime as well as final rime. In \textit{Le Mystère des Saints Innocents} are examples of this. After telling how Joseph was sold into Egypt by his brothers Péguy makes a comparison between the Old Testament and the New Testament which together form a mystic vault. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Et la clef de cette mystique vouète
La clef elle-même
Charnelle, Spirituelle,
Temporelle, éternelle,
C'est Jésus
Homme
Dieu.
\end{quote}

Then Péguy takes up the theme of Children, their innocence and superiority, thus:

\begin{quote}
Le monde est toujours à l'envers, dit Dieu,
Et dans le sens contraire,
Heureux celui que resterait comme un enfant
Et comme un enfant garderait
Cette innocence première.
\end{quote}

Besides being an example of interior rime this next passage pictures a lovely allegory or continued metaphor:

\begin{quote}
Ou encore l'ancien testament est le lac
profond qui reflète la haute forêt.
Et la forêt est toute dans le lac mais elle n'y est pas.
Et le lac sombre et le lac profond est enfonce
\underline{dans la terre.}
Et dans le lac le ciel est au fond.
Mais vers le haut la haute forêt,
Partant du bord du lac, la haute forêt réelle
\underline{Hausse une tête réelle,}
Fait monter une sève réelle,
Vers le seul profond ciel réel.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, 125-135, passim.

\textsuperscript{48} Charles Péguy, \textit{Le Mystère des Saints Innocents}, 173-75.
The quiet whispering 's' and 'l' sounds in the last two lines give an atmosphere of silence to this pastoral scene. Another instance of interior rime is found after Péguy has listed all the places whence pilgrims come to Chartres, Paris, Beauvais, Cambrai, and then unifying all in one word 'la France' he writes:

Mais c'est toujours la France, ou petite ou plus grandes,
Le pays des beaux blés et des encadrements,
Le pays de la grappe et des ruissements,
Le pays de la genêt, de bruyère, de lande.49

It would ineed be a task to collect all the metaphors used by Charles Péguy in his poetry, the following are but samples to whet the literary appetite. Addressing Eve he writes:

Vous avez pu compter, vigilante bergère,
Combien de mes agneaux sont sous la dent des loups.
Vous avez pu noter, aieule passagère,
Combien de mes martyrs sont dans les mains des fous....

Vous regardez monter l'océan d'avarice,
Tout un monde noyé dans la honte d'argent.
Et le débordement de plus hideux caprice.
Et l'astuce et la ruse et l'immonde entregent.

...Vous pleurez longuement sur ce nouveau scandale:
L'argent devenu maître à la place de Dieu.50

Each time that Péguy wants to repeat either of these phrases "Les armes de Jésus," or "Les armes de Satan," which theme incidentally is exploited three-hundred and four out of three-hundred and twenty strophes, he makes use of a new metaphor and frequently a new contrast, thus:

49 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Notre Dame, 53.
50 Charles Péguy, Eve, 61-72, passim.
Les armes de Jésus c'est les sept sacrements
Les armes de Satan ce sont les sept péchés....
Les armes de Jésus ce sont deux mains jointes...
Les armes de Satan c'est les deux poings liés....

The balance of thought in the above is most satisfying.

Péguy also made use of similies, for instance in "La Présentation de la Beauce a Notre Dame" he writes:

Nous sommes nés au bord de votre Beauce plate
Et nous avons connu dès nos premiers regrets
Ce que peut receler de désespoirs secrets
Un soleil qui descend dans un ciel écarlate

Et qui se couche au ras d'un sol inévitable
Dur comme une justice, égal une barre,
Juste comme une loi, fermé comme une mare,
Ouvert comme un beau socle et plan comme une table.

In La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc, an idyll of early French life, Péguy again makes use of the simile showing us the shepherdess watching over her flock at Nanterre. Then in contrast he pictures Sainte Geneviève as guardian of the sculptured world which has since arisen in the same locality. The second verse recalls the statue of her by Landowski erected since the death of Péguy on the new bridge of Tournelles. The last two verses give Péguy's idea of Paris at the end of the world, thus:

Comme elle avait gardé les moutons à Nanterre,
On la mit à garder un bien autre troupeau,
La plus énorme horde où le loup et l'agneau
Aient jamais confondu leur commune misère.

Et comme elle veillait tous les soirs solitaire
Dans la cour de la ferme ou sur le bord de l'eau,
Du pied du même saule et du même bouleau
Elle veille aujourd'hui sur ce monstre de pierre.

51 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc, 74-80, passim.
52 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Notre Dame, 50.
Et quand le soir viendra qui fermera le jour,
C'est elle la caduque et l'antique bergère,
Qui ramassant Paris et tout son alentour

Conduira d'un pas ferme et d'une main légère
Pour la dernière fois dans la dernière cour
Le troupeau le plus vaste à la droite du père.53

A rather less somber simile is that of "...petite espérance qui sauterait à la corde dans les processions, elle est dans la maison des vertus comme était Benjamin dans la maison de Jacob."54 A beautifully implied simile is that found in Eve where Péguy tells her:

Vous n'avez plus connu que le temps dans le lieu
Vous n'avez plus connu que la jeunesse du monde,
Et cette paix du coeur plus lourde et plus profonde
Que l'énorme océan sous le regard de Dieu.55

Péguy's realism is seen in these similes of the last day which he describes as:

D'un monde qui s'abat comme un mur craquelé
D'un monde qui s'abat comme un échafaudage.
Quand le globe sera comme un baraquement.
Quand vos enfants perdus, aieule périssable,
S'avanceront ainsi sur la basse terrasse....
Quand ils iront en bande et les curés en tête...
Quand ils contempleront le dernier tribunal,
Quand ils chemineront tout le long du canal,
Comme ils allaient en bande aux jours de grande fête,
Quand ils s'avanceront dans l'éternelle nuit,
Quand ils auront passé devant le four banal,
Et le moulin à vent et le pré communal,
Comme ils allaient en bande aux messes de minuit,...56

Frequent instances of contrast are found in Eve when for example Péguy writes:

53 Charles Péguy, Le Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc, 23.
54 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 113-14.
55 Charles Péguy, Eve, 30.
56 Ibid., 94.
Vous regardez monter cette double impuissance,
L'impuissance d'aimer et celle de haïr,
Vous regardez monter cette double licence,
La licence d'aimer et celle de trahir.57

This also typifies Péguy's use of interior rime and the repetition of a whole phrase as well as word repetition. The next two selections give a rather fine point of contrast, namely the distinction between having been all one's life unhappy and that of having invented misfortune:

Les autres n'on connu que d'être malheureux
Mais vous avez connu d'innover la malheur
Les autres n'ont connu que d'être douloureux
Mais vous avez connu d'innover la douleur....

Les autres ont connu d'être dans ce royaume.
Mais vous avez connu de descendre en ce lieu.
Les autres n'ont connu que la paille et le chaume.
Et vous avez connu de descendre de Dieu.58

Eve's descendants certainly present a vivid contrast when Péguy addresses her as:

Aïeule du lépreux et du grand sénéchal...
Aïeule de l'esclave et du législateur...
Aïeule du despote et du conspirateur.59

The characters in Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc present a contrast. Jeannette's independence is in striking opposition to Madame Gervaise's dependence and docility. Contrast is also found in the following:

Les armes de Satan c'est l'horreur de la guerre
Les peuples affolements, Jésus sur le Calvaire,
Le sang, le cri de mort, le meutre volontaire.

57 Ibid., 74.
58 Ibid., 124-25, passim.
59 Ibid., 95.
Les armes de Jésus c'est l'honneur de la guerre,
Les peuples rétablis, Jésus sur la Calvaire,
Le sang, le sacrifice et la mort volontaire....

Les armes de Jésus c'est la poignante épine,
C'est la fleur de son sang sur la blanche aubépine.
Et les fleurs de ses pleurs sur la rouge églantine.

In the last line of this tercet there is another instance of interior rime. Also worthy of note is the églantine which doubtless had a special significance for Péguy the socialist. An interesting example of this is found in his prose Le Triomphe de la République where he mentions the symbolic églantine, the display of which he felt was a cover for what he considered true socialism in the hearts of the socialistic leaders. He writes:
"L'églantine est plus rouge, toute rouge, plus symbolique, mais elle est moins églantine, moins fleur. C'est une fleur sans pollen." In the same connection he made an analogical use of it when he refers to it thus: "Les partisans du progrès préfèrent la nouvelle églantine; les horticulteurs-on nomme ainsi les hommes qui cultivent leur jardin, aimeraient mieux la petite fleur."61

In the following tercet "pain" and "vin" exemplify interior rime. The Sorbonne is Péguy's target in the next two, where he makes use of interior rime in alternate lines. Perhaps we can find an early influence for this in his love for Latin poetry of which a classic example is the Dies Irae. He writes:

60 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc, 70, 110, passim.
Les armes de Jésus c'est la paille et l'étable
Et le pain et le vin et la nappe et la table,
Et le plus malheureux, voilà son connétable;

Les armes de Satan c'est la supercherie,
Un aplomb infernal, une aigre drolerie
Le savoir des savants et la cafarderie....

Les armes de Satan c'est la Jobarderie,
C'est le scientifisme et c'est l'artisterie,
C'est le laboratoire et la flagornerie,... 62

Because of Péguy's known love for 'mystique' one would naturally look(26,194),(984,832)
for paradoxes in his writings. For do not all mystics speak in paradoxes?

One need not look far:

Car le surnaturel est lui-même charnel
Et l'arbre de la grâce est raciné profond
Et plonge dans le sol et cherche jusqu'au fond
Et l'arbre de la race est lui-même éternel. 63

Then again with added contrast he writes:

On ne nourrissait pas pour les sept vaches maigres
Vers le Nil donateur les belles vaches grasses.
On ne ménageait pas les sources et les graces.
Toutes coulaient toujours et demeuraient intégrès. 64

In Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu we find this paradox:
"...miracle des miracles l'impérissable n'est sauvé de périr que par le
périssable. Et l'éternel n'est maintenu, n'est nourri éternel que par le
temporel." 65 Péguy's paradox par excellence is "Dieu jeune ensemble
qu'éternel...." 66 -- both for thought and expression. Evidently he liked it

62 Ibid., 70-71, passim.
63 Charles Péguy, Eve, 182.
64 Ibid., 116.
65 Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 114.
66 Charles Péguy, Eve, 17-27, passim.
too because he repeats it with variations of expression for eight pages. Interesting in this connection is the fact that the word for God in the language of the Incas is "Vinay Huayna" i.e., "the eternally young."67

The opening pages of Porche present an exquisite use of personification which is hinted at again in La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc. In the former Péguy writes,

Car mes trois vertus, dit Dieu.
Les trois vertus mes créatures.
Mes filles mes enfants.
Sont elles-même comme mes autres créatures.
De la race des hommes.
La Foi est une Épouse fidèle.
La Charité est une Mère.
Une mère ardente, pleine de coeur.
Ou une soeur aînée qui est comme une mère.
Qui est venue au monde le jour de Noël de l'année dernière.
Qui joue encore avec le bonhomme Janvier.68

In two different works Péguy thus personifies the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. He says:

Les armes de Jésus c'est la docilité,
C'est la foi, l'espérance et c'est la charité,
C'est la femme et l'enfant et la fidélité.69

Again he personifies hope as "Une petite soeur des pauvres qui n'a pas peur de manier un malade et un pauvre."70 Another striking picture is achieved by the use of personification in Eve where Péguy speaks of"...la procession des des maux ineffaçables."71

68 Charles Péguy, Le Porche de Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 22.
70 Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 168.
71 Charles Péguy, Eve, 31.
While the Infant Jesus sleeps Péguy thus personifies the ox and the ass: 

Et ces mufles savants et ces intelligences....
Et ces deux grands docteurs et ces deux bonnets d'ânes....
Ainsi ces deux experts et ces fins connaisseurs....
Et ces deux paysans et ces deux potentats
Et ces deux présidents et ces hommes d'Etats
Et ces laborieux et ces deux gros fidèles....
Gardaien ces fils de Dieu que nous avons vendu.72

The slumbering Baby is cradled by night or in the words of the poet, "Toi [night] qui couchais l'enfant Jésus tous les soirs...."73 The personification of night is indeed lovely. Péguy addresses her thus:

O nuit, mère aux yeux noirs....
O nuit, ô ma fille la Nuit, la plus religieuse
de mes filles
La plus pieuse.
De mes filles, de mes créatures la plus dans mes
mains, la plus abandonnée.
Tu me glorifies dans la Sommeil encouree plus que
ton Frère le Jour ne me glorifie dans le Travail....
Nuit ô ma fille la Nuit ô ma fille silencieuse....
O ma fille étincelante et sombre....

O douce, ô grande, ô sainte, ô belle nuit, peut-être
la plus sante de mes filles, nuit à la grande robe,
à la robe étoilée.74

A rather curious use of personification is that made in Le Mystère des
Saints Innocents, thus,

Ce Notre Père, dit Dieu, est le père des prières.
C'est comme celui qui marche en tête.
c'est un homme robuste, et la prière du Je vous
salue, Marie, est comme une humble femme.
Qui vont l'un derrière l'autre et qui fendent
la foule qui est venue pour la procession.

72 Ibid., 202-205, passim.
74 Ibid., 225-232, passim. Italics in the original.
L'homme va devant et fend le flot de la foule,
La foule de ma colère,
Et la femme suit derrière dans le sillage.
Et L'homme a pris sur ses épaules à califourchon
Cette curieuse enfant Espérance.
Et le Notre Père est le roi et le Je vous salue,
Marie, est la reine et l'espérance est la dauphine.
Et c'est un jeu de cartes et le Notre Père est le roi
et le Je vous salue, Marie, est la reine et tous
les autres sont
Les fidèles valets.75

This interesting procession wends its way through Péguy's poetry.

It is noteworthy that Péguy uses the same expressive and suggestive
medium of style in his poetry which he employed so successfully in his prose,
namely allegory. Among his allegories written in prose are Entre Deux Trains,
De la Grippe, Lettre du Provincial, and Le Triomphe de la République. In La
Tapisserie de Notre Dame there are several allegories. Considering Péguy's
tendency to rumination "Paris vaisseau de charge" is rather concise. The
merchant man here pictured is Paris, a double merchant ship on both banks of
the Seine, a vessel of purple and gold, of myrrh and cinnamon. The bill of
lading includes wheat, rye, justice of soul, humility, and "de simple ver-
vaine."76 For thousands of years Péguy's ancestors, 'our fathers', have
filled you (Paris) with sorrow. Then we find the word "panse" which Victor
Hugo used to mean a lugger boat. Perhaps this is a case of influence. At
any rate Péguy's admiration for Hugo is unquestionable. In the "Présentation
de la Beauce" the use of "sanglot" might also be a Hugoism signifying the
moaning of the sea. Péguy continues: "We bring to you [Paris] a regret so
true, so ardent, and so honorable that the captain [God] will take it for a

75 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 53-54.
76 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Notre Dame, 29.
sack of prayer and will hoist it up to the oriflamme," he says and then apostrophizes: "O vessel, appearing in the time of Septimus Severus, merchant-man at Our Lady's feet...." The next sonnet in which Paris is portrayed as a bireme is also allegorical. The Parisians are the galley slaves sleeping at the feet of Our Lady. In "Paris Vaisseau de Guerre" the man of war is described, and concludes like the preceding allegories, but with this variation: the gaping cannons are green monsters crouching at Our Lady's feet.77

Every poem that Péguys has written is nothing more than a medium to express in allegorical form his deeply ingrained love of religion and reality. In Eve he has a striking example of allegory when he discourses upon the seven capital sins as, "les sept maigres vertus...dans les plaines d'Egypte."

Péguy seems to find a childlike pleasure in the repetition of prefixes as exemplified in:

Les armes de Jésus c'est sa croix équarrie,
Voilà son armement, voilà son armoire
Voilà son armature et son armorerie....79

In another instance he pours forth a stream of sputtering explosives indicative of contempt:

Il fallut qu'elle vît par un sot bavardage
Flétrir le dogme auguste et que nous enseignons,

77 Ibid., 29-48, passim.
78 Charles Péguy, Eve, 117.
79 Charles Péguy, La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc, 66.
Again it is the flow of water in the river, which is sounded forth, in the same poem by means of the liquid 'l' sounds and the interior rime:

Rincant ses beaux drapeaux à l'eau de la rivière
Les lavant au lavoir comme une lavandière,
Les battant au battoir comme une mercenaire...\(^81\)

The 'c' and 'v' sounds suggest piquant irony laughing up its sleeve in the following:

Les armes de Satan c'est la fausse culture,
Qui sème le chiendent et c'est la couverture
Volée au vieux cheval et c'est toute ouverture.\(^82\)

Loud and clear in stentorian tones are the sounds of Victor Hugo in *La Legende du Siècle* reverberating in Charles Péguy's *Eve*:

O mère ensevelie hors du premier jardin,
Vous n'avez plus connu ce climat de la grâce,
Et la vasque et la source et la haute terrasse,
Et le premier soleil sur le premier matin.

Et les bondissements de la biche et du daim
Nouvant et dénouant leur course fraternelle.
Et courant et sautant et s'arrêtant soudain
Pour mieux commémorer leur vigueur éternelle.\(^83\)

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80 Ibid., 119.
81 Ibid., 66.
82 Ibid., 97.
likewise found in this great admirer of the Jewish race. His poems often call to mind the psalm rhythm. An example of this is:

Comme j'ai crée l'homme à mon image et à la ressemblance
Ainsi j'ai crée la liberté de l'homme à l'image et à la ressemblance....

Je suis honnête homme, dit Dieu, et j'agis Toujours droittement.
Je suis l'honneur même, et la droiture, et l'honnêteté.84

The latter half of Le Porche, Souday calls a final nocturn with a full and captivating lyricism. Péguy here lifts himself into the realms of great poetry, especially in the passage on sleep, a testimony of confidence in God, and that on night which cradles creation.85 It might seem barbarous to hew out a few thoughts when the whole is so delightful, nevertheless it may give some idea of this refreshing passage:

Je n'aime pas celui qui ne dort pas, dit Dieu.
Le sommeil est l'ami de l'homme
Le sommeil est l'ami de Dieu
Le sommeil est peut-être ma plus belle création

...Or on me dit qu'il y a des hommes
Qui travaillent bien et qui dorment mal.
Qui ne dorment pas. Quel manque de confiance en moi
C'est presque plus grave que s'ils travaillaient mal mais dormaient bien.
Que s'ils ne travaillaient pas mais dormaient, car la paresse
N'est pas un plus grand péché que l'inquiétude....

84 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 71, 35.

85 Souday, op. cit., 220.
...Ils gouvernent très bien leurs affaires pendant le jour.
Mais ils ne veulent pas m'en confier le gouvernement pendant la nuit.
Comme si je n'étais pas capable d'en assurer le gouvernement pendant une nuit.

...J'en administre bien d'autres, pauvres gens, je gouverne la création, c'est peut-être plus difficile.

...La sagesse humaine dit: Malheureux qui remet à demain. Et moi je dis Heureux, heureux qui remet à demain.
Heureux qui remet. C'est à dire heureux qui espère. Et qui dort.86

Porché has this to say of Péguy's language, that no matter whether he wrote in prose, in free verse, or in 'vers scandés' his language remained of the same quality. His language varied not at all. It never entered his head that a word which he used in prose and which there had meaning and beauty could be too prosaic for use in poetry. There the most simple words, those which lie the least, are transported by an independent genius into the field of the sublime. Neither has the strong construction of his sentences yielded.

Poetic syntax is usually less articulate than the prose: it likes the simple juxtaposition of isolated or coordinated propositions. Péguy's verse on the contrary, as well as his prose, abounds in subordinate and relative clauses which are used in the same way in both moods. There is something analogous between this poetic syntax bordering on prose and the syntax of d'Aubigné bordering on Latin.87

How Péguy wrote 'vers libre' is next explained. Péguy first took each

86 Charles Péguy, La Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 213-218, passim.
thought unit isolating it on a separate line, thus cutting down to its bare necessities the thought content. Thus his free verse was actually nothing more than prose analyzed. This process of separating inclined Pégyuy towards the alexandrine as a goal, according to Porché. In order to reach this goal there remained merely for Pégyuy to equalize his clauses and to unite them by means of a rime scheme, which is what he did.

Pégyuy, however, was not content with having subjected his expression to the most rigid laws of classic prosody; he wished to subject his inspiration to the most fixed, strict, and brief form, that of the sonnet. 88 As an example of this last, Porché gives La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc.

Pégyuy's own expression of his method and literary instinct is the following: the spontaneous is the best. One critic describes his method as: the direct expression of his intimate being, the exact translation of his elan; 90 while another claims that it is: the perfect rendering of the truest movements of his heart. 91 All this is very succinctly epitomized by Porché's remark that Pégyuy gives us simply the French rendering of faith and poetry; it is plain chant; it is ornate only in its bare simplicity. 92

88 Ibid., 146.
90 Romain Rolland's opinion as stated by Seippek, op. cit., 35.
92 François Porché, op. cit., 149.
In general we feel that Péguy learned his sensitivity to beauty, as well as his regard for reality from his early life with his mother and grandmother. These daughters of the soil vibrated with the love and appreciation of nature. In the faubourg Bourgogne they were far enough away from actual contact with it so that consciously or unconsciously they gave it an aureole of idealization. It became so a part of him that it spontaneously expresses itself. His style betrays this when he makes Jeanne d'Arc, Ste. Geneviève, Eve, Notre Dame, and even God speak the language of the Orléanais. This was in strict accord with his own literary ideals and method expressed in his letter to Autmin Lavergne, author of Jean Coste: "Je n'ai pas ratifié la plupart de vos corrections. Méfiez-vous de votre second mouvement qui est le mouvement littéraire. Le premier mouvement, le populaire, est le bon....\footnote{Mlle. Harlor, "Charles Péguy," \textit{Revue de Paris}, CXXVII (1915), 653.}

In conclusion we might say that Péguy's work thinly cloaks the passion which gave it being. This pure passion for which he spent himself is France, is humanity. Since, however, the achievement of great literature is to plumb human suffering, Baudelaire's and Rimbaud's anguish, Flaubert's nihilism, and Renan's scepticism were needed to warm Péguy's soul and bring hope into being--that hope of which he was even then speaking, that hope which was going to call forth from him the greatest sacrifice.
CHAPTER V

THE PATRIOT

In our search for that beauty and greatness which the Tharauds define as the character of Charles Péguy, we find no section of his work richer in fruit than La France.¹ So true is this that in 1939 his son Pierre edited a booklet thus entitled, gathering therein a wealth of eloquent patriotism. It opens with a poem entitled, "Adieux à la Meuse," taken from his first Jeanne d'Arc, in which he has Joan bid farewell to the inexhaustible and unalterable river which was sweet to her childhood and which she so loves.² The Loire is next greeted in a torrent of prose as "Le fleuve aux eaux jaunes et crèmes, crèmes d'écume, aux vagues écumantes, ballonantes et déferlantes aux flots foulants et refoulants, aux bouillons, coulant, croulant, et s'écrasant."³ This is indeed redolent of the swinging poetry of Baudelaire and Verlaine. Péguy's tumultuous description of "la Beauce" is worthy of a patriotic pastoral poem, and proves his love for this granary of his beloved France. "The everlasting restlessness of wheat"⁴ can surely be heard in the following "Plaine, océan de blé, blés mouvants, vagues vivantes, vagues, végétales,

¹ Charles Péguy, La France, Gallimard, Paris, 1939.
² Ibid., 7-8.
³ Ibid., 9.
ondulations infinies. 5

We seem to be falling into the same flow of diffusion and digression that Péguy is accused of by Secrétain. 6 May we not allege, however, in our defense, as well as in that of Péguy, that it is the great defenders and saints of France who stand out and make, if not an historically correct, at least a patriotic 'épopée' of great French men and women?

It is only when we realize that Péguy's early years in the lycée had not given him any of the vital substance of old France but only the superficial externals of the France of 1789, that we can appreciate his complete awakening and enthusiastic singing of the simple beauties discovered in his first encounter with Joinville and Joan of Arc. It was in this charming shepherdess of Domremy that Péguy discovered a focal point around which to group all of the ebb and flow of French history from Hugh Capet to Louis XIV.

Péguy's first vision of Joan of Arc was clear and remained unchanged throughout his life. He saw her as a peasant girl guided by her voices without the backing of any clerics, but rather with that of the people who imposed her upon the king and nobles who in turn saw France in danger of death. It is thus that Péguy portrays her in his first Jeanne d'Arc, written by a socialist and consequently in a sense completely revolutionary. Ten years later Péguy rewrote this drama and renamed it. This time it was not a drama but a 'mystère.' This was indeed the right name for it because this girl of whom he wrote was living with a moving, touching humanity which he

5 Charles Péguy, La France, 21.
6 Roger Secrétain, Péguy Soldat de la Liberté, 279.
envisaged from the double point of view of a shepherdess and a saint. He saw not only the French but the mystic horizon. She is not only the Daughter of Lorraine who suffers for her pillaged village and her ravaged country, but she is at the same time the Christian who suffers for creation invaded by evil. Joan is faithful to grace as well as to nature which are not united in her but fused and this fusion which is the mark of her sanctity is also the mark of Péguy's spirit and one of the realities which sustains his work.⁷ We see this well brought out when he has Jeannette questioning, as Péguy himself might, how Christians can be enemies.⁸

Thus she becomes for him the incarnation of all that he loved most, the people, his country, military life. It is almost as if they were kindred souls, in a world realms above history and literature, because it was that of heroism, purity and sacrifice. Fused with this were faith, hope and charity plus the deep characteristics of his people, frankness, strong will, gallic wit, and clear direct reasoning.⁹

His love of the French people and his suffering with them enters into almost every page of Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc. In fact her soul is athirst to relieve the distress so prevalent at the time of the Hundred Years War, as was Péguy's to alleviate that of his day. Hauviette answers Jeannette as Péguy's mind tried to give him the solution, for she says:

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⁷ Daniel Halévy, Charles Péguy et les Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 34-5, passim.
⁸ Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 19.
⁹ Roger Secrétain, Péguy Soldat de la Liberté, 192.
La tristesse, la peur, la détresse. C'est une grande famille et il y en a beaucoup. On dirait que tu as consommé toute la tristesse de la terre.10

Péguy shows a vital interest in the salvation of his fellowmen in the words of his mouthpiece Jeannette:

Quatorze siècles furent-ils de chrétienté, quatorze siècles depuis le rachat de nos âmes. Et rien, jamais rien, le règne de la terre n'est rien que le règne de la perdition, le royaume de la terre n'est rien que le royaume de la perdition. Vous nous avez envoyé votre fils et les autres saints. Et rien ne coule sur la face de la terre, qu'un flot d'ingratitude et de perdition. Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, faudra-t-il que votre fils soit mort en vain.11

Thus from the lips of the future saint we hear uttered Péguy's personal struggle. This might almost seem a manifestation of his own love of struggle which was ever seeking and finding peace in the god-given gifts of beauty, truth and justice as exemplified in his continually recurring thought of God as shown forth in His creation. When he speaks of wheat it is always "blés, sacrés blés," and wine is addressed as "soeur du blé...vigne, vigne sacrée."12 Yet always, no matter how commonplace are the things of which he speaks, they always lead him to France, her glory past and present which ever dominates with fugue-like fidelity each and every poem he wrote.

No matter whether it is a 'mystère' of a 'Sainte Geneviève' or of 'des Saintes Innocents' or a 'tapisserie de Notre Dame,' it is always the 'éppppée' and the crisis martyrdom which rouses the French soul of Péguy.

10 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 24.
11 Ibid., 13
12 Ibid., 30-1.
It was a tradition of glory, religious, cultural, social and civil. This national tradition Péguy personifies in Saint Louis of whom God said:

Je sais qu'il m'aime.
Au moins je sais qu'il m'aime, celui-là,
parce que c'est un baron français.

C'est pour cela, dit Dieu, que nous aimons tant ces Français,
Et que nous les aimons entre tous uniquement,
Et qu'ils seront toujours mes fils, aînés.13

Thus we see without any doubt that Péguy believed in the divine mission of France as the eldest daughter of the Church and the Mother of Nations. He felt that his individual work in the twentieth century was to carry out the sacred labor of Jeanne d'Arc. This is all too evident in Péguy's belief that war unless just was not right. In his opinion none of the wars from her time to his own were just.

Vous nous voyez debout parmi les nations,
Nous battrons-nous toujours pour la terre charnelle
Ne déposerons-nous sur la table éternelle
Que des coeurs pleins de guerre et de séditions.

Vous nous voyez marcher parmi les nations
Nous battrons-nous toujours pour les quatre coins de terre.
Ne mettrons-nous jamais sur la table de guerre
Que des coeurs pleins de morgue et de rebellions?14

It was as if Péguy had become a part of the Unity of France15 and cries out

13 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 67-68, passim.
15 Gosse, "The Unity of France," The Living Age, CCLXXIX (1919), 522.
Ce n'étaient pas des Français.
Ce n'étaient pas des chevaliers français.
Des gens du pays lorrain....

Jamais le roi de France ne l'aurait abandonné
Jamais Charlemagne et Roland, jamais les gens
de par ici n'auraient laissé faire ça. Jamais
les ouvriers des villes, jamais les ouvriers
des bourgs n'auraient laissé faire ça. Le
maraîcher aurait pris son marteau. Les femmes,
les pauvres femmes, les glaneuses auraient
pris des serpettes. Jamais Charlemagne et
Roland, les hommes de croisade, monseigneur
Godefroy de Bouillon, jamais Saint Louis et
même le sire de Joinville ne l'auraient
abandonné. Jamais nos Français ne l'auraient
renoncé. Saint Louis, roi de France, Saint
Louis des Français. Jamais Saint Denis et
Saint Martin, Sainte Geneviève et Saint
Aignan, jamais Saint Loup, jamais Saint Ouen
ne l'auraient abandonné. Jamais nos saints
ne l'auraient renoncé. C'était des saints
qui n'avaient pas peur.

Sainte Geneviève, Saint Aignan, Saint Loup
n'ont pas eu peur d'aller au devant des
armées païennes. Ils n'ont pas eu peur
des armées païennes. Et Saint Martin était
un soldat. Ce n'était pas une petite troupe de
soldats romains et de bourracaux romains.

Et Saint Bernard, qui prêcha la deuxième
croisade. C'était aussi un deuxième saint.
Ils portèrent le corps de Jésus au devant
d'armées innombrables. Et Sainte Geneviève
était une pauvre femme, une petite fille de
Paris.

Jamais les gens de la vallée de La Meuse,
jamais des paroissiens de nos paroisses,
jamais ceux de Vaucouleurs, jamais ceux de
Domrémy, -- jamais ceux de Maxey nous ne
l'aurions abandonné.

.......

with Jeannette:
...jamais le curé même, le curé Domrémy
le vieux père Bardet, qui est pourtant
un si brave homme, un si bon homme....

Moi je suis sûr que je ne l'aurais pas
abandonné.16

This cross section of Péguy's beloved France shows us the deep insight and understanding he had of Christianity which instinctively flows from its underground source to find expression in the deep thoughts of his heart. Yet perhaps realizing that true liberty is exercised only when given authority, Péguy tried to substitute military discipline, which he loved, for obedience to the law of the Church. In fact he has Hauviette say "...Le mieux, si on pouvait, serait de tuer la guerre, comme tu dis. Mais pour tuer la guerre, il faut faire la guerre; pour tuer la guerre, il faut un chef de guerre."17

He would have liked if possible to kill war in order to get rid of it. While waiting for this eventuality he advocated as a need for his country "une mystique révolutionnaire."

Péguy himself seems to be the answer to this need which he felt for his country. For he had spent himself in writing charming pages in which he sings of Our Lady, in valiant words consecrated to the French; of loyal service to a "Seigneur français;" of a Saint Louis; of a Joinville; of marvelous gardens; of very sad gardens; of souls; of a very beautiful French garden. We have already seen how Orléans, Chartres, Paris, the Loire, the Meuse, the Seine, meant so much to him yet always it was "La Pucelle" who

16 Charles Péguy, La Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 165-91, passim.
17 Charles Péguy, La Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 40.
who was the core of everything French for him. In fact Secrétain tells us that from the publication in 1910 of *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* he envisaged all of his works with Joan of Arc as the center of at least a dozen volumes.18

This was going to be interfered with by World War I. Yet even that interruption is going to be one more proof that in Péguy the patriotic holds a very high place for he lived marching against enemy positions. He saw more clearly each day how the land of France was weighed down with 'isms' unacceptable and menacing. He died at Curcq, September 15, 1914, in the first battle of Marne. Thus the poem of his life ends perfectly. In conclusion it would seem that Péguy the patriot has been justly summarized by the Tharauds and others. They never knew a man so completely convinced that France was the first country in the world, the only country in the world, that no culture could even be compared with hers, that no other thought was so rich, no other living language was even worth being spoken. There only existed for him two literatures in the world, the classic and the French.19

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18 Secrétain, *op. cit.*, 199.

CHAPTER VI
THE PROPHET

When considering whether Charles Péguy is a prophet it seems that we should consider this term in several of its different meanings. Is he one who sees beyond present events as well as foretelling those which are to come? Is he one who speaks for another, namely God? Endeavoring to find answers to these questions let us first consider the last.

Péguy's poetry speaks for another, as that of the prophets in the ancient law had done. He cloaks his message in symbols as they did. His words seem to have caught the spirit of an Isaias, who said: "The grass is withered and the flower is fallen, because the spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it. Indeed the people is grass. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen: but the word of our Lord endureth forever."¹ This is constantly urging him to praise God through and for inanimate nature. He speaks thus:

Je ne parle pas, dit Dieu, de ces hommes
Qui ne travaillent pas et que ne dorent pas.
Ceux-là sont des pécheurs, c'est entendu.
C'est bien fait pour eux.²

Besides this charming selection which only gives a faint idea of the whole there are numerous others in Le Porche de Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu. One of these we have already quoted where he apostrophizes night. Again it is:

¹ Bible, Isaias, XL, 7-8.
² Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 214.
Jardins très douloureux des âmes françaises.

When he writes of water it is:

La source éternelle de ma grâce même.

...Son âme est toujours une eau courante et une eau vive.

...une belle eau lorraine, une âme d'une belle eau et la source même de l'espérance.

...Des eaux du baptême.

Often he reverses the process and uses the material to symbolize the spiritual, as when he writes:

Quand la jeune vertu espérance commence à pousser au cœur de l'homme,
Sous la rude écorce,
Comme un premier bourgeon d'avril.

... Ainsi le corps et l'âme sont comme deux mains jointes.

... la parole de Jésus...est restée plantée au cœur de l'impie comme un clou de tendresse.

... prière...est toujours une eau courante.

Péguy even explains himself, "Car Dieu a lui-même attaché l'immortel au mortel... Et ensemble inséparablement temporelle et charnelle." This same thing is seen in Eve where he realizes and points out some distant and transcendental life and reality fused with our normal flowing, changing life and reality. He stresses the beauty and nobility, the deep spiritual quality of this present life; the supernatural character of nature itself

3 Charles Péguy, Le Poièse du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 179.
4 Ibid., 79, 94, 162, 173, 183, 189, passim.
5 Ibid., 95-99, passim.
when seen from the vantage point of Christian idealism. He summarized this as follows:

Car le surnaturel est lui-même charnel
Et l'arbre de la grâce est raciné profond
Et plonge dans le sol et cherche jusqu'au fond
Et l'arbre de la race est lui-même éternel.

Et l'éternité même est dans le temporel
Et l'arbre de la grâce et raciné profond
Et plonge dans le sol et touche jusqu'an fond
Et le temps et lui-même un temps intemporel.6

However, this idealization is concreted by charming examples based on the Daily Bread of any Beauceron peasant. It is not only the restless grain fields but also the flowing majesty of the Loire envisaged by the peasant in him that we feel in such passages as these:

C'est cette eau, c'est la même eau qui court au ras des prés.
C'est la même eau saine qui monte aux tiges du blé pour le Pain.
C'est la même eau saine qui monte aux sarments pour le Vin.
C'est la même eau qui monte en l'un et l'autre bourgeois, et l'un et l'autre bourgeoisment,
En l'une et l'autre Loi,
C'est la même eau, recueillie, c'est la même eau, saine, assainie, qui fait le tour du monde.
Qui revient, qui reparaît, qui fait tout le tour de ma création.
C'est la même eau recueillie qui rejaillit, qui ressource.
Dans la nouvelle fontaine, dans le rejaillissement jeune.
Dans la source et le ressourcement de l'espérance.7

Herein one sees the slow moving canal boats gliding quietly through the early

6 Charles Péguy, Eve, 182.
7 Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 175.
dawn. The tawny wheat fields cut by the river moving with all the dignity of a royal progress to a chateau on the Loire. One hears the gentle whispering of the water reechoing the wind in the wheat fields as the silent mist hovers protectingly on the banks to break and scatter in the coming light of a new day.

This symbolism is also found in Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc when Jeannette thinks aloud:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pain qui n'êtes plus que les appara\'ences,} \\
\text{du pain; pain qu'êtes plus que l'espèce} \\
\text{du pain.} \\
\text{Pain qui n'êtes plus que de l'ancien pain.} \\
\text{Pain qui fût changé au corps...} \quad 8
\end{align*}
\]

Péguy's interest in the body is characteristically described in an ineffable comparison. The soul is portrayed as a large energetic hard working percheron of Lorraine which struggles to move and draw after it the inert cart which is the body. The cart cannot possibly move without tremendous effort on the part of the horse. After two long pages of explanation Péguy succinctly concludes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mais il faut qu'elle meuve et qu'elle porte,} \\
\text{Encore il faut qu'elle tire et qu'elle traine} \\
\text{Ce corps enfoncé dans la terre qui laboure} \\
\text{derrière elle la glèbe de la terre.} \\
\text{Ce corps inerte, sans elle inanîmé.} \quad 9
\end{align*}
\]

All this passion for symbolism would seem to justify calling Péguy a

8 Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 31.
9 Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 93.
prophet, for he not only spoke for another, God, but he used the very language of the ancient prophets, that of symbols. These he adapted to his readers as they to their readers. The objects closest to hand were those he used as being more readily comprehensible to those whom he wished to reach. The very names Péguy chose for his poems do they not seem to mark him out as a prophet? Like the old tapestry makers he weaves La Tapisserie de Notre Dame, La Tapisserie de Sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d'Arc. The golden thread in the completed work will show the design planned by the Master Craftsman. In the homely everyday things of nature like an Isaias or a Jeremias he embodies great realities of the spiritual world, always striving to arouse in his listeners the spiritual underlying the material universe, urging them to read the deeper meanings; he seems to have that insatiable thirst to make all men see what he had caught in vision in this world of ours. However, we must consider whether he is justly so called in so far as he strove to explain the past. In each one of this "mystères," which seem rightly named evidently he follows the lead of the medieval writers of mystery plays. There are the same apparent divergencies from strict historical and biblical truth yet the result is so living that these discrepancies do not detract from the beauty of the whole. Just as in great medieval art each masterpiece portrays its scriptural personages clothed in the fashions of the artist's day and not their own, so Péguy ignores historical sequence.

He never ceased to worship the heroic, the true, the beautiful which he sought not in the 'age of machinery and banks,' but in the past, in the France of the Revolution, in the Europe of the Renaissance, in the Church of the Middle Ages, in the Greece of antiquity,
and he ever confidently hoped for them in the future.¹⁰

His 'épopées' of the French, of Paris, and of the whole strength of "la chrétienté" evoke the magnificence of a pilgrimage, in which temporal hierarchies and successions withdraw before eternal values. This is the mystic cavalcade of the "race éternelle."¹¹


As it passes we listen to the biblical flow of poetry couched in the perfect French of Touraine which has passed through the crucible of reasoning with Péguy's heart. Not the same kind as that of a Verlaine or a Rimbaud but that which would have us listen to God the Father and not have us astonished at His words, nor His beard, nor His appearance, "bonasse au Tympan" of a Chartres. He asks us if we should not have faith in Him since He has faith in us and confided His Son to us.¹³

The various disguises with which Péguy clothes his interpretations of

¹¹ Charles Péguy, Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc, 180.
¹³ Charles Péguy, Le Porche du Mystère de la Deuxième Vertu, 130.
God and His intercourse with man, show him to possess the genius of the prophet whose mission is to restore the eternal light to a world which has lost it. When he reiterates in *La Porche de La Deuxième Vertu*, and in *Saints Innocents*: "Dieu dit," and "Dit Dieu," or uses as the opening word in *Eve*, "Jésus parle," he speaks, moreover, with the naturalness of a prophet, surprising only those who do not understand it. These are the same words by which the ancient prophets recalled Divine Truth to the people they admonished. Thus it seems that we are justified in saying that Péguy was a true prophet making himself the interpreter of his God who is "eternal and young," liberating human minds from temporal vicissitudes to place them under the action of the eternal.

In the same way but completely unbeknown to himself his *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* were going to substantiate his title of prophet by foretelling the future. In them he brought before the eyes of literary France men whose works were going to have world renown, but who at that time were struggling as he. Péguy recognized the greatness of Beethoven and Jean Christophe and published the first editions. Just as he saw the value of Romain Rolland's works so he understood the historical, philosophical, and critical essays of André Suarès, Daniel Halévy, Antonine Lavergne, and Georges Sorel. Even though some might say that the publishing of the works of Jérôme and Jean Tharaud by Péguy was only due in friendship yet this is so contrary to his theories that we feel it is not justifiable. Psichari dedicated a book to

Péguy, "Lui dédiant ainsi l'Appel des Armes: au solitaire en qui vit aujourd'hui l'âme de la France et dont l'oeuvre a courbé d'amour notre jeunesse, à notre maître Charles Péguy, Ernest Psichari exprimait sans craindre les démentis, une gratitude collective." 16

Besides all this his very death itself coming as it did in a manner in which he had always said that he would not hesitate to die and so in accord with the martial gospel which he had preached would seem to justify our consideration of Péguy as a prophet who foretold the future. Nor are we alone in this opinion for Seippel has said, "Ce n'est pas trop de dire que Péguy avait été d'avance le poète de la guerre de 1914. Il aurait été digne de la chanter, s'il n'avait fait mieux encore, en méritant d'y mourir." 17 This is substantiated in his own words applicable to the fall of France in 1940. 18 He had foreseen that the 'déraisonnement' would inevitably bring about the suffering consequential upon every war. He also encouraged his people to rise above all this by the same moral greatness which he himself had so perfectly recognized.

16 Ibid., 654.
18 Charles Péguy, Eve, 74.
CONCLUSION

The specific nature of Péguy's moral ideal has been studied in the prismatic diffusion of his own poetry, when considering him as seen through it as the peasant, the polemic writer, the poet, the patriot, and the prophet. In every work, whether a 'mystère' or a 'tapisserie' he praises moral greatness seen as abnegation and exaltation of soul. He is like a medieval craftsman handling his masterpiece, placing it now in one light, now in another, in order to consider it in its different shades of brillance and thus by seeing it under all its aspects be better able to estimate its worth.

The warm red rays of dawn have shown the peasant meditating the question of filling the sacks and granaries with wheat yet realizing that God freely gives to all men their daily bread.

The Cahiers de la Quinzaine became in the clear blue light of dialects his instrument for chastising the rhetoricians who lied to the people. For he considered that since God had given liberty, He must set a price on man's freedom, i.e.

Cette liberté de cette créature est le plus beau reflet qu'il y ait dans le monde
De la Liberté du Créateur. C'est pour cela que nous y attachons,
Que nous y mettons un prix propre.¹

This recalled Péguy to the consideration of moral beauty as seen in the

¹ Charles Péguy, Le Mystère des Saints Innocents, 66.
Creator, Who freely paid for men instead of letting man pay for himself.

In *Le Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc* the author sought and found an example of a creature who lived out this plan of abnegation. He first sees her in the cool green fields of Domremy inwardly struggling to reach an explanation of the problem of suffering in the world. She so captivated him that he became a poet in prose and in verse in order to praise her. Then realizing his own inability as a socialist to fittingly understand her he became a Catholic poet and rewrote his first 'drame' and renamed it a 'mystère de Jeanne d'Arc.'

Following the lead of this great French deliverer even unto death, Péguy at first believed that 'la mystique révolutionnaire' was a useful force necessary for the country. As he watched the deep purple glow, its shades lightened. He was going to prove by means of his own sincerity as a patriot and passionate militarist the truth of his work.

From the very beginning Péguy thought that he was going to have to choose between intellect and instinct. The bright yellow light of truth made him realize that he must combine the two. It is thus that he spoke for God through material creation foretelling the future and explaining the past.

Therefore may we not conclude that there is evidence in Peguy's life that he accepted his own ideal of moral beauty? There seems substantiation of this theory in the very fact that his entire life was a search for a solution to the problem of suffering in the world and a finding, apparently unrealized by himself, of its answer in abnegation and exaltation of soul. He ever found the answer at the feet of Notre Dame de Chartres:
O reine voici donc après la longue route,
Avant de repartir par ce même chemin,
Le seul asile ouvert au creux de votre main,
Et le jardin secret où l'âme s'ouvre tout.²

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mother Anita Bremner, R.S.C.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of French.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 26, 1947

Date

Signature of Adviser