

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHARITY OF JOAN OF ARC. By Charles Péguy.
Translated by Julian Green. (Hollis and Carter; 12s. 6d.)

Charles Péguy, born in Orléans in 1873, came of an ancestry of vine-dressers, 'patient ancestors. . . sturdy-footed ancestors, the men gnarled like vine-stocks. . . the women rolling their big fat bundles of linen in their barrows, the women washing by the river.' His widowed mother earned a hard living by mending straw chairs, his grandmother, who could not read, filled his mind with traditional lore. Once a week at catechism, 'our young curates told us exactly the opposite of what we were taught by our young student-masters.' The education of those days—primary schools, scholarships to *lycées* in Orléans and Paris—turned him as a young Normalien into an ardent socialist and professed atheist; yet the faith was an integral part of the way of life he loved, a fundamental part of his own vibrant ideals, of his devotion to truth and to France.

His first independently published work (in 1897) was a great trilogy on her whom we now call St Joan: Joan the little peasant girl, Joan tortured by the sin and suffering around her, Joan docile to her Voices, the lover of France, the brave fighter, the deliverer of his city of Orléans, the martyr of the Trial. When, by 1910, in the stress and disillusionments of life, he had recovered faith in the Church, he came back to her, and published the *Mystère*. He wrote about that time: 'It has been given to me. . . to put whatever a man can put of himself into representing the fourteen or fifteen mysteries, the single mystery, of the life and the vocation and the holiness and the martyrdom of the greatest saint I think that ever was.' Two long conversations, separated by a long monologue, are full of penetrating, even agonising, meditations on the distress of the human condition and on Christ's redemptive suffering. Only Péguy's conception of Our Lady seems to fall short: she is so purely human that she 'weeps and weeps' for three days and three nights during the Passion.

Anyone approaching Péguy in this *Mystère* for the first time should read the Foreword carefully. His incisive style at first sight seems repetitive; but each new phrase adds something, until the sense is bit by bit driven home. Every word is important. The translator has done his work well, but is sometimes *too* literal. Péguy's grammar is not really so strange as it is made to appear when the ordinary emphatic *moi* is translated *me*; or *les uns, les autres* by *the ones, the others*.

MARY RYAN.

MOUNTAINS BENEATH THE HORIZON. By William Bell. (Faber; 8s. 6d.)

The heart of this book is a group of twelve elegies, and here the spirit of great poetry moves in triumph and with an assurance beyond challenge. These elegies are decisive. They rise full formed and bear