

Blackfriars

THE CATHOLIC DIRECTORY, 1929. (Burns, Oates and Washbourne; 3/6.)

THE CATHOLIC WHO'S WHO AND YEAR BOOK, 1929. (Burns, Oates, and Washbourne; 5/-.)

The Catholic Directory this year reaches the venerable age of ninety-three. It has in this present issue revived a feature that was missing from the last three or four numbers, namely, information concerning the Church in Scotland. This reviewer has noticed errors, though he feels sure he has not noticed all of them. The marvel is that such a high standard of accuracy is maintained. More errors could be eliminated if the editors were served more wisely and seriously by local rectors and others whose concern it should be to inform the compilers of changes and new arrangements.

The Catholic Who's Who has a wise preface by Cardinal Bourne, who briefly reviews the progress of the Church in this country since 1829. We have not yet discovered the secret of the editor's principle of inclusion and exclusion. Is it bashfulness that explains certain obvious gaps?

LEVITATION. An Examination of the Evidence and Explanations. By Olivier Leroy. (Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1928; 10/6.)

That the human body can under certain circumstances rise from the ground and remain suspended in mid-air, without visible support, is a fact which has been attested to from quite early times to the present day. We meet with descriptions of levitation, as this phenomenon is now called, in such early writers as Apollonius of Tyana, Jamblichus, and others. Jamblichus himself is said to have been seen raised some distance from the ground, while he prayed, his body being bathed in a golden light.

In recent times the famous medium, Daniel D. Home, was frequently seen to be levitated, and on one well-authenticated occasion, when in a state of trance, he was carried out of the window of one room and floated in at the window of the room next to it.

Levitations have been ascribed to various saints and holy persons throughout the centuries, and in many instances, witnessed by persons of unimpeachable integrity. Though by no means a necessary accompaniment of a mystic trance, or a usual effect of a holy life, nevertheless the phenomenon is constantly associated with such a state of life. When levita-

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tion is about to occur it seems to be irresistible, however little it may be desired. St. Teresa, who was often levitated, simply could not prevent it. A similar spontaneity is experienced by mediums. St. Joseph of Cupertino is an extraordinary example—so frequent and well-attested were his levitations and flights that they compel assent. They were sometimes not without their humorous aspect, as when he lifted a certain lunatic named Balthasar Rossi in the air with him, where they remained suspended together for a quarter of an hour, at the end of which St. Joseph descended and, setting the lunatic on the floor, said: 'Now, cheer up, Balthasar.' Let us hope he was cured. On another occasion this saint was assisting at the clothing of a nun, and, suddenly becoming transported, seized the confessor of the convent, who was present, and danced in the air round the chapel with him. Of the fact of levitation there can be no doubt, but this does not mean that we must accept uncritically all accounts of the phenomenon. Professor Leroy has carefully gathered together the traditions and legends from pagan writers, hagiography, and records of mediumistic levitations. These he has subjected to a searching and competent criticism, laying down certain rules by which their authenticity may be judged. He accepts as authentic those cases which have been witnessed by several people, and is cautious in accepting as genuine, levitations which have been attributed to a saint in some later biography, when no mention is made of levitation in earlier accounts. Thus the levitations ascribed to St. Dominic and St. Francis do not appear in the early lives of these Saints, but seem to have been introduced at a later period, when proper evidence was not forthcoming. Again, where the knowledge of the fact is derived solely from the person claiming to have been levitated, caution is necessary, for we cannot exclude, critically, the possibility of illusion.

The writer's accounts of the psychological and physiological conditions attending levitation, whether of the hagiographic or mediumistic order, are of considerable value. He shows that certain very noticeable differences exist between the levitations of saints and mediums, as well in the phenomenon itself as in the circumstances under which it occurs. Thus for the saints or mystics levitation seems to occur at any time and in any place, and in the light, whereas the medium requires darkness and a specially prepared environment.

In the final section of the book Professor Leroy examines the theories which have been proposed to explain or explain

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away the phenomena. Dismissing such as deny the fact *a priori* on the ground that a suspension of the law of gravity is impossible, he considers in turn the naturalistic and supernaturalistic theories, without, however, committing himself definitely to any one theory. Reading between the lines, however, we think the author agrees with the Catholic tradition that levitation, where it occurs to saints or holy persons, is supernatural. As for the levitations of mediums, or the authenticated levitations of pagan, but non-mediumistic, individuals, explanation is more difficult.

We know so little really of gravitation that one may ask whether the psychophysical states of the individual, at the time of the trance, does not in some way or other unknown to us disturb the ordinary gravitational relation to the earth. However this may be, we must say that no natural explanation is as yet forthcoming, and that of the fact itself there can be no reasonable doubt.

A good bibliographical register and index completes a very interesting and unique study of this subject.

G.A.E.

THE DAWN OF CATHOLICISM IN AUSTRALIA. By the Rev. Eris O'Brien. (Sydney, 1928; 2 vols.)

All sincere students of history will feel grateful to Fr. Eris O'Brien for his most interesting volumes on *The Dawn of Catholicism in Australia*. They were published, as the Assistant Secretary of the Sydney Eucharistic Congress says in a preface note, 'to prepare Congressists with the true atmosphere of Australian Church History.' The reader must do his best to bear this in mind, for to a superficial observer they would seem to contain little more than a very minute and detailed account of the life and adventures of the Rev. Jeremiah O'Flynn.

In a series of extremely interesting chapters and vivid word-pictures, with a wealth of detail and a crowd of historical digressions so minute as at times to seem needless and out of place, the author shows us how this commonplace priest, quarrelsome, tiresome, tactless, and irritating, nevertheless 'achieved greatness by failure.' That the Catholic Church at the present moment is what it is in Australia seems, humanly speaking, due to the fact that this man went there to lay its foundation stones, and after a brief residence of about six months succeeded in getting himself deported.