

Classic book celebrates its golden anniversary

BY MARJORIE HESFORD

Anthony Borgia's thrilling book, "Life in the World Unseen," which gives a detailed account of many aspects of spirit world existence, is soon to celebrate its first 50 years.

In this specially commissioned feature, Marjorie Hesford charts the book's history both here and Hereafter, taking a look at this progress of this and other titles which came through Anthony's mediumship.

The communicator was Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, the son of a former Archbishop of Canterbury.

NEXT month sees the 50th anniversary of the publishing of "Life in the World Unseen" by Anthony Borgia, so it seems appropriate to relate something of the story behind – and the impact made – by one of the classic books of Spiritualism.

The original script was received clairaudiently by Anthony from Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson. It was serialised in the Sunday newspaper "The People" in 1942, under the title "Beyond this Life," and published soon afterwards in book form by Feature Books, a subsidiary of Sidgwick & Jackson.

It sold extremely well as did the second of the scripts, "The World Unseen," two years later. Over the next few years, Monsignor dictated to Anthony further scripts which Feature Books published as "ABC of Life,"

"Facts," "More Light" and "Heaven and Earth."

As Anthony's preface to "Life in the World Unseen" explains, Monsignor had not communicated with him before co-operating in writing a book was first mentioned.

In the 1920s his brother Gordon, a fine healer and trance medium, was controlled by a spirit friend. Anthony asked if he knew how Monsignor was faring.

"He said he would find out," Anthony explained. "A few days later, he told me Monsignor was well and flourishing, and I would eventually hear from him. Years passed before this happened. It came about in this way.

"My brother and I were invited to join an already-established home circle conducted by an excellent non-professional trance medium, Mollie Duncan, with whom we were to sit

regularly for many years.

"Mollie's mediumship was of the highest standard. We had many interesting visitors to the circle from both sides of the veil.

"Shortly after the outbreak of war, a new spirit visitor took control at one of the circles. To our astonishment, we saw it was Monsignor.

"The way he sat, the distinctive tilt of the head with chin up, all revealed the living personality we knew as Monsignor Benson."

Anthony added: "Aside from the physical aspect, Gordon, I and another sitter saw him clairvoyantly beyond any doubt. It was one of the most remarkable first attempts at controlling I have seen. There was no hesitation or confusion.

"Monsignor spoke clearly and firmly, greeting us as though he was there in his own physical body.

"At that first joyous reunion our conversation was personal, but at another circle shortly after, he broached the subject of writing: would I undertake it from him?

"I raised objections, saying the war had started, paper was getting scarce, I was unknown, and so forth, but he brushed this aside saying that if I would do the job, 'they' would do the rest."

For many years before this took place, Anthony had references, via Gordon's mediumship and his own, to future writing work. At occasional sittings with other mediums, including Annie Brittain and Horace Leaf, they also spoke of writing to be done eventually.

The year 1928 saw the start of a series of psychic happenings all connected with the number five, which then had no meaning for either brother.

There are too many to detail, but a few examples include a piece of string being draped in the distinct form of a V, the Roman numeral for five, over a picture or furniture.

On several occasions, five matches were torn from small pocket books of matches. This was once done while Anthony was wearing the jacket in the pocket of which the match-book lay, but he was unaware of what happened at the time.

Perhaps the most interesting occurrence involved a small pencil sketch appearing in one of the match-books. It showed a branch of a tree bearing five leaves with a separate sketch of five figs.

Anthony's mother felt this referred to the spring of the year and recalled a New Testament quotation concerning figs – "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is tender and putteth forth leaves ye know the summer is nigh... when ye shall see these things, know that it is near."

In 1941, the mystery of the fives began to be revealed. The first of Monsignor's scripts was given to the editor of "The People" on November 5 of that year. Serialisation began five months later on April 5, 1942.

Sidgwick & Jackson intended to publish the manuscript in book form coming out on August 5, 1942, but a government take-over of the printing

works delayed this until November 5, exactly five months after the serialisation ended in "The People."

So many coincidences concerning the number five happened throughout the entire matter of producing this first script from Monsignor.

Research into the question of the figs revealed that a fig tree produces two crops a year, a smaller one in the spring, with the main crop in the autumn, thus corresponding to the newspaper serialisation and the published book. Incidentally, the first printing of the book was 5,000 copies.

All the books continued in print into the 1950s, with the Psychic Book Club bringing out editions, too. Then Odhams Press took over publication and decided to combine "Beyond this Life" with "The World Unseen," making one volume entitled "Life in the World Unseen."

This was published in April 1954 and was an instant success, selling out within a week of publication.

"More About Life in the World Unseen" followed in 1956. Three years later, Odhams reprinted "ABC of Life" without the index or original question-

and-answer format, and changed the title to "Here and Hereafter."

From that first serialisation in 1942 almost to the end of his life in 1989, Anthony received thousands of letters from all over the world. These were sent by people wanting to express their appreciation or commenting on one or other aspect of the books.

One writer spoke of "the very clear and detailed descriptions of the next life which I have not come across in any similar account" while the wife of an Anglican minister wrote thanking Anthony and Monsignor for "this beautiful, comforting and informative book."

The Spiritualist writer Paul Miller wrote that Monsignor "does not just deal with the beautiful, orderly and graceful.

"There is a restrained account of a visit to some of the lower realms where human beings reap the rewards of their own grossness, selfishness and folly, just as elsewhere they reap the fruits of their own service.

"The communicator has wise words to say about the position of the so-called famous, the uselessness of dogmas and

DEFINE YOUR MEDIUMSHIP

Beginners: Intermediate: Advanced
4.00 pm, May 9 – 12.30 pm, May 12

DEER PARK HOTEL, WESTON, NR HONITON, DEVON

This four-day seminar is designed to help you enhance your mediumship and awareness

WORKSHOPS: LECTURES: GROUPWORK: TUTORIALS

Optional assessments and sittings

FOUR DAYS ★ FULL BOARD ★ ALL ROOMS EN SUITE

NO SUPPLEMENTS ★ ALL INCLUSIVE ★ £185.00

Enquiries and to book:

Matthew Smith, 215 Portsmouth Road, Woolston, Southampton, S019 9BG

Tel: 023 8044 2642

creeds; on time and space, and the care with which reunions are organised when we pass on.

“The account of the government of the Other Side is so detailed and logical that surely no reasonable human being can doubt that it comes from a man describing what he know to be true.”

Many letters expressed similar sentiments, commenting on the clarity of Monsignor’s prose and descriptive powers. Although there were a few dissenting voices, these were very much in the minority.

Of course, no-one can expect anything they write to meet with unalloyed praise, especially something claiming to originate in the spirit world.

Neither “Life in the World Unseen” nor Monsignor’s other books are an exception. They had their critics and will doubtless continue to do so. No-one can please everybody. Monsignor was not writing to please, but to set down what he knew to be the truth.

Some people have expressed dissatisfaction that the books do not refer to this or that, or complain about what they perceive to be a personal bias of the communicator or his amanuensis.

Others think it all sounds too good to be true while yet others consider the books are not of a sufficiently high spiritual level, according to their notions of what that level might be.

There are those who maintain that Monsignor’s castigation of Orthodox religion is too harsh; others think it does not go far enough.

However, “Life in the World Unseen” appears to remain the firm favourite with almost all readers.

In the end, whatever praise or blame the books have received, Monsignor spoke from the heart – and spoke only the truth.

In private conversations with Anthony, he referred to something of the organisation which had gone into bringing the books about, telling him that during the entire process, beginning many years before he began to dictate the scripts, he had been under the guidance of spirit beings from far higher spheres than his own.

None of them would have permitted him to say anything which was not true, even in the unlikely event he wished to do so.

Nor were his accounts coloured by

Spirit guides

*Have your spirit guide drawn in full colour by
international psychic artist
£20, including post and packing*

Send hand-written letter together with payment to
Lynne Rose, 4 Lockwood Bank, Epworth, Doncaster, DN9 1JJ
Telephone: 01427 873993. E-mail: Lynne4rose@aol.com

(Pictures are approx A3 size and are delivered ready to frame and include information received from Spirit)



personal prejudices or ignorance of the true facts. Monsignor explained that he had to omit much from these accounts, for a variety of reasons, but that everything he said was “plain, unvarnished fact” and known to all who had progressed even a little way through the realms of light.

Monsignor took the matter of these transmitted books very seriously. It was a task he greatly wished to accomplish.

Monsignor realised almost from the moment he arrived in the spirit world how wrong he had been in writing one particular book about Spiritualism when on earth. Some means of putting this right became of special importance to him.

He did not return to communicate while still a “beginner” in his new life, but sought and acted upon the advice of wise and experienced spirit beings, who advised him to wait until a time and circumstances arose whereby such a return would be best effected.

Monsignor waited 27 years until it was considered such work could begin.

While waiting, he travelled throughout the spirit world, armed at times, as he has described, with the necessary permission and protection for entering realms other than his own, amassing all the knowledge he could and being taught by infinitely great souls in the higher realms.

It is surely unlikely that any spirit communicator could possibly bring through all there is to know about the spirit world, even supposing humanity ever reaches a stage of development on earth where we could fully understand

and appreciate such information.

The spirit world also has the added difficulty of finding and working through appropriate people in order to produce books of the necessary quality to attract and inform as many readers as possible.

However, we can only be grateful that spirit beings keep on trying and that the books continue to appear which help to build up for us clear and informative pictures of the life we will all enter eventually.

Among such books, Monsignor’s works hold a high place. “Life in the World Unseen” in particular deserves the affection and esteem in which it is clearly held by so many.

During its existence, it has been translated into French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Thai and Czech. Corgi brought out two editions in paperback in the 1970s whilst at the end of that decade, parts of the book were published in a Jamaican newspaper.

Today, it is still being published in Britain, Canada, America, Germany and recently in the Czech Republic.

I hope that Monsignor, Anthony and all who took part in bringing it into being are happy at what has been achieved... and that it may survive to celebrate its 100th anniversary!

■ *“Life in the World Unseen” is available direct from “Two Worlds” at £9.30 (UK), £10.15 (Europe) and £12.20 (rest of the world). Credit card orders taken by post, phone, fax or e-mail. Our details appear on the front cover.*