Taoiseach, Jack Lynch; Dr Albert MacConnell, provost of T.C.D., and professors and staff-members of U.C.D. On the following day the Requiem Mass was celebrated by Fr O'Driscoll, with Archbishop McQuaid presiding. De Valera was again in attendance and a strong representation from U.C.C.

In his will Alfred had expressed a wish that his body be laid to rest 'with the Holy Ghost Fathers in their cemetery at Kimmage'. His wish was honoured. The graveside service was conducted by Alfred's close friend, Fr Michael McCarthy, with a large gathering of Holy Ghost Fathers and, once again, de Valera in attendance.

The Holy Ghost Fathers were to be as generous and kind to Alfred in death as they were to him during his years in retirement, making him an honorary member of their institute. The inscription on his small, cross-shaped headstone, identical to all the others in the cemetery, reads:

Msgr. Alfred O'Rahilly, C.S.Sp. died 2nd August 1969 aged 85 yrs.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31.</sup> The above is taken from Richard Sherry, Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, 1859-1959 (Dublin 1962); Denis Gwynn, 'Monsignor Alfred O'Rahilly (1884-1969)', Studies, winter 1969; D. H. Manly, 'The Fahey theories', 'Sound history?', 'Fr Fahey and Irish Catholicism', Ballintrillick Review, no. 28 (1990); Cork Examiner 4, 6 August 1969; Irish Independent 25 January 1954, 4, 6, August 1969; Irish Times 4 August 1969; Kerryman 9 August 1969; Standard 7 May 1943, 4 May, 22 June 1956, 6, 13 December 1957, 12, 26 April 1963; Dublin Archdiocesan Archives: Alfred O'Rahilly file; R.T.É. Written Archive: Alfred O'Rahilly file; Papers of Cornelius Murphy: Alfred O'Rahilly file; diaries of Alfred O'Rahilly: 8 April - 1 May 1954; 24 May - 7 July 1954, 11 July - 12 September 1954, 13 September - 26 October 1954, 27 December 1954 - 28 February 1955, 1 March - 9 November 1955, 13 November - 25 December 1955; interviews with John Evans, Mgr G. Thomas Fehily, Peter Hogan, Fr Seán Hughes, S.J., Mrs Deirdre Humphreys (née Flanagan), Mother M. Jordana, O.P., R. D. O'C. Lysaght, Fr Michael McCarthy, C.S.Sp., Cornelius Murphy, Rev. Dr Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., John J. O'Meara, Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, Patrick Joseph Quinn, Fr Patrick Tuohy; papers and writings of Alfred O'Rahilly and the sources already cited.

#### **EPILOGUE**

On 12 November 1901 Alfred entered the Jesuit novitiate at Tullabeg with a view to becoming a priest in the Society of Jesus. When on 18 December 1955 he was ordained in the chapel in Blackrock College his life had all-too-soon come full circle. In the meantime he had married and raised a daughter and son. For forty years he had given unmatched service to U.C.C. as assistant lecturer, professor, registrar and president successively. He was one of the most influential persons in the public life of Ireland for a period spanning almost two generations. As a practical social reformer, he had few peers. He had won an international reputation as a scholar in a number of disciplines.

Notwithstanding these achievements, those who were close to Alfred regarded him as first and foremost an outstanding Catholic apologist. It was a role which he filled with considerable enthusiasm in his daily life as well as in lecturing and writing. Fr Donal O'Sullivan, S.J., who gave the annual retreat at U.C.C. at the beginning of the academic year in 1945, wrote to Fr John R. McMahon, S.J., his provincial, on 17 November:

I thoroughly enjoyed the retreat, though it was at the same time a big strain and the confessions were mission-heavy. O'Rahilly himself and a fair number of the professors attended – the presence of the former does not tend to calm preaching! – and the students packed the chapel. I saw a great deal of Alfred and he was kindness itself to me and at various professorial social gatherings was almost embarrassing in his eagerness to break a lance for the Society. He has done a tremendous amount in his few years of office, even though he has often been fortiter in modo as well as in re. There is really a wonderful Catholic spirit in the college and the personal example of O'Rahilly is just stupendous. The younger students especially appreciate it.

<sup>1.</sup> In his diary he adverted to this on a number of occasions. On Palm Sunday, 11 April 1954, he wrote: 'Once more I am witnessing the Holy Week liturgy in Blackrock College chapel, where these ceremonies first made such an impression on me as a schoolboy. It seems but yesterday. All the intervening years seem to me almost unreal, like the passing visions of a cinematograph. A little while ago I was a schoolboy; now suddenly I find myself to be an old man.'

Alfred never concealed his Catholicism nor his strong religious convictions no matter what the surroundings. Douglas Hyde wrote in the *Catholic Herald* of 6 August 1948:

In London last week I met Professor O'Rahilly, of Cork, and we went for a meal together in a Fleet Street restaurant. The room was crowded, but in five minutes there was to all intents and purposes only one man there – the professor – for his personality is so terrific that, although the most modest of men, he simply dominated the scene.

He told me with pride of the things they are doing in Cork [the course in workers' education at U.C.C.] and was particularly proud of the fact that the men they turn out do not disappear into ivory towers or soft jobs, but take their learning, culture and social teaching with them back to the

working-class circles from which they come.

He seemed to me to be one of the most practical and yet most holy people I have met. And I will confess to having got rather a kick out of seeing the looks of blank astonishment and incomprehension on hard-boiled Fleet Street faces when, having finished lunch, he crossed himself and said grace before departing.

Alfred's passionate attachment to his faith was rooted in his family background, his early education and membership of the Society of Jesus during his formative years. Perhaps because he possessed an acute awareness of the inadequacy of human knowledge, science and theology, like Louis Pasteur, he had the simple faith of a Breton peasant. This he sustained by a life-long commitment to prayer. Throughout his life as a layman he

attended Mass and recited the Rosary daily.

Alfred's readiness to do battle for the Catholic Church arose in part from his desire to compensate for not persevering with his vocation in his early years. In his diary for 19 April 1954 he wrote: 'In spite of my many faults, I have always stood up for Christ and publicly defended religion. Thus I have made some reparation for my own great tepidity and unfaithfulness.' And on 20 January 1955 he reflected on his departure from the Jesuits: 'I was full of spiritual pride and I was unfaithful to grace. The only consolation I have is that, having been found unworthy to be an officer in Christ's army, I think I have honestly

#### **Epilogue**

striven to be a good private.' This was also implicitly recognised by Fr Michael O'Grady, S.J., the provincial, in the dimissorial letter which he provided for Alfred prior to his ordination.<sup>2</sup>

By virtue of his temperament and personality, Alfred was attracted to controversy. He was self-opinionated and extraordinarily vain. Nothing gave him more pleasure than an intellectual joust with a person regarded as an expert on some subject or other. For religious controversy he was well-equipped. He possessed a fine mind, was widely read and had extensive and varied experience. Although he gave no quarter in exchanges, he endeavoured not to show any personal animus to his adversaries. Hurts and insults were both forgotten as well as forgiven by him.<sup>3</sup>

Alfred followed the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) with intense interest. He stated that it dealt with a number of issues which had concerned him for many years. Not surprisingly in view of his independent character, he applauded the council's move to correct the juridical over-emphasis on Church discipline which resulted from the Reformation. He welcomed the new vision of the Church as the people of God and its consequent upgrading of the status of lay people within the Church. In particular he was very pleased with the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy and thereby the restoration of the ideal of corporate worship. He rejoiced at the council's enthusiastic endorsement of ecumenism and the need to respect truths and convictions cherished in other religions and other Christian denominations. But, with regard to ecumenism and the other issues opened up for vigorous debate, he frequently quoted St Augustine: 'In essentials, unity; in doubtful things, liberty: in all things, charity.'

Alfred was more complex and complicated than most people.<sup>4</sup> He tended to beguile his friends and to enrage his adversaries. But he mellowed as he grew older. Dr Kathleen

<sup>2.</sup> Fr O'Grady admired Alfred greatly. In January 1955 in conversation and by letter he informed him that the Society regarded him as a *missionarius excurrens* (an external missionary). He assured him that members of the Irish province were proud of his achievements and felt a great affection for him (see p. 136). In a reference to Alfred's forthcoming ordination, he regretted that the Society had not the privilege 'to have done that crowning' to a 'life so marked with the seal of divine approval'.

<sup>3.</sup> See J. A. Gaughan, Alfred O'Rabilly I: Academic, 193-4; Alfred O'Rabilly II: Public Figure, 384.

<sup>4.</sup> For a psychological profile of Alfred, see Appendix 6.

O'Flaherty, his colleague for many years when he strode the scene at U.C.C. like a colossus,5 published an appreciation of him in the Cork University Record, summer 1955, and the University Review, spring 1955. After mentioning his many achievements in the academic and non-academic worlds, she referred to his capacity for work and for extracting it out of others, his stimulating companionship, and his phenomenal energy, manifested in his quick gestures and rapid flow of talk. Dynamism, she recalled, was his most outstanding characteristic and she continued: 'Those who know him are well acquainted with it: it is the origin of the many emotions to which he gave rise in those with whom he came in contact, for it was impossible to regard him with indifference. It is a source of his brilliance as a polemicist and of the intellectual energy which he continually expended . . . His very manner of walking revealed this trait of his character: it was necessary to run in order to keep up with him . . . His quick glance took in everything . . . When he retired, U.C.C. lost not only an exceptional president but an outstanding personality.'

Fr Michael McCarthy who lived in close contact with Alfred from 1954 to 1969 broadcast an appreciation of his friend from Radio Éireann in August 1969. He described him as magnanimous and forgiving and as possessing a subtle, mischievous but never hurtful humour. In his personal dealings, McCarthy commented, Alfred's generosity and munificence were on the grand scale and his kindness to people about him constant. His pension he spent on books and on charity to the poor. When he died his estate amounted to a mere £1,100. McCarthy concluded that his was 'a kindly heart concealed

under a rugged and unpretentious exterior'.

Denis Gwynn compared Alfred in death to a Roman emperor lying in state. Alfred's life reminds one of the advice of the Greek poet, Hesiod (fl. c. 800 B.C.): 'In the morning of life, work; in the mid-day, give counsel; in the evening, pray.'6

5. Niall Tierney, son of Michael Tierney, recalled that when as a small boy he asked Alfred who he was the latter replied: 'I am the Kaiser of Cork!'

<sup>6.</sup> The above is taken from Kathleen O'Flaherty, 'Obituary: Right Reverend Dr Alfred O'Rahilly', Cork University Record, 1970; diary of Alfred O'Rahilly: 27 December 1954 - 28 February 1955; Dublin Archdiocesan Archives: Alfred O'Rahilly file; interviews with Fr Michael McCarthy, C.S.Sp., and Rev. Dr Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp.; papers and writings of Alfred O'Rahilly and the sources already cited.

#### APPENDIX 1

#### RADIO TALK BY ALFRED O'RAHILLY ON THÉRÈSE NEUMANN<sup>1</sup>

There is in Bavaria, near the frontier of Czechoslovakia, a village of less than a thousand inhabitants, called Konnersreuth, about five miles from the nearest railway station. This obscure place has achieved world-wide fame and has been visited by thousands of pilgrims, for it is the home of Thérèse Neumann, the daughter of the village tailor, born in 1898 as the eldest of ten children. She is an ordinary peasant woman who finished her schooling at the age of sixteen and then was for four years a servant maid. How curious that the eyes of the world should be drawn to such a person! The reason is that since 1926 she has had the stigmata - wounds on the hands, feet and left side which never suppurate but bleed periodically on Fridays, especially during Lent; she also sheds tears of blood. Thus in a most poignant way she recalls men's minds to the Passion of Our Lord. In a sermon preached on 8 November 1927 the late Cardinal Faulhaber said: 'Today a great message of grace has come out of Konnersreuth: Return to devotion to Christ's Passion.'

There is already an enormous literature on the subject. As I happen to have read extensively in it, I have been asked to speak on it, especially in connection with a recent book, The case of Thérèse Neumann. The author, Miss Hilda C. Graef, writes from Oxford. The book is printed in London, has the imprimatur of the archbishop of Birmingham, and was published in 1950 by the Mercier Press, Cork. The publisher's blurb states that the work is the 'first critical examination to appear in the English language'. In my view, however, it is an extremely hostile and one-sided production and therefore calls for some critical comments. The author appears to have paid a visit to Konnersreuth but gives no observations of her own. For most of her descriptions she is dependent on the large work of Josef Teodorowicz, archbishop of Lemberg, of which an American translation was published by Herder in 1940: Mystical phenomena in the life of Thérèse Neumann.

She uses a highly critical symposium published in the Etudes Carmélitaines in 1936 and especially the work of a Polish

<sup>1.</sup> Broadcast from Radio Éireann on 23 April 1951. The typescript is in the Written Archive of Radio Telefís Éireann.

physician, Dr Boleslas de Poray Madeyski: Le cas de la visionnaire stigmatisée Thérèse Neumann de Konnersreuth (Paris
1940). It is, however, disingenuous to refer to this medical
writer as 'the medical expert of the Sacred Congregation of
Rites', as he did not write in this capacity and his book is filled
with a technical and debatable concept of hysteria. Miss Graef
simply accepts his conclusions without reproducing his
arguments. She has missed a much better critical work published
in French by a Polish Jesuit, Paul Siwek, now a professor in
Fordham: Une stigmatisée de nos jours (Paris 1950). As to most
of the literature favourable to Thérèse Neumann, Miss Graef is
unaware of it or at least fails to quote it.

The author's object is to prove that the extraordinary phenomena exhibited by Thérèse Neumann visions, perpetual fast - have a purely natural explanation. Even if she were dealing with a canonised saint, she would be prefectly entitled to do this: Catholics as such are not obliged to regard these phenomena as miraculous. Such a discussion is of great scientific interest but exceedingly difficult in the light of modern psychical research. To be satisfactory the investigation would require a far greater technical apparatus than Miss Graef attempts. But the query I wish to put is this: Is the issue, which can never be decided categorically, of such great religious importance? Even among Catholics in Germany there has been a great difference of opinion; and Miss Graef relies on Fr Waldmann, one of the most vehement opponents of Konnersreuth. Among Catholic scientists and theologians such a dispute is quite intelligible. But does it really affect the ordinary people? Do they consciously raise the question whether God is acting directly or through obscure secondary causes? From my own knowledge of the sturdy Bavarian Catholic rural people. I find it hard to believe that they are obsessed with delusions about miracles. They take the wonderful phenomena as they find them and they thank God for them. In my opinion they are right. As against Miss Graef I hold that a description - still more a sight - of what is happening is of far greater importance than an inconclusive investigation as to whether they are a rather unique manifestation of obscure psychophysical causation. Here, for example, is a quotation from a Jewish physician, who visited Konnersreuth. Dr Wolfgang von Weisl:

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Never could I believe what happens here, had I not seen it with my own eyes: a peasant girl witnesses the Passion of Christ. So strong and fervent is her vision that blood flows in long streams from her eyes down her face; blood from the wounds of her heart and her head crimsons her gown and her head cloth. And as to her eyes — never have I seen such eyes in a hysteric or insane person . . . She weeps bloody tears. In her extended hands of a dull white-like ivory, there shine forth two red marks: the marks of the nails in the hands of the Redeemer.

Presumably this non-Christian doctor does not believe in a miracle; yet he was profoundly affected by this living reproduction of the Passion of Christ.

I myself would much prefer to give my hearers further such descriptions, to try to show them why the thousands who have visited Konnersreuth were so deeply affected. But I must perforce follow Miss Graef in her pursuit of natural causes.

In spite of her ambition to be a missionary sister. Therese Neumann had to start earning her living as a servant in 1914; and, owing to the absence of the men at the war, her work was particularly hard. On the morning of 10 March 1918 a fire broke out in the house where she was employed. For two hours she stood on a chair, handing up buckets of water, then she fell. This, aggravated by a further fall a month later when she was carrying a sack of potatoes, was the beginning of a long period of suffering and illness, during which she lost her sight and became partly paralysed. In 1923 her sight was restored, and in 1925 she was cured of a wound in her foot, of what was alleged to be an organic lesion of the vertebrae. of appendicitis and of pneumonia. Therese maintained that she was cured miraculously by St Thérèse after a vision. Dr Madevski, whom of course Miss Graef follows, holds that these disabilities were due to hysteria initiated by traumatic shock. Let us avoid this much-abused word 'hysteria' and say that these illnesses were psychogenetic, that is, due in some way to the reaction of the mind (not necessarily conscious) on the body. There is much to be said for this contention, for many parallel cases of such symptoms are recorded. Certainly the Medical Bureau at Lourdes would not accept these cures as necessarily miraculous. What follows? Nothing whatever either

to the disparagement of Thérèse or to the invalidation of her subsequent experiences.

Let us now turn to Thérèse's stigmata, the impression of five wounds recalling those of Christ. The first recorded case is that of St Francis in 1224: since then there have been literally hundreds of instances. Rationalist historians, fearful of admitting a miracle, have been reluctant to admit the genuineness of the phenomenon. Renan suggested that Br Elias manipulated the corpse of St Francis: the Cambridge historian Coulton suggested that the saint used a 'rusty nail'! When the German pathologist in 1874 was told of the case of the Belgian girl Louise Lateau. he declared: 'Wunder oder Betrug - miracle or fraud.' And of course he opted for fraud. Such scepticism is nowadays quite untenable. The stigmata of Thérèse Neumann have been investigated and described by numerous medical men; they have been photographed. Says Fr Siwek, an exigent critic (p. 44): 'I do not believe that the reality of the phenomena of Konnersreuth can be seriously doubted.' Miss Graef, who would be glad to be rid of inconvenient facts, reproduces from Dr Madeyski an account of a certain Dr Martini who, because he did not himself witness the start of the bleeding from the wounds. suggested the possibility of a pious fraud; she even reproduces (p. 64) an insinuation from Waldmann that Thérèse's mother manipulated the bleeding. Such base and unfounded charges are indefensible. There is the moral case against deceit; Thérèse is a daily communicant, neither the Neumann household nor the villagers have derived any profit from the visitors, the parish priest, Fr Naber, is a watchful witness. But above all there have been innumerable competent observers. Says Fr Siwek again (p. 90):

The spontaneous beginning of the blood-flow has been well observed by a number of doctors, of whom several used a magnifying glass. The quantity of blood is more than could be produced artifically without leaving notable scars . . . There is no tendency to the production of pus.

It is unnecessary for me to quote numerous medical men, some of them non-Catholics, who have authenticated Thérèse's stigmata and their periodical bleeding. There can be no question of fraud. But are they a miracle? Or to express it more accur-

ately: Is it necessary that God should intervene miraculously to produce stigmata? In this matter the Church shows a prudent reserve. Even in the decree approving the heroic virtues of St Gemma Galgani in 1932 it is stated that no decision is given 'concerning the supernatural character of the charismata of the servant of God'. It is true that no authentic case of natural stigmata has yet been adduced. A case described by Dr Lechler is very doubtful: and Miss Graef was ill-advised in adding an appendix on an alleged case reported in German newspapers. Blisters have been produced by hypnotic suggestion, but not bloody wounds and tears. And vet, given the phenomena of psychical research which we must nowadays admit, it would be rash to assert that stigmata must be purely supernatural in origin. If, however, there be a natural cause, we can exclude two extremes. (1) Auto-suggestion in the sense of will or conscious desire. Many stigmatics have been reluctant recipients: and many great devotees of the Passion have lacked stigmata. (2) Any purely physiological cause. For the stigmata are not just wounds, they have a reference to Christ's wounds, they embody an idea, they convey a message. So most Catholic writers today leave it an open question whether God uses some factor in the psychophysical constitution in the production of stigmata.

In this question Miss Graef appears to me to make two mistakes. She assumes (p. 9) that 'a number of cases are explicable by purely natural causes', while others are purely supernatural. But the same phenomenon cannot be explained naturally in one case and miraculously in another. As a result of this false dichotomy, she adopts the possession of conspicuous virtue as the criterion of the supernatural origin of stigmata in any given case. This is bad theology; for whatever be the explanation of stigmata, they are gratuitous favours which do not presuppose high sanctity in the receiver. Therese Neumann herself was much more accurate when she said: 'These gifts are not for me, they are for others; I could be damned with them if I did not look to myself' (Teodorowicz, p. 274). Let me cite Fr Siwek once more, as he is a critic whose conclusions largely coincide with those of Miss Graef. Here is how his book ends (p. 168):

We have laid aside not only the problem of the personal sanctity of Thérèse Neumann but also that of her mystical

life. Between personal holiness and mystical life on the one hand, and on the other hand the phenomena we have discussed in this book, there exists no necessary or intrinsic relation.

Elsewhere he says (p. 85): 'Personal piety, having no intimate relation with stigmata, cannot serve as a criterion for deciding in any given case whether the stigmata do or do not come from God.' It is a great pity that Miss Graef missed this point. For, having set out to prove that the stigmata and visions of Thérèse Neumann are purely natural phenomena, she finds it necessary to show that Thérèse lacks fundamental virtues and is full of imperfections. This systematic denigration of an inoffensive living person is a grave defect of Miss Graef's book, for it involves a lot of intimate prying, slick insinuations and some really cattish remarks. It is simply absurd for the author to claim that her book is a 'balanced and impartial account', when it is full of irrelevant personal attacks.

Nor do I think that she has dealt fairly with the evidence. For example, she disposes in a few lines (p. 91) of the assertion that Thérèse hears Our Lord speaking Aramaic in her visions of the Passion. She does this by taking one obscure phrase and trying to make out that it is really a corruption of Bavarian dialect. This is not good enough. Why did she not take 'Abbā Shebōk lehōn' - 'Father, forgive them'? Or the unexpected but good Aramaic 'eshe' for 'I thirst' instead of 'sāhēnā'. It is useless to pretend that Fr Wutz, consciously or unconsciously, inspired Thérèse. Fr Robert Leiber, S.I., in a published book, tells us that he became convinced after a long discussion with Wutz. Still more striking is the evidence of the non-Catholic Hans Bauer, professor of Semitic languages in Halle, and of the famous Jewish orientalist. Dr Wesselv of Vienna. Both of these were convinced that Thérèse heard Aramaic, the language spoken by Our Lord. Miss Graef's summary dismissal of this extraordinary problem is quite unjustified. Her bias has made her unfair.

I have left myself no time to deal with Thérèse's inedia, that is, her going without solid food since 1922 or without even liquid food since 1926. As in the case of St Catherine of Siena, this is simply due to her inability to eat. Thérèse herself takes a very sensible view. She says: 'I place no value on eating or not eating, because after all what is of importance? Only to come to

### Appendix 1

the Lord' (Teodorowicz, p. 20). This alleged abstention from food, especially in the case of a person leading an active life, seems to contradict all we know of the laws of energy; were there not similar recorded instances, we should find it hardly credible. Miss Graef, refusing to attribute conscious fraud, suggests (p. 55) that Thérèse helps herself to food in a state of somnambulism, which could hardly be done without the connivance of her family. Alternatively, she suggests that this abstention from nourishment can occur naturally. Once more I find the discussion quite unsatisfactory.

Miss Graef obviously set out to debunk her fellow-Catholic Thérèse Neumann. She reduces as much as she can to hysteria, she pictures Thérèse as a pigheaded and faulty Bavarian peasant, and she tries to evade facts which are inconvenient. Her book may have a succes de scandale. But it is not an objective account of 'the case of Thérèse Neumann'. Nor, even if her theories were true, would it show that God was not using Konnersreuth to

revive devotion to the Crucified.

#### APPENDIX 2

# ALFRED O'RAHILLY'S REPLY TO H. G. WELLS IN THE STANDARD

I2

#### Introduction

There recently appeared in a weekly English paper what purported to be 'a digest of one of the most important books published in our lifetime'.

Ordinarily an Irish Catholic would not pay much attention to this screaming commercial stunt indulged in by an imported paper which also provides illustrated accounts of night clubs<sup>3</sup> and, incongruously and illogically, a life of Our Lord. On this occasion, however, widespread indignation was evoked because the articles, so far from using legitimate arguments, contained offensive guttersnipe references to our religion and to our country. While I agree in general with the editor of the *Picture Post* that a 'reply to Wells's articles under democracy should not be a ban but a reasoned argument', I feel he does not appreciate the difficulty of dealing, not with reasoned arguments on the other side, but with sweeping unproved statements expressed with execrable taste.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of a meeting in Australia, Mr Wells says:

I had denounced the teaching of the Judaeo-Christian mythology as historical fact, in the most emphatic terms. Not a single Christian teacher appeared to reply to that challenge (*The fate of homo sapiens* (1939) 101).

Now supposing that I myself – in a popular lecture, observe, not in a documented book – had emphatically denounced the teaching of the Darwinian mythology as scientific fact, should I then start proclaiming as a grievance the fact that not a single

- 1. The articles, constituting the reply, were introduced under the general title 'Mr Wells and ourselves'.
  - 2. Standard 12 January 1940.
  - 3. I am not concerned here with this aspect of the Picture Post.
- 4. The three articles referred to are in *Picture Post* (4 Nov. 1939, 46-8), *Picture Post* (11 Nov. 40-2), *Picture Post* (9 Dec. 47-9). The book itself is *The fate of bomo sapiens* (1939). Other works of Mr Wells are quoted incidentally to show his background.

### Appendix 2

teacher of biology appeared in reply to my challenge? No; I do not think I would take myself quite so seriously, though I believe I know more of biology than Mr Wells does of theology. The last conclusion Mr Wells would come to about himself is that there are a great number of people who refuse to take him seriously. My own reaction to his book was simply this: a bit of vague biology, some journalistic articles on various countries. a lot of secondhand jeering at religion and various 'rude noises' - to use his own expression (The fate of homo sapiens, 158) about us Catholics. Why on earth should any educated person bother to answer this farrago of ill-mannered sciolism? But the editor of the Picture Post was anxious for a casus belli: so he handed the contents of his wastepaper-basket to Mr Wells and under big headlines published 'H. G. Wells replies to his critics'. And after devouring the authors of these anonymous scraps, Mr Wells starts shouting challenges to Archbishop Richard Downey and Hilaire Belloc. If this kind of thing goes on, it may, in this advertisement-run world, lead many simple people to share Mr Wells's belief in his own importance, omniscience and infallibility. I have therefore thought it worth while to publish a few comments on this unprovoked attack.5

### The Competence of Mr Wells

When not roaring like a lion, Mr Wells displays the ability to coo like a dove:

I am no more responsible for the facts in this book than a telegraph-messenger is for the cable he brings; I have been simply gathering up undisputed statements, and they remain intact, however brilliantly I can be discredited personally (*The fate of homo sapiens*, 320).

This is quite an old controversial dodge of Mr Wells.<sup>6</sup> He is the mouthpiece of science, the impartial collector of facts, the unprejudiced purveyor of undisputed statements, the reporter without bias. This smug self-laudation is really a rather obvious

<sup>5.</sup> No reply was received to an offer to publish my criticism in the pages of the *Picture Post*. See pp. 53-4.

<sup>6. &#</sup>x27;I am a mere reporter of a vast mass of gathered knowledge and lengthened perspectives' (H. G. Wells, Mr. Belloc objects (1926) 51).

attempt to poison the wells especially against us Catholics. It is his favourite alibi. You are not hitting me, he says in effect (Picture Post, 9 Dec., 47), you are attacking Sir James George Frazer – thus neatly daring us to wade through twenty fat volumes. Now unfortunately it is a very difficult – inhuman or almost superhuman – task to catalogue mere facts without personal equation or bias. There is a good deal of truth in George Bernard Shaw's dictum: 'The way to get at the merits of a case is not to listen to the fool who imagines himself impartial, but to get it argued with reckless bias for and against.' However impartial Mr Wells may regard himself in his self-imposed task as 'messenger', he cannot – especially in the case of an author such as Sir J. G. Frazer – disclaim responsibility for the message he extracts from huge specialist compilations. Here is the judgment of a competent critic of The golden bough:<sup>7</sup>

It is perhaps this readiness of Frazer to give up his own theories, to swallow like Kronos his own children, that has contributed to the fact that if his works are universally appreciated as most valuable collections of facts his theories have found relatively few adherents. It is a psychological enigma to me why Frazer, so ready to give up so many theories that he might be styled an absolute sceptic, is so enthusiastic in defending absolute truth in one determined direction . . . His picturesque descriptions are often wonderful. It is clear that by such means he exerts on the general reader the same mighty influence which always proceeds from poetical creation. But of course poetical beauties cannot be for ever substitutes for firm and solid truths; and so I fear that many of Frazer's theories will be found to be nothing but spirited fancies (W. Schmidt, S.J., Anthropos 4 (1912) 259; A. Muntsch, S.J., Evolution and culture (1923) 4).

<sup>7.</sup> Frazer was aware of the tentative nature of many of his theories: 'Hypotheses are necessary but often temporary bridges built to connect isolated facts. If my light bridges should sooner or later break down or be superseded by more solid structures, I hope that my book may still have its utility and its interest as a repertory of facts' (J. G. Frazer, preface to second edition of *The golden bough (the magic art)* i (1913) (3) xix).

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