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Sir Arthur Keith's Brain At Work.

Sir Arthur Keith's creed..... may be summed up as follows: we are all descended from apes, and the sooner we realize this the better. There is no such thing as a human soul, "the soul is but a name for the manifestations of the living brain." There is no future life, no such thing as personal immortality, "the gift of immortality is for the race, not for the individual," and the desire of immortality is a sin of the flesh to be conquered and suppressed. If I add that he admits design to be manifest everywhere and hence that "we must postulate a Lord of the Universe, give Him what shape we will," you have before you the substance of this scientist's creed. It is after all a simple creed: we must postulate a Lord of the Universe whether He exists or not, we are all descended from monkeys, and at death we all perish forever.

As if to imply that there is no room for doubt regarding the articles of this creed, Sir Arthur speaks modestly of some other questions, such as the origin of life, the culmination of life in human form, and the final purpose of man's existence. "The human brain," he says, "is a poor instrument to solve such ultimate problems." It's a pity he didn't advert sooner to the poverty of the human brain. Had he done so, he might possibly have taken Sir James Jeans' advice and left off making pronouncements; he might perhaps have waited to find the "missing link" before assuring us so confidently of our "ape-like ancestors;" and I believe he would have refrained from denying so stoutly the existence of the human soul on the strength of such arguments as he advances against it. Thus - to take one example - he argues that since there is a great resemblance between the brains of apes and those of men, and since there is no reason to believe that apes have souls, therefore there is none for believing that men have. But surely, whatever be the resemblance between the brains of apes and of men - a matter about which I know nothing - there is a reason, and a very cogent one, for looking in man for something not found in the ape. For instance, Sir Arthur will readily admit, I feel sure, that there is a vast difference as to intelligence between, let us say, the cleverest ape and the poorest scientist; and to the majority of mankind this difference appears so vast as to call for in the scientist not merely a more developed brain, but something of a wholly different and superior kind, something which we call a human soul. Yet, marvellous to say, this world of difference, which lies at the heart of the whole matter, is passed over by Sir Arthur in complete silence!

Sir Arthur has the courage, or rather the imprudence, to raise the question as to how this creed of his would work in practice. This is his reply, which I consider a real gem: "If men believe, as I do, that this present earth is the only heaven, they will strive all the more to make heaven of it. To feel that we are mere birds of passage, only temporary probationers, is not conducive to the best conduct." I think the unconscious humor of that reply would be hard to beat. Certainly, if men believed this earth the only heaven, many of them would strive to make the most of it, even if, to use a slang phrase, they "made hell" in their effort. Yes, they would strive, even at their neighbor's expense, and who could blame them? If the poor man believed there is no future life, who could blame him for trying to have the best possible time in this? Who could blame him very much for theft or robbery or adultery, or even murder, in his quest for his earthly heaven, the only heaven he could hope to enjoy? Equally rich is Sir Arthur's implication that the Christian belief that we are all birds of passage, that is to say, destined for a future life of bliss or misery according to our conduct here, is not so conducive to the best conduct as his own creed, which derives us all from apes, and at death condemns us all to nothingness.

-- Cardinal MacRory, "Modern Prophets and the Christian Faith."