

BOOKS

Maori Belief and History

POLYNESIAN MYTHOLOGY, by Sir George Grey, edited by W. W. Bird, illustrated by Russell Clark; Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 17/6.

(Reviewed by Barry Mitcalfe)

THE old leatherbound Grey concealed a number of virtues from a popular audience, but the publishers have groomed this edition for its debut from the glass-case to the bedside table. Russell Clark's dustjacket makes a lively beginning, the spacious layout heightens the sense of quality; merely to look at this book is a pleasure.

Grey's classical style, with its sinewy periods, is in the best tradition of Maori oratory. It is suited not only to the subject, but also to the modern reader. Grey has no need now to apologise for "occasional simplicities and infelicities of expression." Except for the standardising of Grey's Maori spelling and the improvement in order of chapters, the late Mr W. W. Bird's editing is skilfully unobtrusive.

I quibble with Grey's preface and his title, *Polynesian Mythology*. Although he states "that probably to no other

person but myself would many of [the Maoris'] ancient chants and traditions have been imparted by their priests," it was an ex-road works foreman, Elsdon Best, who penetrated beyond the esoteric myths of Grey's volume to the esoteric concept of Io and the abstract beginnings of the earth, from darkness and negation, through stages of will and desire, into substance.

Buck mildly ridicules the school of Te Matorohanga, on whom Best relied, for its inconsistencies and transcriptions from the Christian concept of creation, but he does not question the concept of Io. Io, the father, Io, the fatherless, who could have no atua or image, who had no place in the common genealogy of gods down to men, puts the Rangi and Papa creation-myth beside Adam and his rib-bone—a delightful story, but little else.

Yet with all due disrespect for one's elders, I do not for one moment suggest that Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* is merely a collection of delightful stories—it is more than that, a work of scholarship, a shaft deep into the workings of Maori belief and history. Buck, even Best, followed this shaft and drew much from it. Grey's account of the dissensions in Hawaiki and the

coming of the "fleet" should be read beside Buck's version in *The Coming of the Maori*.

The acid test of Grey's scholarship and veracity is that he chose to publish the first edition in *Maori* at a time when the oral tradition was still strong enough to give the instant lie to any error in substance or in style.

Polynesian Mythology has every right to sit alongside any de luxe edition of Greek myth and legend. In this country, it has prior right.

ASPECTS OF SCIENCE

SCIENCE IN NEW ZEALAND, edited by F. R. Callaghan; A. H. and A. W. Reed, 22/6.


PART of the preparation for the recent well-organised Science Congress in Dunedin was this volume edited by Mr Callaghan and issued gratis to members. Its 272 pages, comprising 23 papers by authorities in the several aspects of fundamental and applied science in the Dominion, give an informative survey of almost the whole field, ranging from anthropology to aerial topdressing and from the medical sciences to oceanography. The general reader should not fear that the papers are too academic; they prove indeed that many specialists can write informatively and even entertainingly for the intelligent layman. Such articles as I. D. Dick's Historical Introduction, J. K. Dixon's on Chemistry, C. M. Smith's Changed and Changing Vegetation, and those on science in agriculture, in the fruit industry, and in the dairy industry by F. C. Callaghan, J. D. Atkinson and W. Ricdet respectively, might well be "required reading" for candidates for Parliament—and for electors. The book is liberally illustrated with maps and diagrams where required, and with 37 good photographs. —L.J.W.

THE ORNAMENT OF ENGLAND

SIR KENELM DIGBY, by R. T. Petersson; Jonathan Cape, English price 25/.

OF the facts, legends and speculations connected with the life of Sir Kenelm Digby there are few which can have eluded Mr Petersson's diligent pursuit, and for that matter few which do not adorn his detailed and well documented story. Conversely, the author's touch is less assured when dealing with matters marginal to his hero's career. Indeed, it appears that for him English history in the 17th century was dominated by spectacular types clothed in dramatic garments and active in grotesque gestures, rather than by human beings with whom one has firm contact. . . . Digby himself is a somewhat tiresome person if taken seriously. The main authority for his exploits is in his own florid writing. His account of his repulsion of the 15 rogues who villainously set upon him, of his rejection of amorous advances whether by the Queen of France or the selected beauties of Turkey, of his casual indulgence in piracy with much the same spirit and result as other men shoot partridges, is in fluent, conventionally romantic style. It all adds up to an odd story unless taken with more humour and scepticism than Mr Petersson allows himself.

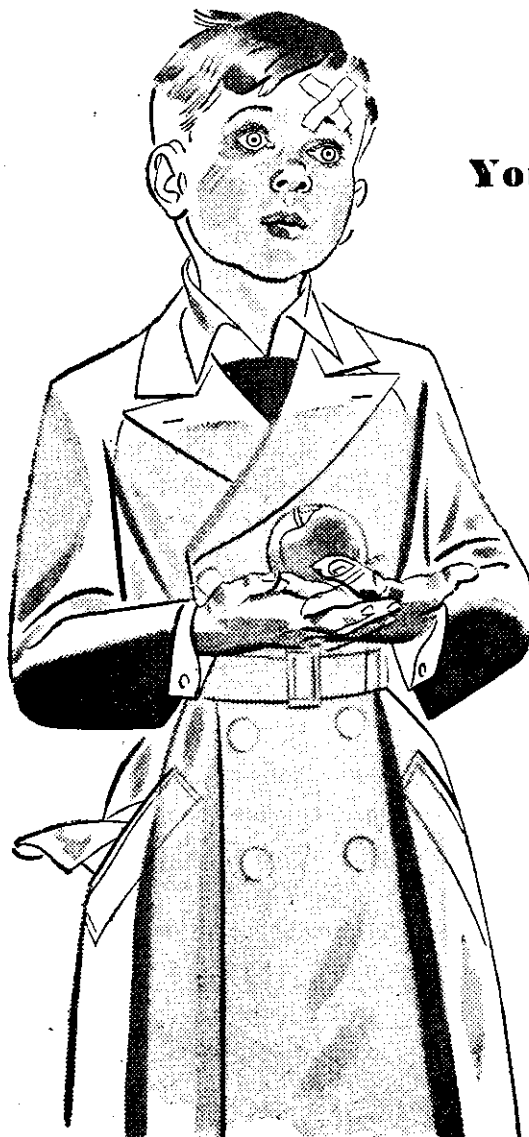
Digby was a 17th century English gentleman, a cultivated dilettante in a rich and mobile society, which was torn by big issues vigorously debated. He was, of course, a Catholic, son of a gunpowder-plot conspirator, and his story throws light on the possibilities open to an educated and co-operative Catholic gentleman. Mr Petersson's competent, indeed meticulous, inquiry does not, however, push on to that critical probing, that sceptical analysis, which



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