

## NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



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## Children of Beelzebub

Beelzebub, Prince of Devils, was originally a god. It has always been the practice of a conquering people to dethrone the gods of the tribes they subdue, and cast them into the pit as demons. When the Children of Israel, fighting for Yaweh, irrupted into Palestine three thousand years ago, they did this to the numerous Baalim they found in possession there, and Baal-Zebub became Beelzebub.

There was nothing to lament about the fall of the Baalim, as the gods of the pagan Semites were generally called. The civilization that produced them was old and very corrupt, and like old and tired civilizations in many places, had forsaken gods who might be loved and worshipped only the gods who kept the stronger hold of fear. Beelzebub was an especially repulsive deity, for he was the Baal of Buzzing Things, that is to say, the God of Flies. No wonder the Israelites, whose whole religious ceremonial centered around keeping themselves and possessions clean, hated him.

The Baalim were killers, demanding bloody sacrifice. What more appropriate acolytes could such a god want than flies? The followers of Yaweh did not know what bacteria are, nor that flies carry them. But their religion taught them that uncleanliness and ungodliness are very much akin, and their common sense made it plain that a god whose pet animals were the offspring of filth was no god at all, and had better get down among the demons where he belonged.

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I think there will probably be a war worse than the Great War within a century, and it is perfectly possible that it may prove fatal to our particular type of civilization. At the present time the main thing science can do is to make them unprofitable for the victors as well as the vanquished.—*J. B. S. Haldane.*

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## Defends Oats Physiology

The paradoxical situation of a Scot denouncing oatmeal as a deficient article of diet and of an American defending "the halesome parritch" has arisen out of the experiments of Prof. Edward Mellanby at the University of Sheffield and of Prof. Harry Steenbock at the University of Wisconsin.

It is agreed among all physiologists that any cereal taken alone is deficient in vitamin D, which prevents the disabling bone disease, rickets, in children and young animals. Some time ago Prof. Mellanby got results with oatmeal fed to puppies that were so much worse than those that followed a diet of other grain products that he assumed the presence of an unknown substance in oats, with action opposite to that of the vitamins, which he named "toxamine."

Now Prof. Steenbock, one of the outstanding authorities on the formation and activities of vitamin D, states that he has very carefully repeated Prof. Mellanby's oatmeal experiments. He asserts that while he finds oats to be somewhat inferior to wheat in the matter of preventing rickets, he can find no evidence that they are as bad as Prof. Mellanby paints them, and that he is not convinced of the existence of the hypothetical toxamine.

While an exclusively cereal diet is practically certain to bring on an attack of rickets, Prof. Steenbock adds that as ordinarily used, with the addition of other foods of high calcium content they are valuable elements in the diet. Cereals themselves may be given an adequate vitamin D content by exposure to ultra-violet rays.

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## ARCHÆOLOGY

## 4000 Year Old House Plan

An architect's drawing, believed to be by far the oldest in the world, discovered in Mesopotamia, is described by Dr. J. Stur, a Viennese engineer. This 4000-year-old equivalent of a blueprint was in a fragmentary condition, but three of the pieces fit accurately together, showing part of the ground plan of what must have been a very large house.

The walls and doorways for 17 rooms are indicated by accurately and cleanly drawn lines, and cuneiform notes give the dimensions. The largest room was 40 by 46 feet, and the scale of the drawing is 1 to 360.

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## The Platypus

(A book devoted entirely to the platypus has been published in Australia.)

The Australian duck-billed old Platypus,  
An amphibious mammal who ought to be sung,  
*Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, monotrematous,  
Digs a nest and lays eggs, but suckles her young.

Papa Platypus tucks back the web on his feet  
To dig in the bank a fifty-foot home. . . .  
Rooms for sleeping and resting—the last one is neat,  
Lined with soft things, the nursery is snug in the loam.

The Platypus swims with the tip of his head  
Sticking up above water, his eyes and his ears  
Closed up in their grooves, but on land it is said  
He walks miles with them open—he sees and he hears.

He can fast, if he must, but the prawns and the worms  
That he digs with his bill and daily requires,  
Weigh half his own weight, a wise student affirms. . . .  
He swims out twice a day and grubs river-bed mires.

The babies can growl and their parents have words  
Including a call-note. No harm is to tell,  
Though they bite with their bills as do many birds  
And the males have sharp spurs on their hind-feet as well.

The zoologist calls him a great living link;  
Prays enforcement of laws to protect his survival. . . .  
Selfish man wants the Platypus fur.  
Does he think  
Of destroying a species, biologic deprival?

—*Gladys Moon Jones.*

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Science always was revolutionary and heterodox: it is its very essence to be so: it ceases to be so only when it is asleep.—*George Sarton.*

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Nothing beautiful can be separate from life and life is that which dies.—*Paul Valery.*

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