

ANNIE OAKLEY

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (Ja. 1:27).

Annie Oakley was born Aug. 13, 1860 in Darke County, Ohio. Her original name was Phoebe Anne Moses. She was the sixth of eight children and endured incredible poverty and hardship for the first years of her life. Her father died when she was only six years old. They had to mortgage the family farm to pay his medical and funeral expenses.

In order to help feed the family Annie took her father's Kentucky rifle, balanced it on the banister of their porch, and shot a squirrel's head off. She was only eight years old. Unfortunately she had loaded the gun with so much powder that she suffered a black eye and broken nose from the experience. She never regretted it, however, for the family now had something to eat. Even though she was only a child, Annie became a professional hunter. She was so successful that she not only fed her family, but sold enough wild game to hotels and restaurants that she paid off the mortgage on the family farm. At the tender age of ten Annie boasted” *“I never had a nickel in my pocket I didn't earn”*.

Since Annie couldn't read her mother sent her to Cincinnati to live with her sister Lydia. Here she was able to go to school. Demonstrating her shooting skills at a local shooting gallery a man asked her if she would like to make some money with her marksmanship. He arranged a shooting match with a traveling marksman named Frank Butler. The purse was \$100 which was more than a year's wages for many. Annie was only 15 years old, 5 feet tall, and weighed a mere 100 lbs. She not only won the money, but also Frank's heart. Later they would be married and travel as a team demonstrating their shooting skills. That's when she adopted the stage name of Annie Oakley.

Soon Annie was recruited by the Sells Brothers Circus where she shot moving targets from the back of a galloping horse. In 1884 she was hired by the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. For her 10 minute routine she wore simple handmade western costumes and shot glass balls thrown into the air while she was riding on the back of a galloping horse. She could also two targets at once with a gun in each hand. Her routine ended by shooting the hat off of her husband's head. Chief Sitting Bull was so enamored by her skills that he adopted her as his daughter and even willed his belongings to her.

The Wild West Show was so popular that in 1887 Queen Victoria requested that they perform at the 50th anniversary of her reign. At the performance, Grand Duke Michael of Russia challenged Annie to a shooting match which she easily won. Prince Edward presented her with a medal of victory and English newspapers called her "Annie Oakley of the magic gun," Thousands of people saw her slice the thin edge of a playing card at 30 paces. Kaiser Wilhelm II had her shoot a cigarette out of his lips. She was death to moving glass balls and by official count shot 4,772 out of 5,000 in a single day.

Annie was described as a religious “fundamentalist” who was Puritanical in her devotion to Christ. She was never involved in a scandal and in addition to her commitment to her work she was constantly concerned for the welfare of others. For example, she provided for the education of at least 18 orphans. She and her husband lived frugally so that they might share their wealth with others. Near the end of her life she melted down all of her gold medals, sold the gold, and donated the money to a children's home. Her grand niece said she spent the last days of her life wrapping gifts which she sent to her many friends around the world.

Annie passed away Nov. 3, 1926. Her husband Frank died 18 days later.

On earth her shooting skills made her famous and hardly anyone knows of her care for orphans. In heaven the reverse is true. In heaven Annie is famous for taking care of orphans and hardly anyone knows or cares about her shooting skills. In the eyes of God pure religion is not about making money and becoming famous, it is about caring for the “least of these” like widows and orphans

