

# FREETHINKER

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## COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE Church of England Board of Education, in association with the National Society, has just set up a 30-member commission to report on "Religious Education in Schools".

The Commission, whose chairman is the Bishop of Durham, had its first meeting on Tuesday, October 3rd. The Education Correspondent of *The Guardian* reported (October 5th) that 'meetings will be held with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Free Churches, and leaders of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society'.

I hope the leaders of the BHA and the NSS find their meeting with the Commission, if it ever takes place, a fruitful one. Personally, I consider the projected meeting little more than a public relations move on the part of the Church of England. Religious indoctrination is becoming unacceptable to more and more people. The compulsory act of worship and religious instruction according to an agreed syllabus is no longer a dead issue. It is live and you can actually see the bugs crawling in it. It stinks from beginning to end. The Agreed Syllabus currently used in Northamptonshire, for example, contains the following question which teachers and particularly head-teachers are supposed to ask themselves in order to check that their school is being directed along the right track. "Is there a free quest for truth based on the certainty that if we seek honestly, wherever it may lead, we shall find God?" (*sic*) p. 5. And of course it is sick to suggest this as a general guide for an educational establishment. It is a disease which, until recently, comparatively few people have been trying to cure.

The Commission has no need to meet leaders of the

British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society to ascertain their views. Admittedly it might be as well for the BHA to write to the Commission and point out that it no longer stands by that disastrous joint production with Christians on *Religious and Moral Education in Schools*, which the Humanist Teachers Association promptly rejected when it was published two years ago. It would be reasonable for the BHA to send the Commission a copy of its new policy statement with a brief covering note to explain that this now represents current BHA policy. Frankly that is all the Commission really needs from either the BHA or the NSS. The views of the BHA are well covered by the policy statement. The views of the NSS are well covered by David Tribe's *Religion and Ethics in Schools*, which the Humanist Teachers Association supported. The utter hypocrisy, dishonesty and unfairness of the RI set-up is also well exposed by Brigid Brophy in the Fabian Society's pamphlet on *Religious Education in State Schools*. If its members have any sense, the Commission can draw the following straightforward conclusions from this already published material without formally meeting Humanist leaders.

Scrap the religious provisions of the 1944 Act. Let religion be accommodated in the curriculum on the same grounds as every other subject—educational grounds. And if the Church of England wants Christian converts and pew fodder, let it attend to the job outside the schools with its army of priestly employees and its motley assortment of church buildings. As far as State schools are concerned, let's get hypocrisy, out, sincerity in, lies out, truth in—in short, let's have some honest education.

The hard fact is that the religious provisions of the 1944 Act are nothing less than a national disgrace. The Church of England can take the same course of action on this issue as it would be well advised to take on several others. Give up its privileges voluntarily or ultimately have them taken from it and suffer the inevitable consequences.

This Commission has been set up because the Church of England realises that the campaign against the religious provisions of the 1944 Act is being intensified and increasingly effective. If the Church of England hopes that it can do a deal with Humanist leaders to salvage what it can of its privileged position, then I hope it will be rebuffed firmly and unequivocally. The compulsory act of worship in State schools must be forbidden and the statutory requirement of religious instruction according to an Agreed Syllabus abolished.

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## HUMANIST WEEK

ALMOST 50 events are planned for the British Humanist Association's first 'Humanist Week', October 21-29. In London, famous speakers are taking part in a programme of meetings centred on Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1, and local Humanist groups all over the country have organised events in and around the 'Week', to make it a truly national humanist happening.

The 'Week' is the crunch of the BHA's campaign year, designated when the decision to forgo charitable tax benefits in favour of freedom to engage in direct political action set the BHA on a sink-or-swim course. So far, substantial advances have buoyed her up—publicity for Humanism on the increase, the establishment of an effective lobbying machine and a fully democratic framework of control by members, the first policy-only conference, the start of a really solidly-grounded campaign to change the law on religion in schools—but only a 6,000 increase in paid-up individual membership can wipe out the annual financial deficit and remove the threat of having to cut back on activities. Of all the work during campaign year, none is more likely to bring home this particular brand of bacon than 'Humanist Week'.

Finance is coming from the campaign funds generously contributed by BHA supporters. Practically £1,000—peanuts by commercial standards, a year's advertising budget for the BHA—is being spent on promotion, using tube posters and press advertising. 500 new members will give a satisfactory return on this expenditure, and hopes are high for more. But you can't break everything down to black and red in a bank account, and one great benefit which the 'Week' should bring—and not only to the BHA—is an increased currency for humanist ideas under the title 'humanist'.

The most common themes for the meetings are 'Humanism', 'Religious and Moral Education', 'Morality Today' and 'Conservation'. Speakers range from local group members themselves to the very famous—London, in particular has an all-star cast. But every meeting needs the support of humanists. If there is one in your area, go along—it won't only do you good!

### In London

IF you are planning to stay in London you should book accommodation early, because the Week clashes with the Motor Show.

Central London meetings are being held at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (nearest tube Holborn). All are free except for the conference, Hampstead meeting and the party, and it is advisable, though not essential, to reserve your seats for October 25 and 28 by writing to Bookings, BHA, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8 (WES 2341).

#### Friday 20

Hampstead humanists have gathered a most effective platform for their meeting **MORALS TODAY** at Old Hampstead Town Hall, Haverstock Hill, NW3 (opposite Belsize Park tube) at 8 p.m.: Kenneth Allsop, Dr Eustace Chesser, Lord Sorenson, and Dee Wells (2/6).

#### Saturday 21

The day conference on **THE MORAL EDUCATION OF THE CHILD IN SCHOOL** (10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.) costs 5/-. Though planned with the idea of being useful for teachers, this is open to anyone with a serious interest in the subject. The nine speakers include Cyril Bibby, Lionel Elvin and James Hemming.

In the evening there is a wine and cheese **PARTY** at 8 o'clock. Admission is by ticket only, costing 10/- each.

#### Sunday 22

**HUMANISM AND THE ARTS** is the title chosen by critic and broadcaster Roger Manvell for his talk at 11 a.m.

Tom Vernon (*BHA Press Officer*)

#### Tuesday 24

South Place Ethical Society have arranged a meeting on **DISARMAMENT** with Miss Myrtle Manning of the Peace Pledge Union, Hugh Manning of the Disarmament Committee of the United Nations Organisation and Nicholas Simms of the Peace Committee of the Society of Friends as speakers. 7.30 p.m.

#### Wednesday 25

**OUR OVER-POPULATION AND VANISHING RESOURCES** is the title of the public meeting on Conservation with Sir Dugald Baird and E. M. Nicholson as speakers. Sir Dugald Baird is well-known for his forthright stand on abortion, and was formerly Regius Professor of Midwifery at Aberdeen University. E. M. Nicholson is one of the country's leading conservationists and was for some years Director-General of Nature Conservancy.

#### Friday 27

West London and London Young Humanists have a joint public meeting at Kensington Public Library at 8 p.m. H. L. Elvin and Kathleen Nott are speakers under the title of **FIND OUT ABOUT HUMANISM!**

#### Saturday 28

**HUMANISM** is the star meeting of the week at 7.30 p.m. with Professor A. J. Ayer, Professor H. Bondi, Lord Francis-Williams, and Mrs Margaret Knight—none need any introduction to humanists.

#### Sunday 29

**THE OPEN SOCIETY** is the subject of H. J. Blackham's talk at 11 a.m.

### Outside London

THERE is news of activities planned in or around Humanist Week from the following groups. In some cases the programme may be liable to alteration.

#### Aberdeen

**SCIENCE AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF CULTURE**—public meeting at the Saltire Room, Provost Ross's House, Shiprow, Aberdeen. Friday, October 27 at 7.30 p.m.—Speaker: Dr. J. S. D. Bacon.

**Brentwood, Cardiff and Torquay**—details from group secretaries.

#### Belfast

**HUMANISM AND NORTHERN IRELAND**—public meeting at War Memorial Building, Waring Street—8 p.m., Wednesday, October 25—speaker John D. Stewart—admission 2/6.

#### Bristol

**HUMANISTS AND PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY**—public meeting at Royal Hotel, College Green, Bristol 1—7.30 p.m., Sunday, October 22—Arthur Palmer, MP.

**INFORMAL MEETING**—with members of the Society of Friends at Folk House, 40 Park Street, Bristol 1—7.30 p.m., Wednesday, October 18.

**ACTION GROUP**—meeting at Kelmescott, 4 Portland Street, Bristol 8—7.30 p.m., Sunday, October 29.

#### Birmingham

**WORLD POPULATION**—public meeting at Dr Johnson House, Colmore Circus, Birmingham 4—Thursday, October 26, at 7.30 p.m.—Prof. J. H. Fremlin, Very Rev. Monsignor John Humphreys.

#### Bolton

Public meeting at Central Library, Bolton—November 9—details from secretary, BHG.

#### Bradford

**RATIONALISM AND HUMANISM**—public meeting at Main Lecture Theatre, Bradford University—Monday, October 23 at 7.30 p.m.—Mr H. J. Blackham.

#### Cambridge

**HUMANISM OR CHRISTIANITY**—public meeting at Mill Lane Lecture Rooms—8.30 p.m., Thursday, October 26—Margaret Knight.

**PREVALENCE OF BROTHERLY LOVE**—public meeting at Mill Lane Lecture Rooms—8.30 p.m., Friday, November 3—Elizabeth Schoenberg.

#### Carlisle

Public meeting at Lecture Theatre, Technical College, Carlisle. Cumberland—Wednesday, October 25.

#### Carshalton

**COFFEE EVENING**—follow up to meeting in Sutton at Red Cross House, Carshalton—Saturday, November 11.

**Chatham**

An introduction to HUMANISM—public meeting at Chatham Social Club, Military Road—Thursday, October 26 at 8 p.m.—Prof. P. H. Nowell-Smith.

**Cheltenham**

HUMANISM FOR INQUIRERS—informal meeting at 51 Shurdington Road, Cheltenham—7.45 p.m., Wednesday, October 25.  
EXPANDING POPULATION—public meeting at Municipal Offices, Cheltenham—7.30 p.m., Friday, October 20—Professor J. H. Fremlin.

**Coventry**

RELIGION AND EDUCATION (religious instruction in schools)—public meeting at Herbert Art Gallery (lecture theatre), Coventry—7.45 p.m., Friday, November 3—Renee Short, MP.

**Croydon**

HUMANISM EXPLAINED—public meeting in Maple Room, Fairfield Halls, Croydon—8 p.m., October 26—Dr Peter Draper

**Edinburgh**

HUMANISM IN THE SPACE-AGE—speaker: Dr John Milburn. Public meeting at Riddle's Court, The Lawnmarket, Edinburgh at 7.30 p.m.

**Guildford**

HUMANISM & MEDIA OF COMMUNICATIONS—public meeting at Guildford House, North Street, on Wednesday, October 25 at 8 p.m.—Lord Francis-Williams.

THE FUTURE OF MARRIAGE—public meeting at Guildford House, North Street, on Thursday, October 26 at 8 p.m.—James Hemming.

**Hereford**

WHAT IS HUMANISM?—public meeting at Commercial Hotel, Hereford—7.30 p.m., Thursday, October 26—details from Secretary, HHG.

**Leicester**

APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA—public meeting and appeal at Vaughan College, Leicester—Monday October 23 at 7.45 p.m.—Mr L. Katzen.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION—public debate at Vaughan College, Leicester—Thursday, October 26 at 7.45 p.m.—Derek Wright, Wilfred Flemming.

**London Young Humanists**

Public meeting at Kensington Library—8 p.m., Friday, October 27—speakers: H. L. Elvin, Kathleen Nott—joint meeting with West London Humanists. Regular meeting at 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8—7 p.m., Sunday, October 15—details from Secretary, LYH.

**Lincolnshire**

CENSORSHIP—speaker Mr C. D. Ross, Public meeting at Albion Hotel, Wragby, Lincs. at 7.30 p.m., Thursday, October 19.

**Manchester**

THIS IS HUMANISM—Public meeting at Geographical Hall, Parsonage Gardens, Manchester 3—7 p.m., Sunday, October 29—speakers: Mr Peter Jackson, MP, Mr B. J. Barnett.

Regular group meetings at 36 George Street, Manchester 1—Wednesday, October 11 and Wednesday, November 8—details from Secretary, MHG.

**Merseyside**

Public meeting—WHAT HUMANISTS BELIEVE—7.30 p.m., Thursday, October 26—B. J. Barnett, David Collis, Prof. H. Fish, A. C. Mason—Bluecoat Hall.

**Newcastle-upon-Tyne**

Public meetings at Technical College, Monday, October 23; The University (Elvet River Block), Durham City, Thursday, October 26; Marine and Technical College, South Shields, Friday, October 27; Lecture Hall, News Theatre, Pilgrim Street, Newcastle—details from Secretary, THS.

Additional public meetings at West Park College of Further Education, St George's Way, Sunderland—Monday, October 23—Prof. G. Neil Jenkins, Roy Cairncross, F. R. Griffin.

Social Service Centre, Beach Avenue, Whitley Bay—Tuesday, October 24—Roy Cairncross, F. R. Griffin—above speakers also scheduled for Durham, South Shields and Newcastle.

**Portsmouth**

DOES HUMANISM PROVIDE A SOUNDER BASIS FOR MORALITY THAN RELIGION?—teach-in, with the Portsmouth Council of Churches at Portsmouth Guildhall, Portsmouth. Details from Secretary, PHG.

**Reading**

FROM GODS TO TECHNOLOGY—public meeting at St. Andrew's Meeting Hall, Acocia Road, Redlands Road, Reading—8 p.m., Wednesday, October 25—Mrs M. Laws-Smith—joint meeting with Reading University Humanist Society.

**Redbridge**

SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION—public meeting at Gants Hill Library, Ilford, at 8.15 p.m., Monday October 23. Details from Secretary, RHG.

**Richmond**

FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMANISM—public meeting at Council of Social Service Bureau, Richmond. Tuesday, October 24 at 8 p.m.—Speaker: Karl Hyde.

**St Annes-on-Sea**

CREATIVE HUMANISM—public meeting at Fern Lea Hotel, St Annes-on-Sea—Wednesday, October 25 at 7.45 p.m.—Jim McCarthy.

**Sheffield**

THE CASE FOR HUMANISM—public meeting at Friends Meeting House, Sheffield—8 p.m., Friday, November 3—Peter Jackson, MP.

**Southend**

MAKING IT GOOD TO BE ALIVE: A SYMPOSIUM—public meeting at Leigh Community Centre, Elm Road, Leigh—8 p.m., Saturday, October 28—Councillor M. Bidmead, Col. J. G. Runciman—details from Secretary, SHG.

**Southgate**

MORALS—WITHOUT RELIGION—public meeting of new Enfield and Barnet group at Southgate Technical College, N14, on Friday, October 27 at 8 p.m.

**Sutton**

MORAL EDUCATION—public meeting at Sutton Public Hall, Sutton—Monday, October 23 at 7.30 p.m.—Richard Sharples, MP, John Dowsett.

**Tunbridge Wells**

HUMANISM AND 20th CENTURY PESSIMISM—public meeting at Centre for Education and Art, Monson Road, 7.30 p.m. Saturday, October 29—Dr John Lewis.

**West London**

LIVING TOGETHER HAPPILY WITHOUT GOD—public meeting at Kensington Public Library—8 p.m., Friday, October 27—H. K. Elvin, Kathleen Nott—held in association with London Young Humanists. Social to welcome new members—13 Prince of Wales Terrace, W8, 7.45 p.m., Thursday, November 9.

**York**

TEACH-IN ON MORALITY—Wednesday, October 25. Speakers: William Deedes, MP; Prof. Ronald Fletcher; Dr David Kerr, MP; Lord Sorensen; Dr John Wren-Lewis.

CONWAY HALL, Red Lion Square, London, WC1

## SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION PUBLIC MEETINGS

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3rd

### MICHAEL DUANE

(College of Education lecturer; former Headmaster of Risinghill School)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17th

### DIANE MUNDAY

(Member of the BHA Executive Committee)

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1st

### MAURICE HILL

(Author "Moral Education in Secondary Schools—A Suggested Syllabus")

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15th

### DAVID TRIBE

President: National Secular Society  
Author "Religion and Ethics in Schools")

MEETINGS COMMENCE at 7.30 p.m.

Organised by the NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
103 Borough High Street, London, SE1  
Telephone: 01-407 2717

## THE GOSPEL OF FREETHOUGHT

G. W. Foote

[G. W. Foote was founder and first editor of the *FREE-THINKER*. Although the following was written over 70 years ago and certain parts must be considered in the context of that period, it is noteworthy that much of what Foote then wrote is now as relevant and important as ever. I offer it to *Humanist Week* as the living contribution of a brave Freethinker who did much to help create the climate of opinion so favourable to the Humanist movement today. The ill-informed should take note.—EDITOR.]

CHRISTIANS are perpetually crying that we destroy and never build up. Nothing could be more false, for all negation has a positive side, and we cannot deny error without affirming truth. But even if it were true, it would not lessen the value of our work. You must clear the ground before you can build, and plough before you sow. Splendour gives no strength to an edifice whose foundations are treacherous, nor can a harvest be reaped from fields unprepared for the seed.

Freethought is, in this respect, like a skilful physician, whose function it is to expel disease and leave the patient sound and well. No sick man claims that the doctor shall supply him with something in place of his malady. It is enough that the enemy of his health is driven out. He is then in a position to act for himself. He has legs to walk with, a brain to devise, and hands to execute his will. What more does he need? What more can he ask without declaring himself a weakling or a fool? So it is with superstition, the deadliest disease of the mind. Freethought casts it out, with its blindness and its terrors, and leaves the mind clear and free. All nature is then before us to study and enjoy. Truth shines on us with celestial light, Goodness smiles on our best endeavours, and Beauty thrills our senses and kindles our imagination with the subtle magic of her charms.

What a boon it is to think freely, to let the intellect dart out in quest of truth at every point of the compass, to feel the delight of the chase and the gladness of capture! What a noble privilege to pour treasures of knowledge into the alembic of the brain, and separate the gold from the dross!

The Freethinker takes nothing on trust, if he can help it; he dissects, analyses, and proves everything. Does this make him a barren sceptic? Not so. What he discards he knows to be worthless, and he also knows the value of what he prizes. If one sweet vision turns out a mirage, how does it lessen our enjoyment at the true oasis, or shake our certitude of water and shade under the palm-trees by the well?

The masses of men do not think freely. They scarcely think at all out of their round of business. They are trained not to think. From the cradle to the grave orthodoxy has them in its clutches. Their religion is settled by priests, and their political and social institutions by custom. They look askance at the man who dares to question what is established, not reflecting that all orthodoxies were once heterodox, that without innovation there could never have been any progress, and that if inquisitive fellows had not gone prying about in forbidden quarters ages ago, the world would still be peopled by savages dressed in nakedness, war-paint, and feathers. The mental stultification which begins in youth reaches ossification as men grow older. Lack of thought ends in incapacity to think.

Real Freethought is impossible without education. The

mind cannot operate without means or construct without materials. Theology opposes education: Freethought supports it. The poor as well as the rich should share in its blessings. Education is a social capital which should be supplied to all. It enriches and expands. It not only furnishes the mind, but strengthens its faculties. Knowledge is power. A race of giants could not level the Alps; but ordinary men, equipped with science, bore through their base, and make easy channels for the intercourse of divided nations.

Growth comes with use, and power with exercise. Education makes both possible. It puts the means of salvation at the service of all, and prevents the faculties from moving about *in vacuo*, and finally standing still from sheer hopelessness. The educated man has a whole magazine of appliances at his command, and his intellect is trained in using them, while the uneducated man has nothing but his strength, and his training is limited to its use.

Freethought demands education for all. It claims a mental inheritance for every child born into the world. Superstition demands ignorance, stupidity, and degradation. Wherever the schoolmaster is busy, Freethought prospers; where he is not found, superstition reigns supreme and levels the people in the dust.

Free speech and Freethought go together. If one is hampered the other languishes. What is the use of thinking if I may not express my thought? We claim equal liberty for all. The priest shall say what he believes and so shall the sceptic. No law shall protect the one and disfranchise the other. If any man disapproves what I say, he need not hear me a second time. What more does he require? Let him listen to what he likes, and leave others to do the same. Let us have justice and fair play all round.

Freethought is not only useful but laudable. It involves labour and trouble. Ours is not a gospel for those who love the soft pillow of faith. The Freethinker does not let his ship rot away in harbour; he spreads his canvas and sails the seas of thought. What though tempests beat and billows roar? He is undaunted, and leaves the avoidance of danger to the sluggard and the slave. He will not pay their price for ease and safety. Away he sails with Vigilance at the prow and Wisdom at the helm. He not only traverses the ocean highways, but skirts unmapped coasts and ventures on uncharted seas. He gathers spoils in every zone, and returns with a rich freight that compensates for all hazards. Some day or other, you say, he will be shipwrecked and lost. Perhaps. All things end somehow. But if he goes down he will die like a man and not like a coward, and have for his requiem the psalm of the tempest and the anthem of the waves.

Doubt is the beginning of wisdom. It means caution, independence, honesty and veracity. Faith means negligence, serfdom, insincerity and deception. The man who never doubts never thinks. He is like a straw in the wind or a waif on the sea. He is one of the helpless, docile, unquestioning millions, who keep the world in a state of stagnation, and serve as a fulcrum for the lever of despotism. The stupidity of the people, says Whitman, is always inviting the insolence of power.

Buckle has well said that scepticism is "the necessary antecedent of all progress". Without it we should still be groping in the night of the Dark Ages. The very foundations of modern science and philosophy were laid on

ground which was wrested from the Church, and every stone was cemented with the blood of martyrs. As the edifice arose the sharpshooters of faith attacked the builders at every point, and they still continue their old practice, although their missiles can hardly reach the towering heights where their enemies are now at work.

Astronomy was opposed by the Church because it unsettled old notions of the earth being the centre of the universe, and the sun, moon, and stars mere lights stuck in the solid firmament, and worked to and fro like sliding panels. Did not the Bible say that General Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and how could this have happened unless it moved round the earth? And was not the earth certainly flat, as millions of flats believed it to be? The Catholic Inquisition forced Galileo to recant, and Protestant Luther called Copernicus "an old fool".

Chemistry was opposed as an impious prying into the secrets of God. It was put in the same class with sorcery and witchcraft, and punished in the same way. The early chemists were regarded as agents of the Devil, and their successors are still regarded as "uncanny" in the more ignorant parts of Christendom. Roger Bacon was persecuted by his brother monks; his testing fire was thought to have come from the pit, and the explosion of his gunpowder was the Devil vanishing in smoke and smell.

Physiology and Medicine were opposed on similar grounds. We were all fearfully and wonderfully made, and the less the mystery was looked into the better. Disease was sent by God for his own wise ends, and to resist it was as bad as blasphemy. Every discovery and every reform was decried as impious.

Geology was opposed because it discredited Moses, as though that famous old Jew had watched the deposit of every stratum of the earth's crust. It was even said that fossils had been put underground by God to puzzle the wiseacres, and that the Devil had carried shells to the hill-tops for the purpose of deluding men to infidelity and perdition. Geologists were anathematised from the pulpits and railed at by tub-thumpers. They were obliged to feel their way and go slowly. Sir Charles Lyell had to keep back his strongest conclusions for at least a quarter of a century, and could not say all he thought until his head was whitened by old age and he looked into the face of Death.

Biology was opposed tooth and nail as the worst of all infidelity. It exposed Genesis and put Moses out of court. It destroyed all special creation, showed man's kinship with other forms of life, reduced Adam and Eve to myths, and exploded the doctrine of the Fall. Darwin was for years treated as Antichrist, and Huxley as the great beast. All that is being changed, thanks to the sceptical spirit. Darwin's corpse is buried in Westminster Abbey, but his ideas are undermining all the churches and crumbling them into dust.

The gospel of Freethought brands persecution as the worst crime against humanity. It stifles the spirit of progress and strangles its pioneers. It eliminates the brave, the adventurous and the aspiring, and leaves only the timid, the sluggish and the grovelling. It removes the lofty and spares the low. It levels all the hills of thought and makes an intellectual flatness. It drenches all the paths of freedom with blood and tears, and makes earth the vestibule of hell.

Persecution is the right arm of priestcraft. The black militia of theology are the sworn foes of Freethought. They represent it as the sin against the Holy Ghost, for which there is no forgiveness in this world or the next. When they speak of the Holy Ghost they mean themselves. Freethought is a crime against *them*. It strips off the mystery

that invests their craft, and shows them as they really are, a horde of bandits who levy blackmail on honest industry, and preach a despot in heaven in order to maintain their own tyranny on earth.

The gospel of Freethought would destroy all priesthoods. Every man should be his own priest. If a professional soul-doctor gives you wrong advice and leads you to ruin, he will not be damned for you. He will see you so first. We must take all responsibility, and we should also take the power. Instead of putting our thinking out, as we put our washing, let us do it at home. No man can do another's thinking for him. What is thought in the originator is only acquiescence in the man who takes it at secondhand.

If we do our own thinking in religion we shall do it in everything else. We reject authority and act for ourselves. Spiritual and temporal power are brought under the same rule. They must justify themselves or go. The Freethinker is thus a politician and a social reformer. What a Christian *may* be he *must* be. Freethinkers are naturally Radicals. They are almost to a man on the side of justice, freedom and progress. The Tories know this, and hence they seek to suppress us by the violence of unjust law. They see that we are a growing danger to every kind of privilege, a menace to all the idle classes who live in luxury on the sweat and labour of others—the devouring drones who live on the working bees.

The gospel of Freethought teaches us to distinguish between the knowable and the unknowable. We cannot fathom the infinite "mystery of the universe" with our finite plummet, nor see aught behind the veil of death. Here is our appointed province:

"This world which is the world  
Of all of us, and where in the end  
We find our happiness or not at all."

**Let us make the best of this world and take our chance of any other. If there is a heaven, we dare say it will hold all honest men. If it will not, those who go elsewhere will at least be in good company.**

**Our salvation is here and now. It is certain and not contingent. We need not die before we realise it. Ours is a gospel, and the only gospel, for this side of the grave. The promises of theology cannot be made good till after death; ours are all redeemable in this life.**

We ask men to acknowledge realities and dismiss fictions. When you have sifted all the learned sermons ever preached, you will find very little good grain. Theology deals with dreams and phantasies and gives no guidance to practical men. The whole truth of life may be summed up in a few words. Happiness is the only good, suffering the only evil, and selfishness the only sin. And the whole duty of man may be expressed in one sentence, slightly altered from Voltaire—Learn what is true in order to do what is right. If a man can tell you anything about these matters, listen to him; if not, turn a deaf ear and let him preach to the wind.

The only noble things in this world are great hearts and great brains. There is no virtue in a starveling piety which turns all beauty into ugliness and shrivels up every natural affection. Let the heart beat high with courage and enterprise, and throb with warm passion. Let the brain be an active engine of thought, imagination and will. The gospel of sorrow has had its day; the time has come for the gospel of gladness. Let us live out our lives to the full, radiating joy on all in our own circle, and diffusing happiness through the grander circle of humanity, until at last we retire from the banquet of life, as others have done before us, and sink in eternal repose.

## RIGHTS AND DUTIES: IV

A. C. Thompson

### *Further Specific Rights*

THE RIGHT to possess property is considered by many to be a natural human right, although doctrines and political systems such as Communism limit or deny this right. Actually, there appears to be no justification for a belief in a natural right to property in land. Ideas of private property in land, and of national territory, first came to humanity with the domestication of plants. The pursuit of agriculture induced man to maintain a fixed abode instead of wandering in search of new pastures as nomadic people must do who domesticate animals but no plants. People who grow crops must remain on the soil they till to reap the harvest; there is no longer need to wander and they thereby avoid conflict with other tribes who resent encroachment on their land. Thus, the land cultivated by a society is its territory; that tilled by an individual is his property. However, it cannot be asserted that cultivating land confers the right to possess it, because one would need to possess it before having the right to cultivate it. Whence, then, comes the right to possess it? Before a society settled upon and cultivated a territory, it may have had no better right to do so than any other persons, but after it has done so it has a better right to occupy the land than anyone else. The right of a society to its territory is therefore not an absolute but a relative right; it is simply better than that of others. Africans, for example, who permit white settlers to establish themselves on their lands may be construed as losing their former right to the occupied territory. Then the right of an individual to own a portion of the territory is a right conferred by society and not a natural right.

Obviously a human being, in order to live on the earth, needs to occupy a portion of its surface; one cannot live in the air without touching the ground. But society permits one to designate as his a larger portion of the earth's surface than he can actually occupy, to remain his even when he leaves it to return to it later. By regarding that land as his own, he believes he has a right to exclude all other persons from that portion of the earth's surface, and to make whatever use of it he wishes whether such use contributes to the survival of society, to his own survival, or merely to his own pleasure, or whether he makes no use of it at all. Private ownership of land, then, is an expedient, a social custom which has been found practical; it is a matter of custom rather than of right. One may own land because his peers do, because that is the way we do things. Whatever right there is to property in land is a contingent rather than a natural one; it is bestowed by society and the land one thus owns is part of the territory that the society claims a right to occupy. Since this is a contingent right, it could be rescinded by society if, for justice's sake, all landowners are treated equitably. As population grows and a territory must support more people, the interest of society in the land and its produce must predominate, and there is less justification for private property in land, at least in large tracts which are not devoted to a social purpose. Whether the custom of private ownership should be continued or altered becomes a matter of expediency rather than of morality: if the land can sustain society better in private hands, then private ownership will continue, subject to regulation by society; if society as a whole can better preserve itself with public ownership of all land, the custom of private property in land may be rescinded. But one must still own the result of his labour on the land or be entitled to just compensa-

tion for it. The original tiller of the ground may not have owned it before he tilled it, and may have asserted a claim to it for tilling it; he may not, strictly speaking, have a natural right to own the ground, but he has a better right to the product of his toil than has anyone else. The absence of natural right to own portions of the earth is seen more clearly when one inquires, who owns parts of the sea, or what is in it?

There can be no justification for belief in a natural right to property in other things than land in excess of what is actually needed for comfortable survival. Man needs food in order to survive, and his peculiar nature is such that he requires implements, shelter and, in most cases, clothing. There is a strong tendency in human beings to multiply possession of money and other property far in excess of actual requirement—to be glutted with possessions. Custom has permitted such gluttony because of lack of a yardstick or standard for deciding reasonable compensation or income for various services to society and the only rule, in consequence, has been that of letting each get all he can. To some extent this rule is reasonable, even salutary, for it provides incentive to effort and achievement; carried to excess, it is socially harmful.

If a person has not a natural right to possess property in excess of his needs for survival, he also has not a natural right to inherit in excess of such needs. The right of a child to inherit property is, on the one hand, his right to be provided for, and on the other, the right of a parent or other person to bequeath. A minor child, unable to support himself, must have a right to claim from his parents' effects enough to provide the necessities of life, however the parent may have willed otherwise; beyond this, a child has no more natural right to inherit than has a person not related by descent or marriage. The child contributes to society nothing whatever in virtue of which he earns a right to an inheritance; his right to possess it is wholly his right of survival as a member of society plus the right of someone who has actually earned the property to dispose of it as he wishes, in this case to order, during his lifetime, that it be passed on to his descendants or other named heirs after his death. The right to bequeath is also a contingent one, for upon death one ceases to be a member of society, one ceases to contribute to the survival of society, one ceases to perform duties to other members of society, and one ceases therefore to hold rights against society. It is therefore by custom rather than right that society respects a bequest after the death of the testator. Generally, contingent rights are the result of arrangements made by society for its survival, and are just rather than natural rights; one has the right because his peers have it.

Does one have a natural right to mate and beget children? Such a right is denied by those who would prevent the parenthood of such persons as congenital idiots, other mentally subnormal persons, haemophiliacs, even of criminals and paupers. The right to procreate must be regarded as a dependent right, dependent on the rights of the child. Society must provide for the proper rearing of its children. Institutionalised persons can thereby be deprived of the opportunity of reproducing. Beyond this, society may not deny to any of its members the right to mate and to reproduce, which are natural rights, not conferred by society and not forfeited by membership in society. Information on methods of contraception may be made available, instruction may be given in birth control, but the choice of

whether or not to employ such means is the right of the spouses. The state may not sterilise or otherwise mutilate innocent persons against their wills. Natural selection may tend to eliminate unfit persons for reproduction by causing them to be rejected for sexual partners. The state regulates marriage only for the purpose of fixing responsibility of parents for their children, not for making people 'moral'. Society does have a right to knowledge of the potential parents of its new members and to require that their prospective sexual union be officially recorded. Society cannot tolerate casual, irresponsible sexual intercourse.

Since the right of mating is a natural one, no person can have a right to require another permanently to disavow his right to reproduce. There is nothing which can give to society, much less to an organisation or an individual within society, a right to require another either to make or to adhere to a life-long vow of celibacy either to the organisation or individual, or to a god; and one who has in the past made such a vow is not bound to observe it if and when a possible sex-partner appears whom he wishes legally to marry. Every Catholic priest, bishop, cardinal or pope, has a legitimate right to disregard any vow of celibacy he may once have made, and to marry without securing or seeking any permission whatever from the authorities of his church.

Every member of society should have a right to a good standing and to a reputation for a good character, until it is proved otherwise against him. The right to integrity and to the respect of fellow-men is a safeguard of other social rights. Flagrant violation of this right is common in employment procedures. Personnel officers and departments of employing organisations often arrogate to themselves the right to commit slander and libel against former employees, through the custom among prospective employers of asking for references from former employers. The applicant has usually no alternative but to account completely for his past earning time and thus to name his past employers. These past employers and their officers reply 'in confidence' which means, in secrecy. This secrecy which they maintain among themselves prevents the applicant from knowing what is said or written about him. Personnel officers thus place themselves in a position in which they can with more or less impunity injure the good names of other people and deprive them of a chance to earn a livelihood. Here exists unjust deprivation of the right of a member of society to good reputation and good standing in society.

Has society a right to require its members to go to war, and thus to imperil their lives and the lives of others, for the presumed protection of the society? It may be argued that if the right to life is inalienable, society has not the right to ask anyone to sacrifice or hazard it. First, a society has not the right to direct its members to try to kill members of another society, or to deprive them of any of their freedom unless those others actually threaten to destroy the society or the people in it; an aggressive war upon a peaceful people is undeniably evil. If a society is actually threatened with destruction, and if all peaceful means of self-defence are unavailing, then in asking a man to fight in a war it is not really asking him to die; rather, it is asking him to avoid death, if he can, and return victorious. True, it is asking him to place his life in jeopardy, but it assumes, in a just war, that the lives of all members of society including his own are already in jeopardy. Society has not the right to require any of its members to perform an act which will result in certain death, but a person may volunteer for such a task if it is reasonably certain that his heroism will save the lives of others.

The duty of the individual to pay taxes to society is asserted on the ground that an individual's right to own any property in excess of the necessities of life and comfort is a contingent one rather than a natural one. It is the right of society to rescind the right of individuals to own property that is the basis and justification of taxation. Society, or the state, assumes the right to require from its members, on an equitable basis with no privileged class exempt, part of their property which it needs for the common expense.

Do different classes of people in a society have different specific rights? Do children, for example, have different rights from adults? A child must have the same natural rights as adults. A child surely has the right to life, even though it has been thought for thousands of years by religious people that a parent has a right to kill a child and to use the dead body as a sacrifice or gift to a tribal god for the sake of advancing his own fortunes. A child has the right to mate and to beget children even though he is unable to exercise this right; it would be evil to deprive him of this right, as by sterilisation in childhood, as eunuchs were produced in the Middle Ages for religious and other purposes. For centuries women have been deprived of rights equal to those of men, even of such rights as are totally unrelated to sexual difference. Throughout all of recorded history, there have existed privileged classes which have been granted special rights.

Do animals have rights? It is customary to accord appropriate rights to animals which are deemed in some way to constitute part of human society—to domesticated animals, to birds which add pleasure to the garden, to wildlife which increases the interest of countryside and woodland. Animals which annoy are called pests or vermin and elaborate efforts are made to exterminate them. It is evident that whatever rights men grant to animals accord with the survival of human society. The question of the rights of animals is relevant to that of vivisection: should animals be used for scientific research and for practice in surgery? Undoubtedly, the survival of society and of the individuals who compose it is the prime consideration; if there is reasonable expectation that by experimenting on animals human knowledge can be advanced and a better understanding can be gained of the ways by which human life can be prolonged, then the scientist has a right, nay a duty, to use animals as a means of finding solutions to problems. The young surgeon beginning to perform operations, cutting into the living bodies of other people is not to gain his knowledge and skill by experimenting on those people when it was possible for him to have gained previous practice on animals. It is understood that precautions are taken to prevent the animals from suffering, but even if they do suffer, where the choice lies between the sufferings of animals and of men, the moral decision is clear: man's moral duty is towards his own species rather than towards another. Those who declare that it is wrong to kill or injure animals, even when clearly to human benefit, base their case upon an ethical principle of Intuitionism founded on sympathy: they place themselves in imagination in the animal's place, endeavour to imagine how the animal must feel and decide that they would not like to undergo such experience. This feeling of course exerts no moral persuasion on one who rejects Intuitionism as a principle or source of ethics. This same argument of intuitive sympathy, as already seen, is used to justify abortion, for it is asserted that since an unborn child has, as far as is known, no sensations, one need have no sympathy for it.

(Concluded)

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Editor: DAVID COLLIS

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Items for insertion in this column must reach THE FREETHINKER office at least ten days before the date of publication.

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High Street, London, S.E.1. Telephone HOP 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service. For information or catalogue send 6d stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

### OUTDOOR

Edinburgh Branch NSS (The Mound)—Sunday afternoon and evening: Messrs. CRONAN, MCRAE and MURRAY.

Manchester Branch NSS, Platt Fields, Sunday afternoon, 3 p.m.; Car Park, Victoria Street, Sunday evenings, 8 p.m.

Merseyside Branch NSS (Pierhead)—Meetings: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.; Sundays, 3 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

Nottingham Branch NSS (Old Market Square), every Friday, 1 p.m.: T. M. MOSLEY.

### INDOOR

Abortion Law Reform Association (Kensington Central Library, London, W8), Saturday, October 21st, 7 p.m.: Public Meeting. Speakers include Professor Glanville Williams. Chair: Lord Soper.

Bristol Humanist Group (Royal Hotel, Bristol), Sunday, October 22nd, 7.30 p.m.: ARTHUR PALMER, MP, "Humanists and Public Responsibility".

Leicester Secular Society (Secular Hall, 75 Humberstone Gate), Sunday, October 22nd, 6.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Humanism, Christianity and Sex".

Merseyside Humanist Group (Bluecoat Hall, Bluecoat Chambers, Liverpool), Thursday, October 26th, 7.30 p.m.: Professor FRANK FISH, B. J. BARNETT, DAVID COLLIS, A. C. MASON, "What Humanists Believe".

Redbridge Humanist Association (Gants Hill Library, Cranbrook Road, Ilford, Essex). Various speakers discuss Social and Moral Education.

South Place Ethical Society (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1), Sunday, October 22nd, 11 a.m.: ROGER MANWELL, "Humanism and the Arts"; Tuesday, October 24th, 7.45 p.m.: Teach-In on Disarmament. Speakers: NICHOLAS SIMMS (Quaker Peace Committee), MYRTLE SOLOMAN (Peace Pledge Union), HUGH HANNING (UNA Disarmament Committee). South Place Sunday Concerts (Conway Hall, London), Sunday, October 22nd, 6.30 p.m. Admission 4/-. Jack Brymer, Anthony Pini, Wilfred Parry. Brahms programme.

Humanist Week October 21st-29th. Details of events in London and the provinces obtainable from the British Humanist Association, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London, W8 (Telephone: Western 2341).

University of Birmingham, Tuesday, October 24th, 7.30 p.m.: DAVID TRIBE, "Drugs and Addiction".

West Ham Branch NSS (Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre, Wanstead, London, E11). Meetings at 8 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month.

## To Humanist Parents and those who agree with them . . .

KIT MOUAT is now distributing (on behalf of the NSS) forms on which any parents, who are concerned for the well-being, education, or honesty of their children as a result of compulsory worship and RI, can fill in. This is especially useful perhaps for parents who have hesitated to make any complaints to the school concerned or to local authorities for fear of adding to the problems that face their children. Wherever it is wished, names will be treated as strictly confidential. Please write and say how many forms you can use, and distribute to your friends, family, etc., to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex. We are anxious to get together a file of genuine cases of victimisation or unhappiness that result from the religious clauses in the 1944 Education Act. Now is your chance **TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT . . .**

## LETTERS

### Religion in Schools

YOUR LEADING ARTICLE last week on the BBC programme "Religion in Schools" rightly pointed out the handicap to the Humanist movement which the Christian-Humanist document on *Religious and Moral Education* has turned out to be.

The Humanist Teachers' Association, which is of course concerned about such matters, criticised the document when it appeared and refused to adopt it, recommending instead David Tribe's *Religion and Ethics in Schools*.

If the HTA had been consulted about this programme, teachers—and pupils—might have been able to give some concrete and valid evidence. We should also have been able to expose Mr P. R. May's surveys of public opinion (of which our advocate on the programme had never heard) as a mixture of misleading questions and false conclusions.

Perhaps we can learn from this not to make compromising concessions to Christians, who are never slow to take advantage.

MAURICE HILL.

## OBITUARIES

MADAME Amy Capenerhurst, a prominent figure in Leicester music circles, has died. She was a singer, violinist, pianist and teacher. Her pupils won over 400 prizes at festivals. Madame Capenerhurst and her husband were members of Leicester Secular Society for many years.

MR Harry Baker, who died recently at the age of 64, was a well-known and respected figure in the Tring (Hertfordshire) area. He was a long-standing member of the National Secular Society. Mr Baker is survived by his wife Elizabeth who is also an NSS member. The general secretary of the Society (Mr W. McIlroy) conducted the committal ceremony at West Hertfordshire Crematorium, Garston, on September 29th.