

# Freethinker

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## THREE IN ONE—OR MORE HASTE LESS SPEED

"THERE MUST now be a period of reflection before we do anything." Thus spoke the Bishop of London, Dr Stopford, the Anglican Chairman of the Unity Commission, after the Anglican convocation had failed to sanction stage one of the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme. Dr Stopford's remark amply sums up the degree of anti-climax induced by the finale to the recent build-up of ecumenical activity.

The most striking thing about the situation at the moment is the fact that no one seems to know what to do next and nothing more concrete than Dr Stopford's recommendation has so far come to light. It seems that the Anglicans can do little to cover up the public embarrassment of their failure to agree, set against the Methodist success.



Doubtless time will be taken for 'reflection', a certain amount of lobbying will be done, and then another vote will be taken. It would seem this is all that can be done, without initiating a whole new scheme. The church is indeed lucky that it can afford to take months and even years to make up its mind about something. If politicians could afford such ages for thought we might have achieved world peace by now. Figures of a year and two years have been given by leading Anglicans as the amount of time needed before they can try again. It seems almost certain, however, that at whatever date they do eventually succeed in getting their scheme off the ground, there will be a substantial proportion of dissentients in both churches. On this occasion 31 per cent of Anglicans and 22.6 per cent of Methodists came out against the proposals. And in fact almost exactly 25 per cent of all those who voted in both church assemblies were against the scheme. Thus it would seem quite likely, unless a radical transformation of opinion takes place, that instead of one church, three churches will replace the existing two.

The leaders of church opinion would seem to have initiated their scheme for unity too soon. They have not sufficiently allowed for the reactionary nature of many clerics. Their excuse for this undue haste, is, of course,

that the churches as a whole need a new image and must be seen to be willing to change. Their panic to effect this illusion which has caused its failure, is not an occasion for snide comment, but for mild jubilation as the claim of Christians to be guided by one person, God, is again seen to be decidedly far-fetched.

## NOT UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE

ADDICTION of any kind, be it to drugs, food, gambling, alcohol or even bingo, is a force which, like religion, exercises an undue influence on a man, and as such lessens his freedom. There are more people addicted to tobacco than to any other substance or pursuit. And of course as well as restricting a man's freedom of choice, tobacco addiction causes severe damage to health, if not death. Considered in this light what at first may appear a rather curious choice of subject for a press statement from the President of the National Secular Society, David Tribe, is seen to be a highly pertinent comment on an evil, which is too rarely discussed in authoritative circles. Tribe's statement reads:

*"I was delighted to come across a report that Prince Charles declared himself in Cardiff to be a non-smoker.*

*With almost daily shrieks from respectable society when someone is detected with 'drugs', often in the privacy of his own home, and strenuously prosecuted, it is curious that there is no comment on ordinary smoking in public places. Theatres, cinemas and restaurants where this is permitted billow with clouds sent up by smokers with complete disregard for the convenience of others. Public transport is often a nightmare for bronchitics and sufferers from other chest conditions in this country. On most trains and buses there is a shortage of non-smoking compartments. Unless a passenger on the Underground has time to get stationed at one end or other of the platform, only an Olympic athlete can reach the haven of a non-smoking carriage.*

*Perhaps the Government will consider launching a national advertising campaign featuring Prince Charles saying 'Why I am not a smoker'. It may be objected that this would prove ineffective or that the Royal Family should not be used for promotional purposes. The efficacy can be known only after a test. Considerable sums of money are spent on models and others who demonstrate that smoking is glamorous, virile, convivial, relaxing and ultimate irony in what burns at 1,000 degrees C—or so—cooling. Presumably the advertisers find people are in fact*

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# Freethinker

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(Continued from previous page)

influenced. As for using the name of the Royal Family, for over a hundred years certain establishments and products have been proud to announce that they are 'Under Royal Patronage'. Can there be any objection to proclaiming that tobacco is not under royal patronage?"

Mr Tribe is evidently a non-smoker, but as a smoker I would only take him to task over the state of my calf muscles, which have in fact benefited from many sprints down platforms in order that I may ignite another flame under my coffin.

There can be few people, smokers or non-smokers, who would not agree that to take up smoking is one of the most crass steps an individual can take—a step which is no different in essence from the heroin addict's first 'fix'. When reading of the premature death of a heroin addict one wonders incredulously why he ever started the habit, yet tobacco smoking is in just the same league. How to stop young people from beginning smoking is a vital problem, and one with which Freethinkers should concern themselves if not on humanitarian grounds at least on the aforementioned grounds of freedom. Evils such as smoking predominate fundamentally because of the hypocritical nature of society. How can one expect children to believe that smoking is bad, when a large proportion of the adults with whom they come in contact indulge in the habit. Obviously the process of returning tobacco to its rightful position

beside the stinging nettle as a common and useless weed, will be a slow one. Adults should think seriously about giving up smoking if not for their own sakes, then for the sakes of the youngsters who will inevitably follow their examples. One may have a right to do what one likes with one's own health and freedom, but one has no right to abet the fostering of an evil in society as a whole. And as well as Tribe's regal suggestion would it not be well worthwhile to step up the campaign to have printed on all cigarettes cartons, as the Americans do, a warning of the health risks engendered by those who use the contents of the carton.

## RACE RELATIONS REPORT

THE REPORT of the Institute of Race Relations, entitled *Colour and Citizenship*, which was published on July 10, contains many revolutionary and laudable recommendations, not least among which is that the laws on immigration should be standardised so that admission would be on a basis which applied equally to Commonwealth citizens and aliens. The report, which is the result of five years' study, contains a survey conducted in Lambeth, Ealing, Wolverhampton, Bradford and Nottingham. This reveals that 10 per cent of white British people in those areas are racially prejudiced, 17 per cent prejudice inclined, 38 per cent tolerant inclined, and 35 per cent tolerant. 10 per cent is a quite high enough figure for concern and the survey reveals that the incidence of prejudice is low among young people under 35 and old people over 65, but that it is at its highest in the 45 to 55 age group. Dr Mark Abrams, who conducted the survey concluded that the incidence of prejudice is below average among the young, among women and among those who have been educated to sixth form standard. The most striking difference between the 10 per cent and the remainder was in the psychological field. Their characteristics were an exaggerated need to submit to authority and acute hostility to other 'outgroups'.

Though this sounds rather akin to the psychology of those who depend on religion, it would be very unfair to connect it in any way with the report's conclusion that the churches could play a larger role in furthering integration. "Although there is no lack of public statements and publications from the churches bearing witness to the need for racial tolerance, few churchmen would regard these as sufficient in themselves to demonstrate a Christian attitude towards coloured immigrants". The report suggests that the churches could utilise more fully church halls and land for community activities and schools, and it goes on to say that since the churches have a particularly large share of primary schools they could have a strong influence on educational policy.

Whatever else the churches may be they are certainly not racist. One is therefore brought to the conclusion that the church's lack of activity in this field is the result of mismanagement, and this provides another ground for the government's taking a stronger hold over an institution, whose wealth is out of all proportion to its following.

## HTA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Humanist Teachers' Association took place in London on July 5. Mr Maurice Hill, the Honorary Secretary, presented the annual report and informed the meeting that there had been a marked increase in membership.

It was decided that the HTA should affiliate to the National Secular Society, and make a donation to the Secular Education Fund.

## COMING EVENTS

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, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Humanist Letter Network (International) and Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). 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 and McRae.

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

London Young Humanists: Sunday, July 20: Visit to Down House, home of Charles Darwin where he wrote the *Origin of Species*: Meet Nigel Sinnott at 11.30 a.m. at Victoria Station at the platform entrance for the 11.40 train to Bromley South (day return 5s). Total cost of including entrance to Down House—about 12s.

North Staffs Humanist Group, Cartwright House, Hanley (near Cinebowl): Friday, July 25, 7.45 p.m.: Meeting.

South Place Ethical Society: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, WC1: Sunday, July 20, 11 a.m.: "Education—The Way Ahead", T. F. Evans, LL.B.

Trade Union, Labour, Co-operative—Democratic History Society: Exhibition at the Town Hall, Harlow, Essex: Until July 26, daily 10 a.m.—8 p.m.

West Ham Secular Society: Wanstead and Woodford Community Centre: Thursday, July 24, 8 p.m.: Meeting.



# ESTIMATING RUSSELL

G. L. SIMONS

## LAST OF NINE ARTICLES

BERTRAND RUSSELL is a remarkable phenomenon. At nearly one hundred years of age his mind is clear and his social involvement is undimmed. Still he writes, embodying a lucid idealism that has inspired four generations. Mankind has continued to suffer and Russell has suffered with it in a long life, but his anguish has not been passive. He has incurred ridicule and hatred for the uncompromising nature of his declamations; he has been jailed on two occasions; and ostracised on many more. And yet despite this—perhaps in part because of it—he will be one of the very small band of twentieth century Englishmen to be remembered a thousand years from now.

His immortality as a logician and philosopher is assured. It is impossible to pick up a comprehensive book on symbolic logic or epistemology without finding references to his name. In other fields also he will be remembered, not perhaps for great scholarship but for penetrating insights, ready wit, and a ruthless iconoclasm. How Russell's social and political protests will be estimated in the future depends to a large extent on how the world develops. If future societies are humane, rational and sensitive then Russell will be regarded as one of the greatest crusading figures of history. If, on the other hand, societies remain much as they are today, with the same quota of apathy, cynicism and dogma, then Russell will be regarded as an eccentric, as a nineteenth century curiosity who strayed irrelevantly into the wrong age.

On Saturday, May 19, 1962, a musical tribute was paid to Bertrand Russell by the London Symphony Orchestra—a day after his ninetieth birthday. In the programme that was issued, several dozen tributes were printed from eminent writers, philosophers, scientists, politicians. The tributes span nearly twenty large pages and the contributors include A. J. Ayer, David Ben-Gurion, Leonard Bernstein, Niels Bohr, Fenner Brockway, Bronowski, Buber, Moshe Dayan, Isaac Deutscher, Edith Evans, Julian Huxley, Kenneth Kaunda, Martin Luther King, Mendes-France, Arthur Miller, Henry Moore, Nehru, Nkrumah, Michael Polanyi, Quine, Rothschild, Schweitzer, Edith Sitwell, U Thant, Sybil Thorndike and Leonard Woolf. These tributes are a great testimony to Russell's intellectual ability and moral passion.

A great quality of Russell's is the way in which his vision transcends national boundaries and parochial questions. His concern is always with mankind as a whole. The concept of 'world citizenship' was never more real than in Russell, and on numerous occasions he has argued and preached world government. And any field in which human misery was needlessly sustained or caused was grist to Russell's moral mill. Over the years he espoused with passion: votes for women; family planning; the rights of conscientious objectors; the liberation of India; the ending of colonialism generally; the release of political prisoners; nuclear disarmament; the ending of the Vietnam war. Sometimes his political judgement has seemed eccentric or dangerous (especially his advocacy of an atomic war against Russia to prevent them achieving nuclear parity with the West—see *Morning News*, May 28, 1949); sometimes his judgement has seemed superficial or short-sighted; and occasionally as with every prolific writer, he has slipped into self-contradiction or factual error. But despite these undeniable points Russell is a splendid figure.

He embodies a clear-headed integrity, an honesty and concern that is quite unique in British public life. He has none of the smooth evasiveness of famous politicians, heads of industrial boards or nationalised concerns. He lacks the sophisticated guile and diplomatic hypocrisy that so characterises men in public life. Russell is honest and straightforward; his views are simply stated, and they stand there to be refuted if the evidence can be found. And when the evidence is found Russell modifies his opinions, plunging with equal zeal upon the course that new data indicate. And there is a remarkable richness in a Russell that few people know. When Russell was ninety, Ralph Schoenman wrote:

"Russell. All the excitement remains with him, the energy and the élan. His passion for early church music and poetry, the vast knowledge of the scriptures of religions and the small ironies of old cultures, these things are with him and always shared. It is his sensibility, his passion for language, his hatred for humbug and pedantry, the great sense of irony and paradox which excites every moment in his presence. Wales. He knows every plant by name and the trained eye drinks the sun and the fields. Recite a line of poetry, any line, and the next one is returned. This is the Bertrand Russell I cherish and who I want to celebrate. It is the poetry of man, the generosity of which he isn't aware. I want to celebrate the beauty of Bertie for nothing touches this, not the meanness or the smallness or the hostility of pathetic men, ridden with envy and the poison of their inadequacy. He needs no metaphor."

Already the books are being written on Bertrand Russell, as they will be as long as books are written. Before me I have *Bertrand Russell, the Passionate Sceptic* by Alan Wood, *Bertrand Russell, Philosopher and Humanist* by John Lewis, *Bertrand Russell: A Life* by Herbert Gootschalk, and *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy* by D. F. Pears; doubtless there are many other volumes of which I am unaware. And what material there is here for future biographers and commentators: a man who married four times (in his *Autobiography*, volume 3, he tells of a honeymoon in Paris at the age of eighty); a man who lectured in Russia, China, America, France, Germany, Scandinavia, Britain, Australia; a man who met Queen Victoria, Lenin, Trotsky, Einstein, Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, the Webbs, Bernard Shaw; a man who was sent to prison, and awarded the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize for literature; a man who wrote a book a year from twenty to well over ninety—and thousands of articles, papers and letters in addition (most of which have been preserved and are being catalogued).

There will be debate about Russell's significance in the fields of scholarship and political protest. In some fields his reputation cannot be challenged; in others it will ebb and flow. There is much in Russell with which I disagree—but the central and underlying principles of his philosophy are unassailable: needless human suffering is a horror that should arouse men everywhere; man can create a better world but he must do this on his own—he can expect no help from an imagined supernatural realm; the development of the human mind and the flowering of the human spirit are the things that make human existence worth preserving—and these things can be found in simple pleasures as well as in the fine adventures of the human intellect; there is enough potential for good in men to encourage those who fight for social improvement.

Russell is an intellectual and moral giant, and a fascinating individual. His long life has been rich enough for half-a-dozen great men; the remarkable amalgam of intelligence,

(Continued on page 229)



# PARENTS' VIEWS ON SCHOOL RELIGION

KIT MOUAT

## An abridged report on a questionnaire to humanists whose children suffer compulsory worship and RI.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE, though not ideal in shape or form, gave many parents the opportunity to voice long-suppressed anxieties. Unfortunately there is still a great deal of apathy, and a great deal of understandable parental fear of adding to the problems of their children. But what is surely vital is that such parents should support each other.

### Why not opt out?

Edward Short has said that he has 'no reason to believe' that anyone in this country is ignorant of the right to opt out; 99 per cent of our parents said that they had not been informed of their rights under the Act, and one had done everything possible to prompt the Head to bring the matter up, but in vain. According to the NOP Survey organised by the BHA, out of the 15 per cent of electors who described themselves as agnostic, atheist or having no religion, only 36 per cent knew that RI was compulsory and only 27 per cent that there was a compulsory daily act of worship. The BHA has asked 308 Education Authorities whether they do, or are prepared to, inform parents of their rights. Six said 'yes'.

Some Christians defend our present educational policy on religion by pointing out that, because it fails to produce many committed Christians, Humanists needn't worry. They would not, of course, approve of daily reverence for Communist doctrines and weekly doses of Maoist ideology on the grounds that by alienation our schools would produce good democrats. A similar attitude, however, is sometimes found in Humanists. One mother wrote: "A good dose of Christianity in the early years is the surest way of putting one off it". Frankly, I find this attitude irresponsible. Secular humanism is not just a cynical reaction against religion, it is an affirmative and continually developing way of life. Humanists reject religion not just because it is a bore, but because its claims for veracity collapse on investigation, and because we know that the 'good life' does not depend on any religious beliefs. Could it be that some Humanist parents are non-thinkers about education, even if freethinkers about religion?

Another argument sometimes put forward is that RI provides our children with an opportunity for lively discussion. This may apply to the children of the better informed families, but those who have no Humanist background will neither be able to join in such discussion, nor really appreciate the strength of the Humanist point of view, especially when the authority guiding the RI period is dogmatically Christian. There should be no suggestion that any one religious or non-religious group has all the answers regarding what it is right to believe and best to imitate. The purpose should be to encourage children to think for themselves, not to listen to Christian opinions presented as facts and then be expected to put the alternative views without support.

### A good dose of Christianity

This is the sort of comment we read over and over again:

'My children have been continually indignant and upset by RI since the day they started school. I would be glad of a chance to air my grievances in a way that might do some good.'

'I deeply resent the implication that Christians, and

more especially churchgoers, have the monopoly of goodness.' (State Infant School.)

'My daughter was very puzzled by RI at an early age, and later she was penalised because she thought for herself. As a result of opting the child out, there was a complete change in the Headmistress to non-co-operation or direct rudeness, and a refusal to help over sixth form work and a future career.' (Grammar School.)

'Our children have suspected their teacher's general integrity. One child was given lines for asking about evolution, and generally began to dislike and be bored with school because of the narrow, non-questioning approach.' (Voluntary Aided Primary.)

'Since the age of 5 (now 13) she has been extremely upset by the bias placed on Christianity. The present RI teacher says that Christianity is the only true religion. My daughter is not considered suitable to take a second foreign language, and in consequence must do extra RI lessons. We cannot work this out, except as a means of keeping the "less academic" child occupied, while others do German.' (Grammar School.)

'At Junior School, Jewish and other children who did not attend assembly were made to stand in the hall while notices were being read. The other children would sit. Although we encourage her to respect the religious views of everyone, regardless of which religion, her teacher's scathing criticism of Eastern religions upsets her, especially as we have Hindus and Taoists among our friends. She has learnt respect for the views of others . . . we wish that teachers would respect her Humanist outlook.' (Primary School.)

'It was made clear to my daughter that she would not be welcomed into the sixth form, and having been made conspicuous by withdrawal from RI, she was lectured extensively over minor rule infringements. The Head explicitly said that our daughter should not take too much notice of her mother: "Headmistresses know best", she was told!' (Grammar School.)

'Our daughter has learned from observation (and conversation with older pupils) that to show any scepticism will put her in bad odour with those staff who run Christian activities inside and outside the school, and if put in writing will ensure a very low mark. So she knows at 13 that it pays to keep her views to herself, and write what she doesn't believe. The staff constantly say that it is impossible to be moral unless Christian.' (Grammar School.)

'The greatest harm is done in the Infant School. Parent and teacher contradict one another. The child is too young to understand, and loses confidence in one or the other.'

'There is constant friction with the home teaching and environment, as at the Junior School where certain teachers did not hesitate to criticise a child for being "different" . . .' (Modern School.)

'The Headmistress fondly imagines that "community Assemblies" are sufficiently innocuous not to worry even Humanists.' (Modern School.)

'No actual suffering involved, but half an hour daily is *wasted* in the nonsense of Assembly which should be spent more usefully.' (Grammar School.)

'It doesn't help domestic co-existence when the child of one Christian and one Humanist parent finds the



school tells him that one parent is speaking the truth and the other is not. The State has no right to interfere when such parents, if left alone, may well be able to demonstrate that people can disagree but still love one another.' (Progressive.)

'The results in our family have been: exposure to superstition, belief in ghosts, fear of the dark; loss of respect for the teachers who take Assembly; a steadily growing intolerance towards anything or anyone religious; resentment of the waste of time when they could be learning something; loss of respect for schools which try to instil superstitious fears into children.' (Primary and Comprehensive Schools.)

AND . . .

'My children were opted out, and now all the others are very envious.'

### Penalties and rewards

Some children who are opted out of RI are given nothing to do at all; one was forced to remain in the classroom while the RI periods went on, and when she asked a question she was told "Your mother and father opted you out . . ." A few children sat completely alone in an empty classroom. One sixth former who broached the matter of opting out with the RI master was told that only one pupil had ever been withdrawn and any more withdrawals might upset the Headmaster. On further investigation, however, it seemed that the RI teacher was using the Head as an excuse, and the one boy who had been opted out had not been made to suffer in any way. Indeed not all children were punished for their parents' Humanism! Some in Grammar Schools were allowed to do homework, revising for exams and so on. One father of a Modern child insisted that his daughter be allowed to do extra work for the O-levels, and succeeded. There could, of course, come a time when those children who are opted out and get more work done get better exam results than those who take RI. And why not?

As for Assembly, removal more often than not seems to mean 'hanging about outside', and generally being forced to accept that Protestant Christians are the Chosen People in British state schools. Jews and Catholics are rather better off than our children, because they opt out in larger numbers. Even two Humanist children would probably have enough courage to make 'waiting outside' and 'missing the notices' better than staying inside, silently bored, resentful, or hypocritically involved.

The situation is bad; very bad indeed. What is clear, however, is that those parents and children who have taken the matter seriously, who have found the courage to battle with schools and the educational authorities, have been rewarded, and if the situation is improving at all it is thanks to them, and not to any change of heart among Christians. It is naive to imagine that in this age of declining faith, Christians can afford to permit genuine toleration; the only thing that is likely to change is the window dressing.

### What can we do ?

The situation not only must be changed, it *can* be changed, if only Humanist parents, teachers, teenagers and sympathisers will show their determination to get rid of the indoctrination that makes a mockery of any system of education. Parents must seek each other out; teachers must realise that the sooner the Act is changed, the sooner their chances of promotion will be freed from religious clauses. *Teenagers who rebel against the 'ultimate hypocrisy' must be able to count on support from parents and teachers. Time is running out . . .*

I have a letter from Mr Short, the logic of which would shame a child of twelve. To quote from the end of it: 'What would be oppressive would be to deny this kind of education (i.e. compulsory worship and RI) to the vast majority of parents who desire it for their children, because a minority do not'. Mr Short, it seems, believes in government by referendum without even knowing what it is the majority want, and he considers those many countries which leave Christianity to be taught by parents in the home, in churches and Sunday schools, to be 'oppressive'!

If we do not want another twenty-five years of this disastrous and dishonest situation we must act *now*. The next few months are vital if we are to exclude indoctrination from the next Education Act. We have to show in action that we really do care about education, about the integrity of children, and the rights of non-Christians in a society which claims to be democratic. Our toleration cannot include Christian intolerance.

May I suggest that:

1. Parents with children in Primary Schools should take every possible step to contact other parents with RI problems, and see what can be done without harming their children (remembering the harm that is already being done, especially to children without the help of a Secular Humanist background).

2. Parents with children in Secondary Schools should contact other agnostic and atheist parents and withdraw children from Assembly and RI in as large numbers as can be gathered.

They should also ask for their children to be allowed to do homework or extra study instead of RI (remembering that other children may well then persuade their parents to remove them too).

3. All parents should make the strongest protest to their MP, Education Authority, and the Humanist Teachers' Association, about any attempts to force children to believe or say what they think is untrue. RI teachers and Heads must not be encouraged to imagine that they are free to penalise children for not being Christians.

Parents should be able to refer to a central Humanist Parents' Bureau (an extension of the Humanist Teachers' Association perhaps). If you are not already members of the HTA, do write now for details to: Mr E. M. Denison, 11 The Cobbles, Shenfield Crescent, Brentwood, Essex—and write to the NSS for free leaflets; also for *RI and Surveys* by Maurice Hill, 1s; *Religion and Ethics in Schools* by David Tribe, 1s 6d; *Religious Education in State Schools* by Brigid Brophy, 2s 6d.

(Continued from page 227)

moral concern, philosophic insight, literary ability, wit, integrity and knowledge are totally unique. This amalgam has no historical or modern counterpart. And part of the greatness of Russell is that though his vision is boundless he is at the same time a simple human being, loving flowers, children and sunsets, and worrying terribly about the dull monotony of ordinary lives.

A lot will be written about Russell, but read also what he wrote himself. He has given us a delightful and profound range of 'wit and wisdom', and there is much here that is within the scope of anyone (I reckon that about half-a-dozen of his books could even be read to children). We need many men and women who follow Russell in being honest, courageous and sensitive, impatient with hypocrisy and dogma, and involved to a degree in the troubles of the world. The best that Russell's disciples can do is to try to make sure that they are worthy.



## SAINTLY SWINDLES

I. S. LOW

LET'S TALK about the Law of Contract and Religion. With special reference to the elevating moral effects of the latter.

In English Law, if you make a contract you must keep it. This is because it's assumed you have freely entered into it. But suppose you haven't entered it freely? Suppose you've been forced to enter it? Then the contract is void. You needn't keep it. There is said to have been "undue influence". And—religion has made quite an interesting contribution to case law on this subject!

Putting it plainly, there have been several cases in which X forces Y to grant property to X by playing on the religious fears or beliefs of Y. Cheshire and Fifoot, in their book *The Law of Contract* say: "Probably the origin of the strict law relating to undue influence is the hostility which the courts have always shown towards spiritual tyranny".

The leading case is *Allcard v Skinner* (it would seem the defendant had an appropriate name!). In 1868 the plaintiff was a woman thirty-five years old. She was persuaded to join a Protestant Order, the "Sisters of the Poor". Accordingly she took a vow of strict poverty. All her individual property had to be given up. And between 1871 and 1879 she gave up £7,000 to the Lady Superior. At last she left the Order and sued for her property back. The Court held she had been the victim of undue influence.

In this case, Lindley, L. J., said: "The influence of one mind over another is very subtle and of all influences religious influence is the most dangerous and the most powerful, and to counteract it courts of equity have gone very far".

What is a court of equity? You may well ask. It may be described as a technique for modifying the law when its strict application would work injustice. It was worked out by the Lord Chancellor's court—a fact which is reflected in the existence of the Chancery Division of the High Court.

Suppose A gives B and C land—on the condition that they allow A's son D to use and enjoy it. This was done in the Middle Ages to avoid feudal dues. If B and C refused to

honour their obligations to D—well, the land was theirs and by strict law no-one could do anything about it. But the Chancellor could. He would summon B and C into his presence and say: "Look here. You know you only got that land on condition you allowed D to use and enjoy it. Your behaviour in refusing to do so is inequitable. It will give you a bad conscience. To prevent this I, in my jurisdiction as Chancellor, will put you in prison till you do the right thing by D". And over the centuries a code of equity was built up in this way.

Now—in the Middle Ages, the Chancellor was nearly always a clergyman! And if a court set up by clergymen, intended to keep up the moral standards of Christianity, has to watch religion—well . . .

The plaintiff in *Allcard v Skinner* was unlucky. She brought her action many years after she left the Sisterhood. So she didn't get her property back. It was different in *Morley v Loughnan*. This action was brought six months after the death of an epileptic from whom £140,000 had been extracted by a Plymouth Brother. The action was successful. The money had to be returned.

What about other religions? In *Tufton v Sporni* (1952) the plaintiff and defendant were members of a committee formed to set up a Muslim cultural centre in London. The plaintiff was to provide funds for the Centre. The defendant induced the plaintiff to buy his (the defendant's) house for the purpose at a price which grossly exceeded the market value. The contract was set aside.

In the twenty-second edition of *Anson on the Law of Contract* (my favourite book on the subject) occurs this comment: "Many other cases on this point have unfortunately concerned spiritual 'advisors' who have used their expert knowledge of the next world to obtain advantages in this". Note the word "unfortunately".

I don't need to say that the law of England is supposed to be based on Christianity and the judges are usually supporters of that religion.

So—watch it—the man who wears that dog-collar might be a shark.

## ROAD ACCIDENTS AND THE WORLD MALAISE

R. READER

DESCRIBING THE RECENT chaos on the M1 motorway, in which 63 people were injured and over 100 cars wrecked, the daily press spoke of "motorway madness" and said that "the drivers just didn't seem to care".

"Road Accidents" (FREETHINKER, 20.11.56) indicated how accident statistics deliberately hide the patent fact that there are too many cars on the roads, and showed the part played by religious neurosis in the matter. "Road accidents, although only one tiny facet of the world malaise, yet contain all the elements for the solution of the whole . . ." "A road accident is a biological drama, a material demonstration of the fact that, as the individual human life grows wider in scope and complexity, so, on a planet of limited size, the total number of human lives must decrease, even if that decrease is achieved in a welter of tears and anguish . . ." "And so, pending the utilisation of nuclear fission, which will redress the balance for all time, the automobile becomes the instrument of biology."

Following the M1 havoc, there will be the usual crop of exhaustive enquiries, recriminations, prosecutions, modifications of road markings, route signs, speeds and so forth

—but no realisation that the whole thing, essentially, was a sinister biological drama.

"The drivers not seeming to care", in fact, has parallels in both plant and animal life. The growth of a plant, under normal conditions, is such as to ensure the plant's survival. But if one overcrowds a hundred such plants in a tiny window-box, then the growth of each individual plant is such as to strangle the others.

Again, certain species of fish are caught by encircling the shoal with a large net, towed between two boats. As the circle closes in on them, the movements of the fish become increasingly spasmodic, unco-ordinated and violent, each fish injuring itself and the others. Some, in their frenzy, leap right out of the water on to the boats. *The fish don't seem to care, even as the M1 motorists just didn't seem to care.*

But the M1 situation is the more grotesque, because all the people concerned were probably striving their utmost to eventually worsen the situation! To take some hypothetical cases:



Mr A had an important appointment and was travelling fast to make it. Why? So that a new factory could start up to produce yet more cars. Mr B was moving fast too, in order to run up more flats and ensure that five times as many people would eventually have to cross the road at a certain point in one minute than at present do so in one hour. Mr C had a revolutionary additive to improve car acceleration at the said road crossing. Mr D was planning a supermarket on the same site, or close by, with a park for 2,000 vehicles. Mr E was arranging to install six hair-dressers where formerly only one operated.

It is unnecessary to continue this list of hypothetical aims. The important thing to notice is that they are all mutually exclusive or cramping, any one to all the others, like the cylinders of a car engine firing against one another. This traffic overcrowding is, in fact, a miniature of world overcrowding. In each case, humanity is ineluctably restricted by the space-time framework of our existence but pretends it is not there. More human beings, more cars, more roads, more of everything. To what end? Why, in order to again produce yet more of the same things. Expansion—pure expansion—is the only objective of our pseudo-scientific age, made inevitable by our absurd attitude to human procreation. So long as children are unwarrantably and accidentally born, as at present, then so long will humanity be constrained to increase the fury and tempo of the commercial bear-garden.

And after the last tree has been felled, the last strip of road length filled up by the last car, and—dare we say it?—the last battle fought by loving, but rival, Christian sects, what then? Shall we then have succeeded in our neurotic flight from death? Of course not, because, long before such a situation could become a reality, death would have overtaken us all, even as, in the past, it overtook every other species guilty of swarming.

## FILM EVENING

LUCY DANCIE

On Wednesday, July 2, members of the National Secular Society assembled to see the French director, Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Before the film Dr Roger Manvell, who was described quite correctly by David Tribe as the leading British authority on the film industry, gave a short talk on the film we were to see and its director. Many of us had seen the film before, but the new insight given us by Dr Manvell made a second viewing very well worthwhile.

Resnais began his career in a minor capacity as a film editor, and then went on to direct documentaries. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* was the first feature film he directed and its beginning is in fact a documentary on Hiroshima. The script by the French novelist, Marguerite Duras, breaks out of this into a story about a French film actress who has a brief affair with a Japanese architect. As Dr Manvell stressed, Resnais' films concentrate on the inter-relationship between people's pasts and their present situations, and start where someone begins to resolve a past trauma. As a young girl the actress had fallen in love with a German soldier during the German occupation of France. After the liberation she was ostracised, even by her own parents, who locked her in their cellar. It is this which many years later, presumably reminded by Hiroshima, that she pours out to her sympathetic Japanese lover. Thus we had a love affair in the context of Hiroshima—love contrasted with human annihilation.

The film flashes back to the actress' life in her native French village—to her relationship with the German—to her period of incarceration, during which she became temporarily insane—and to her escape to Paris. Resnais makes this fairly simple plot into a weighty piece of psychology, and a most moving situation. As Dr Manvell had warned us, the film made demands on our 'imagination and sympathy'. Brilliant editing, many subtleties, such as the subliminal repeated flashing on the screen of something, whose significance is to be revealed later, and the imaginative choice of music were among the qualities, which had not Dr Manvell drawn our attention to them, we would not have appreciated so fully. It was a most enjoyable and educative evening.

## BOOK REVIEW

ANN ROEST

PRISONS OF THE MIND, Otto L. Shaw (Allen and Unwin, 50s). "THE LOCKSMITH was love and his craft creativity . . ." So many young boys, so many abhorrent young boys and, soon, so many more of these boys unless . . .

Maladjusted and delinquent abhorrent boys growing up to become criminals are the people of the book, *Prisons of the Mind* by Otto Shaw, Headmaster of Red Hill School and Magistrate. The book is a battle cry for love. And Shaw knows exactly what he means by love, explains himself fully and tells us equally fully how to love these children. This is the lesson in the book and I defy anyone who has read it to defend incarceration, brute force and stern discipline as cures for the sins or social crimes of children.

Shaw quotes case histories, explores the problems and describes how his boys are helped back to security and happiness. Mind—he is honest and confesses he picks his boys, who are often highly intelligent. He explains that he may keep the boys for their full school life, if they choose to remain, and therefore his chances of success with them is high.

The case histories he quotes are gruelling and each one, as we read it, appalls us with the apparent difficulty of affecting any cure. But Shaw has time on his side and he manages (this is his own special gift) to gain the trust and co-operation of his child. Clearly his staff are special people too, for he must depend upon them considerably. As each case develops we feel a sort of Cinderella hope and lo! at last the happy ending. I did wonder whether Shaw might have confessed to some failures or were there none? Exploration of these would have been interesting and very instructive.

I was a little troubled by the spell-binding quality and readability of the book. This is a very serious book, introduced by Fred Willey, MP, and one perhaps should feel the burden of respect for it which would preclude reading it in two days. Nowhere comes the hindrance of pomposity, verbiage or 'impressive' long word writing. It is a joy to read such good, clear prose. The author's namesake would have approved. It must be concluded that Shaw has written this important book not only for the rarefied few with professional or intellectual interests in the subject, but also for all the rest of us as well, from Nursery Nurses onwards.

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## LETTERS

### Free Will

FREE WILL is self-assertion. So also is the denial of free will. The thing has been denied in the name of "theological predestination" and in the name of "scientific determinism" but the denials have been sufficiently rare and sufficiently "academic" to constitute an opposition to the "common consent of mankind", which has always been and will continue to be on the side of free will or self-determination, even though this may sometimes lead to murder and sometimes to martyrdom.

It seems dishonest to attribute to "Christianity" what is in fact a much more universally held opinion that "man is unique and superior to all other animals". After a million years of evolutionary servitude a man can assert his free will without claiming to be a "Son of God" or to be in possession of an "Immortal Soul". I claim to be a free man, but I do not claim as Christians claim that I shall live for ever, or that after my death I shall rise from the dead.

I can see no reason whatsoever why we should deny free will to two-thirds of the world population simply on the ground that they are badly fed or badly treated by their fellow men. Indeed the more appalling the conditions, the more important it becomes that all those who are not killed or damaged beyond repair should be strengthened by their own inner will to survive. To deny individual free will is to make *no* contribution to the betterment of the world.

I still think that the action of the Roman Catholic who excommunicated himself from his Church in obedience to his conscience was significant as an illustration of individual free will. Only an extremely foolish person would imagine that a free and voluntary act must be one that is totally "unmotivated". The Roman Catholic could have gone on pretending to be one of the faithful. He would in fact have pleased many more people by keeping up this pretence than he did by striving to be, if not "honest to God", at least honest to himself and to the woman he loved. Whether we can be "honest to God" must depend on whether there is One God or *no God*. We can dismiss the purely abstract and logical possibility that there might be a multitude of gods.

To conclude the matter for the present, I would say that for most people it is more important to have a mind of their own and a will of their own than it is to belong to any "society" whether capitalistic or communistic, whether "sacred" or "secular". Unless the will is free, nothing is free.

PETER CROMMELIN.

### Powell

I WAS completely disgusted on reading the letters (July 6) submitted by Charles Smith and P. G. Hall. They have fallen into the trap—taken the drug of racialism which is imposed upon them by fascists like Powell, Colin Jordan and the newspapers which support them.

P. G. Hall thinks Powell is doing us a good turn, when in fact he is trying to split the working class in order to distort their thought. (A man called Adolf Hitler did the same thing.) People like Powell want the working class to fight about race, religion, football, etc., so that they will forget what their *real* problems are. I am talking about the futility of the British government which carries out policies which suit America and the capitalist class.

Let Charles Smith and P. G. Hall visit some of the major hospitals in Britain (manned by immigrants) and they will be shamed out of their minds.

I do not like to be too dramatic but I see the only hope as revolution. I mean a revolution in thought. Freethinkers must try and break the apathy of the masses. The masses must learn to think and make up their own minds. Let's face it, our government is a farce. The only answer is mass participation. The workers must own and work their own factories, in order to determine their own fates.

As for the statistics produced by Charles Smith and P. G. Hall, they mean nothing. They have been taken from some non-free-thinking journal (which means all capitalist newspapers).

Both Smith and Hall mention the housing problem. *There is no housing problem. One Polaris submarine costs 30,000 new homes.*

DAVID PETRIE.

### Honesty

I AM most interested in the article of Isobel Grahame (June 20) concerning the honesty and purpose of the nation.

I have to reach the prime age of fifty yet and as my best teeth

fall to the dentist I cannot help wondering what the world is all about.

Is it a crime to be honest? From the Stock Exchange to the silly pilferer in the shop one cannot help but notice how the great swindles in the money market have been defined as legal by the very makers of law and order; and the stupid lass or cow who takes the packet of tea has nullified the right to the title of honesty.

There are too many people on both ends of the (Old Bailey) scales trying to take that little on the side. This would not be such a tragedy if it were not for the dirty names a person can gain by being too lazy to take part in the snatch and run race that makes society into a mammoth dirt bin.

I recall asking advice of a fellow-freethinker as to how best to write for jobs—I was on my eighty-sixth attempt. 'Oh no,' he kindly remarked, 'never put that you are an honest person, it will make the firm wonder what is wrong.'

According to the answers I received he may have been right. But what a turn-up for the book in this land of the Bible.

It seems to be that if a person wishes the right to speak up for better things he must keep his nose clean. My handkerchief is well used.

As another person in an official governmental capacity put it to me in my employment problem, 'So you do not wish to take the easy way?'

ARTHUR FRANCIS.

### Not necessarily

IN HIS LETTER (July 5) P. G. Hall tells readers (without further specification) that he does not himself agree with everything Mr Powell has said. Does P. G. Hall think it would be in any way appropriate if Mr Powell was now to state that P. G. Hall (amongst others) does not necessarily agree with everything he, Mr Powell, says?

For the sake of Freethought I hope that not too many readers were unduly shocked or disappointed to learn that the views expressed in your editorial are not necessarily those of P. G. Hall.

CHARLES BYASS.

### Rhodesia

WHILE MILLIONS are starving in Biafra, owing to the crimes of those two 'devout' Christians, Ojukwu and Gowon, Rhodesia is offering security and a better standard of living for whites and blacks.

African chiefs have said that 'one man, one vote', is quite foreign to their way of life.

As for referendums, millions in Britain have no vote and no voice, so let us first set our own house in order.

B. HOBSON.

### Veneral disease

APART FROM remarking that Michael Lloyd-Jones' obvious ignorance about venereal diseases is again demonstrated in his latest letter (July 5), I will confine my reply to one request: will he kindly not misrepresent my statements? I made no suggestion that the facts about gonorrhoea should be concealed, I simply stated a fact, and it was that youngsters who have a practical knowledge of this disease—because they have been treated when they were infected—are less likely to be afraid of it than someone who has never suffered from the disease! This is not *immoral*, as a simple observation, it is *amoral*.

DENIS COBELL.

### Correction

IN THE FREETHINKER of July 5, in his article 'Russell's Political Philosophy', G. L. Simons referred to an article written by Russell in the *New Statesman*. The date of publication of this article was given, on the top line of p. 213, as 15/3/69. The article in fact appeared in the *New Statesman* of 15/3/68.

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