

# RIGHTS AND DUTIES

by "SUNDOWNER"

I AM glad to know from *The Countryman* that several Christian communions have recently "taken official cognisance of the rights of animals." But I am not sure why I am glad. Between Christians and animals a gulf has yawned for 2000 years, and I can't pretend that I think the gulf will now be bridged. Christians allow animals the

place a carpenter allows his saw or a sailor his boat and oars. They must be treated properly to give the best results, but they differ from those inanimate things only by being temporarily endowed with life. Christians may, being compassionate, go further than that, but they are not required to go further, and usually suppose that going further is dangerous.

Well I do, too, though not for Christian reasons. I think it is foolish to talk about the rights of animals if we mean what is in our minds when we talk about the rights of men. An animal has no such rights as those. From the day it is born to the day it dies it neither possesses rights, nor demands them, nor is aware of them, nor could claim them if they crossed its consciousness. It allows no rights to other creatures, concedes nothing to any weaker animal, extends to others not one passing moment of sympathy. I can think of no positive sense in which animals have rights at all.

I am not sure that they have even negative rights—the right not to be starved, not to be brutally used, not to be tormented for our pleasure, not to be killed without a good cause, and so on. Those are duties we owe them, or rather owe ourselves to give them, but they are not rights animals have in and by themselves. In themselves animals are, I am afraid, where Christians

usually place them—inhabitants of the earth who may be removed at man's wish, and surely will be if the day ever comes when he can live without them.

At present I do not know how far "official cognisance" by Christian bodies has gone, or precisely what it means. I am glad to hear of it as I am glad when I hear that a meat-eater has turned vegetarian; but I am not myself a vegetarian, I think vegetarianism is foolish, and I know that if it ever became universal it would annihilate all the animals in which I am most interested. Granting rights to animals, whether it is done officially or unofficially, will not shorten their lives or lengthen them, but it is at least a sign that our dominion over them is giving us some restless moments.

A READER sends me this note from Napier:

During the third week of June, and again on July 6, a bumble-bee flew about our large verandah for about an hour, and on the second occasion was later seen patrolling the garden—mainly in the vicinity of the citrus trees. The earlier visitor no doubt also remained for some time, but as I took it to be a straggler from last summer, I made no particular note of its appearance. On the second occasion, however, a visiting South Islander also saw the bee and followed its movements throughout the morning, which was fine but cold, with a bitter southerly wind blowing. (The house, however, faces north, and, being situated half-way up a gully is protected from frost and wind.) Neither bee was a queen as far as we could judge, or have since been able to find out.

It was the first week in July when I saw a bumble-bee at work in the

tussocks on two particularly cold mornings. Since then I have seen other bumble-bees working, and there is one buzzing over the fallen pine needles as I am writing this note.

It is quite vigorous, and I can't believe, though the sun is shining weakly, that it has just emerged from its nest. In colder and harsher countries than ours only the queens may survive the winter, and survive by hibernation. I can't persuade myself that it happens here.

(Another reader wants to know whether they are "humble" or "bumble" bees. The Oxford Dictionary gives both, but I prefer "bumble." They were bumble-bees when I was a boy. Then I think I became genteel and made them humble. Now I like the good, round, homely bumble, with its onomatopaeic suggestions.)

I SUPPOSE it is to the advantage of mankind that freak animals should be preserved and examined. Though my own instinct is to put them out of sight at once, it is better to let the eye of science see them

AUGUST 24 first. I therefore support the request for unusually interesting specimens made recently by Canterbury College.

But I am not sure that it is good to advertise these biological failures. The next step will be a superstitious wave of misinterpretation, with sin and science getting about an equal share of the blame. The number of freaks is never high relatively. It can, however, be a great number cumulatively in a country with such a high preponderance of animals as we have in New Zealand, and if every deformed lamb born in Canterbury this spring finds its way to Canterbury College, it will be sufficient to announce the number to fill many innocents with panic.

Nature has never, from the beginning of time, worked without failures. If it had done so the number of breeds on the Ark would be the number on the earth today. We forget that failures can be good as well as bad. Though the bad, the anti-bomb geneticists say, greatly outnumber the good, I think the good comes to the surface if we wait long enough; a few million years, say.

(To be continued)



N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER, 13, 1957.

WHAT YOU NEED  
IS A  
*Rubidor*  
THE BALL  
PEN THAT WRITES  
WITH ORDINARY INK!

No Refills to buy . . . no nibs to change . . . excellent for carbon copies . . . dries as it writes . . . fully guaranteed.

only 17/6

Superior Rubidor  
Refill Ballpoint models —  
GOLDEN AUTOMATIC, 9/-  
STANDARD AUTOMATIC, 6/6  
FINESSA NON-AUTOMATIC, 4/6  
Guaranteed Refills that don't  
Clog or smudge. — 1/9

'Astronic'  
REGD. TRADE MARK

10 watt AMPLIFIER

Perfect Reproduction from Radio—Record  
Tape—Microphone. Where can you buy  
better value, fully guaranteed, at

£42/12/6

FROM YOUR LOCAL DEALER  
Or Sole N.Z. Agents:  
SONOPHONE DISTRIBUTORS LTD.  
114-121 CHANCERY CHAMBERS,  
O'CONNELL STREET, AUCKLAND, C.I.