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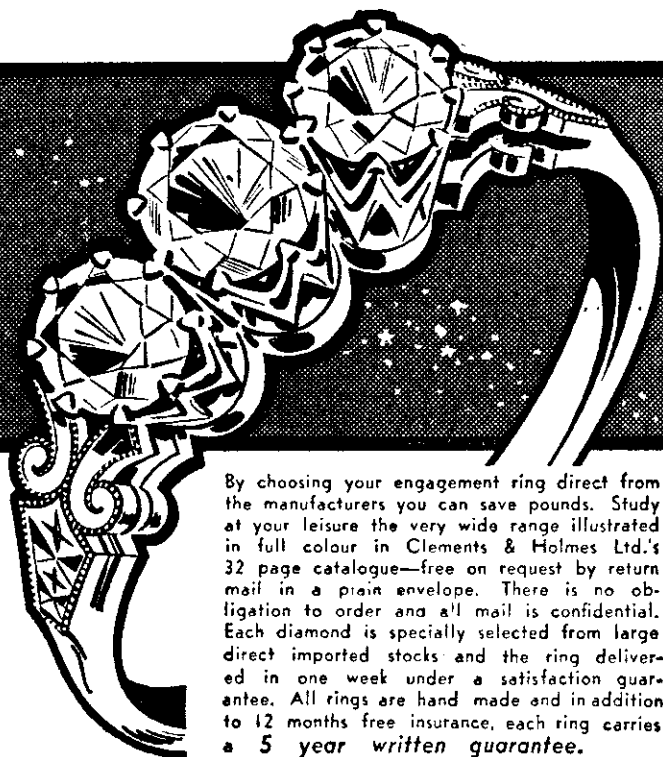
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Memory by the Nose

by "SUNDOWNER"

IT is our noses and not our eyes or ears, someone has said somewhere, that link us to our past. Though it would have been safer to say "link some of us to our past," the statement must be true of at least half the human race.

Because noses are grosser organs than eyes and ears we are not so prone to boast of their powers; and when we do boast we are usually deceiving ourselves or trying to deceive others. Above a certain range of olfactory consciousness, noses are not clear reporters; but we are very unfortunate if they refuse to say anything at all. The usual experience must be an acute awareness of what is unpleasant, and a diminishing, but seldom vanished, awareness of everything above that level. Animals—I am very doubtful if the same can be said of primitive men, though it often is—can follow a scent almost as easily as we can follow the white line on a sealed road. My dog, who is not encouraged to use his nose, and descends from a line of eye-workers, can follow my track at great speed half an hour after I have left it. Even Elsie, who is ten years old, and has spent her 3650 days filling her belly and emptying it again—and never, the experts insist, sleeping for more than a few minutes at a time—even Elsie can follow her calf as fast as I can walk a quarter of an hour after it has wandered out of sight. If the calf goes away with Betty while I am feeding Elsie in the garden, Elsie will track it down as soon as I release her, following its exact route, not always without calling, but without getting any reply that I can hear; and certainly without taking

a bee-line in the calf's direction if she has heard anything unheard by me.

It is true that men can survive, very easily and very comfortably, without the assistance of their noses, but I hope that I personally will never be required to do so. I am writing this note by an open window only six feet from a wattle tree in full bloom, and not much more than 30 feet from a row of hyacinths in bloom. I know that both are giving off fragrance as freely as the flowering currant at the other end of the gable and the geraniums along the wall; but a high wind is blowing and carrying all those delights away. Winds blow so often in New Zealand, and so boisterously, that many flowering things have a feeble scent and many strong scents never reach us; but when they do strike my nose they carry me back through all the years since I first became conscious of them. It is not just a memory, but the active enjoyment of a freshly-stimulated sense capable of recalling sights and sounds and smells, and even other unrelated physical experiences that cannot be repeated. As I painted my new cowshed last week I lived in every new room I have ever occupied while the paint was still fresh, and sailed again on more than one ship. The cabbages that are now cooking in the kitchen are bringing back other kitchens, with their warmth and steam and anticipatory delights of 50, 60 and nearly 70 years ago. Artists and musicians may have a different story to tell. Saints and sages may refuse such stimulations, crush them, despise them, flee from them. But I am of the earth and earthy. I have no thoughts, and no memories, no

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 5, 1956.