



Shepherd's Calendar

SPRING BY THE NOSE

by "SUNDOWNER"

WHATEVER their habits may be in Britain, I am now persuaded that hedgehogs do not hibernate in New Zealand. I am not sure that any animals hibernate in New Zealand, though some no doubt keep under cover and lose much of their activity. I suppose hedgehogs do

AUGUST 14 that. But I have so often seen them at large in July and August, and so seldom uncovered one in a condition of at least partial hibernation—it has, in fact, happened only once—that I no longer regard them as even temporary hibernators. True hibernation is more than drowsiness or sluggishness or torpidity. It is suspended animation, or something so near to suspension that a quick return to full alertness is impossible. The physiological story has still, I am told, some gaps in it. To me some of the gaps are as wide as the distance between a little knowledge and none. But I know that hibernation involves marked changes in the blood; a drastic slowing down of respiration; such changes in the pulse that the beat can hardly be detected; a violent drop in temperature; the complete or almost complete suspension of the temperature-regulating mechanism, loss of weight; and always a considerable water-logging of the tissues. None of those conditions could disappear in the brief period between the uncovering of a torpid hedgehog and its return to full wakefulness.

Nor have I found hedgehogs to be wholly or mainly nocturnal. In tussock country in particular, but also in grass paddocks surrounded by hedges, I have often encountered hedgehogs feeding in bright sunlight, and when I have followed and watched them they have

shown no inclination to escape into shadow. Today, in a very raw wind following a cold but not frosty night, I saw one of the biggest specimens I can recall moving down the bed of a gully as I moved up. What it was finding to eat was not quite clear to me, but I judged from its movements and pauses, and especially from the arching of its back when its snout was buried in the grass, that it was finding and extracting worms. At a distance of about 15 yards it stopped and started sniffing in my direction, moving its nostrils and half opening its mouth. But it was not greatly disturbed. Although I sat down when I was about 10 yards away, and had my dog with me, it passed us both at about 10 feet, and then went off at an angle up a slope in front of us. In the next quarter of an hour it travelled only about a chain, and when I went to see why it had not emerged from the cover of a particularly big tussock I found it, not covered up and not coiled in a ball, but sitting on its haunches like a dog with its eyes closed, and its head leaning against the supporting growth behind it. Sleep had overtaken it at three in the afternoon; but not before its hunger was satisfied and a little gleam of sunshine had caught it in a corner away from the wind.

AUGUST 16 NOW that spring is here I think the anti-smokers are making a mistake in trying to frighten us away from tobacco. They should try instead to lead us to the jonquils and the flowering currant. Although most of us meet spring with our eyes, and some with our ears, I have dull ears and overworked eyes and lean heavily on my nose. As long as we have all our

senses we no doubt use them all, and unless we are very unfortunate, we get some assistance from all of them all our lives. But not many of us when we are old get as much assistance from one organ as from another, and I have not, for 30 years, had good service from my ears. My eyes in spite of the harsh treatment I have given them, still struggle bravely with glasses; still keep this world what it has always been to me, and make it impossible for me to imagine a world of darkness. But it is my nose that brings me some of the keenest delights of spring.

I don't know how it is with others, but colour to me without smell is insipid. It is the flowers which strike my nose as well as my eyes, the plants that strike it even when I can't see them (as happens so often in the dark), the fragrant creeping things that I have hardly ever seen or looked for (growing in gullies and on steep hillsides)—things like those that shout goodbye to winter and bring back 70 summers.

Smelling is no doubt a cruder sense than seeing and hearing. It speaks to the animal in us louder than to the angel or the artist. It composes no music and it writes no poems, paints no pictures, and starts no religions. I would not accept my nose in exchange for my eyes; no one would since man first stood upright. I would not, if the choice had been mine, have exchanged my ears. But people without noses—and they are very common—are impoverished people, people who have lost a precious contact with earthly things, perhaps their first contact, but one, whenever it began, that we have all been sad fools to neglect. It may not be true that the organ itself has degenerated; the authorities suggest that it has not. But many of us have ceased to use it, and many more to respect it. The anti-smokers are short-sighted. They should let us know how much we all lose before cancer comes near any of us.

IT amuses me sometimes to stop dead a few yards from a nibbling sheep and wait for the reaction. Sometimes I have to wait a surprisingly long time. If I am only eight or 10 yards away there is, of course, a sudden stampede

AUGUST 17 as soon as I am observed, and the sheep runs two or three chains before she stops and looks round. But if I am two or three chains away to begin with, remain quite still, and have no dog, it may be a minute or two before I am seen, and I am seldom seen clearly enough for immediate identification. There may, in fact, be a staring match that lasts a further two or three minutes before curiosity gives way to panic. To the ewes I possess at present, crossbreds three-parts of the way back to Merino, I am always an alarming presence in some degree, and they do not stand their ground very long. But even these can be caught by curiosity if they do not become aware of me too suddenly. It pleases me, too, before they run to hear their loud sniff of warning and to watch its effect on the others. Though Merinos have been domesticated longer than any other breed, they have never liked men, and never will. They stay in our paddocks because fences have always confused them; but they are wild animals in their hearts, and their hearts are not here.

(To be continued)

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