

What's in a Name

by "SUNDOWNER"

MY friend George, when I rang him today to ask if he would be home at three o'clock, answered, "Yes, dear brother, if God is willing." George has his own way of discovering the will of God, and it never fails. If his plans go through, that is by God's grace. If they miscarry, it is because God knows better than he does.

God is never far away from George by day or by night, and He is always God the Father.

SEPTEMBER 1 Today He must have been an indulgent Father, since George was waiting for me at three and was almost rebellious when I left after half an hour. That has been our story for 20 years. If a new chapter begins it will not be opened by me. I feel close to George in spite of the gulf that separates our minds. I want to stay close.

But when I met him first the gulf was not so wide. We were 25 years younger, and George was not much closer to God than I was. Now that God watches over him every hour of every day, speaks to him, guides him, and forbids so much that I constantly approve and do, the thought of our friendship sometimes startles me. But I don't think it startles George. I think

God allows him a place for it. If it troubled him, I am sure that he would take it, and me, to the Lord in prayer. Perhaps he does, but if so he does not tell me. To George prayer is the same thing in essence—though an unspeakably more solemn thing in purpose and effect—the same thing as an appeal to an earthly father, as natural, as necessary, and as little disturbing. The difference is that when George goes to God he always gets what he asks for, since all his prayers end with a request that God's will and not his own should be done.

It sounds ludicrous, but it isn't. I can't laugh at George, and if I could I hope I would not. I can laugh at our incongruity; at the absurd spectacle of two men marching always out of step and never attempting to correct their stride or their pace; at the ridiculous things we say to each other, the same words meaning one thing to George and a very different thing to me; at our concealments, pretences, deceptions, and attempted bluffs; but never at George himself or his beliefs or his visions.

He has, in fact, made it difficult for me to quarrel with anyone called George. In the course of our friendship

he has invested the name with a quality that I transfer to the bearers of it whether they are worthy or not. It is strange, it is preposterous, but if I could recall at this moment all the Georges I have known in the last 20 years there would not be one whom I would not remember with pleasure. So much can there be in a name when the right man carries it.

IT is not true, I have now discovered, that hedgehogs hibernate even in England, if hibernation is an unbroken sleep from the onset of winter to its close. What happens, my books seem to say, is that their dormant period fluctuates from animal to animal as well as from season to season, and is not governed wholly by temperature.

SEPTEMBER 7 To be able to hibernate safely in any country a warm-blooded animal has to become a cold-blooded animal, and that involves physiological changes which are not yet fully understood, but seem to be independent both of cold and of hunger. It is physiology, working through fat deposits, that starts hibernation; not just a drop in temperature. For that reason some hedgehogs become torpid weeks in advance of other hedgehogs in the same locality. But it is, of course, a rise in temperature that wakes a hedgehog, and I conclude that our temperatures in New Zealand are not low enough for a long enough time to permit a sleeping hedgehog to sleep on. In any case, they do not sleep in any part of New Zealand in which I have lived—and that includes Central Otago and inland Southland. Here in Canterbury I feel sure that they do not change their body temperature at all, but remain warm-blooded throughout the year.

WHEN a friend many years younger than I am asked me recently to walk 53 miles with him, carrying a nine-pound rifle and a 30-pound pack, through country too empty and rough for a road, I should have given him the answer that on a solemn occasion was given to the Devil. But I fell on his neck. If I paused a second before

SEPTEMBER 8 I did so, it was to make sure that he was not pulling one, or both, of my ancient legs. Then I rolled back the pages. I ante-dated my birthday by 15 years. I felt as young as he pretended he thought I was; and as fit; and as eager. But when I found that we could not start for two or three weeks I wilted again. I was afraid lest his second thoughts might be the same as my own—that God is not mocked; that prancing old men are mountebanks and fools; and that every man, whatever he feels or thinks he feels, is as old exactly as the marrow in his bones and the wrinkles in his skin.

But I saw him again today and we start tomorrow. The illusion of youth, ridiculous though I know it to be, has not faded. We have been grinning at each other, as we completed our plans, like Scotsmen sitting over a bottle, and it does not worry me at all that in 24 hours my legs will feel like logs. Today my strength is as the strength of ten because my heart, if not pure, is gay. It is cheap medicine and I offer it free. If you have overtaken yourself, and are sinking under the load, take up your swag again and walk. If you were a murderer 20 years ago be a murderer again; but armed or gunless, go back into the wilderness.

(To be continued)

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"Take up your swag again and walk . . . armed or gunless, go back into the wilderness"
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N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 27, 1957.

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