

From a banker's diary

Tuesday: Mr. [redacted] came in to introduce his son, John (18), who opened a cheque account with an initial deposit of £10.



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This man has been our customer for some time. He believes that the sooner young people learn to handle their own money the better. So when his son began to earn a regular income, he brought him into the Bank to open his own cheque account.

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The Use of Christian Names

THE embarrassments of a new settler with the wrong sort of Christian name, described by "Augustus" on page 8, lend themselves to fantasy because they have an underlying truth. Very few men in New Zealand are now able to address their friends by surnames without giving offence. The usual practice is to pass quickly to Christian names: "Mister" remains the sole concession to formality. It is widely assumed that the unaccompanied surname is a studied curtness. True, it is still used by newspapers in reports of games and athletic meetings; but in the comment which makes up an increasingly large part of sporting journalism the writers revert quickly to "Wally" and "Merv." This reflects a common attitude. Sportsmen are people we should know if we wish to be on more than nodding terms with the great; and if we cannot know them in the flesh we can at least be brought as close to them as the use of their first names will permit.

There is evidence that the trend is not confined to New Zealand. A few months ago *The New Statesman and Nation* printed an indignant letter from Kathleen Raine, who objected "to the use of my Christian name by those meeting me, sometimes for the first time, who seem to assume that belonging to the 'literary world' entitles them to a certain intimacy with all writers. . . ." And she went on to allege that the habit is "a deliberate form of social climbing." We are spared these distresses in New Zealand, where nobody outside the "literary world" wants to climb within reach of it, and where those inside it are unaware of any social value their intimacy might confer. Miss Raine was supported and opposed. There was, inevitably, a suggestion that "this usage is presumably of American origin," though nobody seemed

to think of Rudolph. In England, however, the situation is a little different from our own. Unlike the New Zealander, the Englishman sees no implication of curtness in the use of the surname as a step towards closer relations. The indiscriminate use of Christian names is not for him an escape from awkwardness, but an unwelcome short-cut to intimacy.

His reaction may be too easily mistaken for coldness. Friendship goes further than acquaintance, and is not reached by a casual use of names. Behind the attitude of those who do not want to be carried abruptly to an easy footing is the feeling that friendship is not a social form but a personal undertaking. It is a relationship to be built up slowly, with advances and retreats, and with little assays of taste and opinion. The approach becomes more cautious as a man grows older; he finds it harder to open his mind to someone new. There is too much in his life that cannot be understood by those who come late to it; and liking, which is only the beginning of friendship, has to be taken further by understanding. The familiar habits of these times may seem to be pleasant and relaxing, but they are no more than social fictions. A man may be Tom, Dick or Harry to many people, and yet have few friends. It is easy to fall into the illusion that the use of Christian names is good fellowship, whereas it may be no more than a superficial conformity, beyond which all the problems of personal relationships are elusive and untouched. As Philip Toynbee put it in *The New Statesman* correspondence: "Surely the degrees of intimacy are worth preserving, and the formal surname should be welcomed back, if only as a cautious preliminary to a further advance." But we suspect that the tide is against him.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 27, 1953.

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