



"This Sycamore Tree"

ISN'T IT odd, how the classic tree-name "sycamore" has been bandied about!

Our parable appropriately starts with a pair of philosophical limericks from England. They are comments on the basic doctrine of one school of philosophy, which claims that the world and all things in it exist only as perceptions and ideas in the mind of the observer, that seemingly large and substantial objects are there only because you think they are. The problem is proposed thus:

An Oxford young man remarked: "God
Must surely consider it odd
That this sycamore tree
Simply ceases to be
When there's no one about in the Quad."

To which another wit offered a reconciling solution, holding the solid universe together by postulating an omnipresent Observer. The answer is set in letter form:

Dear Sir: Your bewilderment's odd:
I am always about in the Quad,
So this sycamore tree
Will continue to be,
Since observed by
Yours faithfully,
God.

But if three diverse young men in the Quad should stop to take a good look at this sycamore tree, two of them at least might not see a sycamore there at all. They would see a tree, and they would all see the same tree, but if they were respectively Briton, American and Levantine they might find themselves presently involved in a debate "loud and long," like the Wise Men of Hindustan, as to just what they were looking at.

The Briton (our original Oxford student, let us say) would contend that it really was a sycamore. And he would be right—in Oxford, England. But put our trio on a trans-Atlantic plane and set them down in Oxford, Ohio, and the English sycamore tree "simply ceases to be" a sycamore, and becomes a sycamore maple.

If the American student should then point out what he considered to be really a sycamore, he would be pounced on at once by both the Briton and the Levantine, who would tell him it was unmistakably a plane-tree. And the American would have to admit that the tree had another name, even in the United States: buttonwood.

Then if the three were to be whisked to the holy hills of Palestine, the Oriental young man might point out still a third sycamore, only to be told by his companions that it was really a kind of fig-tree. They might further point out that this peculiar, inedible-fruited fig bears a Greek-Latin name that means "fig-mulberry"—*Ficus Sycomorus*.

Whereupon they might all seat themselves in its shade upon the ground and ask each other, mournfully, "Just what is

a sycamore, anyway?" To which the philosophical Oxonian, all his first bewilderment returning, might well respond, "God knows!"

Science News Letter, April 20, 1935

MEDICINE

Rickets Cured With Caviar in Russia

CAVIAR may be a delicacy to most people but to children of Soviet Russia it may become a tasty substitute for cod liver oil because, like the fish oil, it is rich in anti-rickets vitamin D.

A daily dose of two teaspoons of caviar was prescribed for one month to a group of 20 babies suffering from rickets. Seventeen of the babies were completely cured by this epicurean treatment, Prof. M. Lepsky reports.

Caviar from sturgeon and carplike fish was used in this experiment. The caviar of various fishes differs but slightly in composition, however, so it is possible that other kinds of caviar may prove equally effective as a cod liver oil substitute.

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