Names in Everyday Speach

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MANY NAMES OF PEOPLE AND PLACES have found their way into our everyday language. Some became so popular that they are no longer capitalized, as in the case of *china*, referring to a ceramic ware originally produced in China; of one of the most common words in this industrial age, *sandwich*, named for no less a personage than John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, who enjoyed this type of snack in the eighteenth century; of the names of measuring units in electricity: *ampere* from the French scientist, A. M. Ampere, *watt* from James Watt, the Scottish scientist, and *ohm* from the German electrician G. S. Ohm; of a very useful word *bloomers*, named for Mrs. Amelia Bloomer of New York State, who could not have imagined as she cut her new type of costume that it would immortalize the surname of her husband; of *boycott* referring to Captain Boycott, a land agent in Ireland so treated in 1880; of *lynch* from *Lynch's law*, the law being named after the author, Captain William Lynch (1742–1820) of Virginia.

These names trace their derivation to various sources. Some are found in our literature; some in our history books; some in our comics; some on the stage; some in the laboratories; some in the law courts or legislative bodies; some in our songs and stories. It is hard to know when a word will catch the fancy of the public or find an important niche in the life of the people.

From the classics we have inherited many names which we constantly employ, among them *Venus*, the goddess of love and beauty, used to refer to a very beautiful woman; *Minerva*, the goddess of wisdom, employed to designate a woman of great wisdom or learning; *Adonis*, the symbol of masculine beauty, applied, often ironically, to a handsome young man; *Atlas*, a giant compelled to support the heavens on his shoulders in Greek legend, now used to refer to one who carries or supports a heavy burden, but more often to a bound collection of maps because of the fact that the

Flemish geographer Mercator (Gerhard Kremer) (1512–1594) placed the figure of Atlas with the world on his back on the title page of his sixteenth century collection of maps; *Hercules*, the symbol of strenght, applied to any large, strong man; the *Gordian knot*, more often in the expression "to cut the Gordian knot," meaning "to solve an intricate, difficult problem by direct action, perhaps by a single decisive stroke." The *Gordian knot* derived its name, according to the Greek legend, from a knot tied by King Gordius of Phrygia, which an oracle prophesied would be unfastened only by the future ruler of the East. Alexander the Great heard the prophecy and said that he would perform the task and at once cut the knot with his sword, thereby solving the perplexing problem.

The Bible, both the *Old* and the *New Testament*, has likewise contributed many names to our language, among them *doubting Thomas*, after the apostle Thomas, who doubted the resurrection of Jesus (*John* 20:24–29) and had to have proof. Another apostle who is known to everyone is Judas, who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (*Matthew* 26:14–25; 47–50). Today the name *Judas* is applied to any one who betrays a friend.

A well-known Biblical character is Job, the personification of poverty and patience, based on the story in the book by that name, which tells dramatically of the patriarch whom the Lord gave Satan permission to test. His wealth disappeared, his children died, and he was afflicted with boils, but he remained true to God. Today we hear the proverbial comparison "poor as Job's turkey," in alluding to the poverty of someone, or speak of *Job's comforter* in referring to one who intends to sympathize with a person in sorrow but tells him that he brought it on himself and thereby adds weight to the person's grief.

Solomon, the wisest and most magnificent of the kings of Israel, dating back to the tenth century B. C., did not fail to establish himself in the language. In speaking of the wisdom of someone, a person inevitably employs the comparison "as wise as Solomon."

Likewise, the Queen of Sheba who was entertained by Solomon (1 *Kings* 10) has been remembered. A woman or girl who is dressed so as to attract attention is often referred to as the *Queen of Sheba* or compared to her.

A very early patriarch, one who lived before the Flood, one who has continued to live in our language is Methusaleh, known for his

age. According to *Genesis* 5:27, he lived "nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died." Today when one refers to the long life of someone or something one often employs the proverbial comparison "as old as Methusaleh" or calls a person "a regular Methusaleh."

It may not be wisdom or age that determines immortality in the language but wickedness as in the case of Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel (I *Kings* 16:31; 21:25; II *Kings* 9:30–37), whose name is now employed to refer to any woman who is shameless and wicked. One may also hear "a painted Jezebel" referring to someone wearing too much rouge, for Jezebel also painted her face.

There are also many other types of sources. Take, for instance, *Annie Oakley*, named for Phoebe Annie Oakley Mozee (1860–1926), a markswoman in Buffalo Bill's troupe who astounded audiences by throwing a playing card into the air and then shooting it full of holes before it could land on the ground. Those who saw the performance began to call any punched ticket an "Annie Oakley" and soon *Annie Oakley* meant "any complimentary ticket or pass."

Annie Oakley is still capitalized but not so with *merry-andrew*, " a buffoon, jester, or clown," which is a compound of *merry* and the given name *Andrew*, originally supposed to be said, according to Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, by Thomas Hearne (1678–1735) in referring to Andrew Boorde (1480–1549), a reputed author of jest books and an eccentric character who served as physician to Henry VIII. It should, likewise, be pointed out that in early English plays Andrew was a common name for a manservant as Abigail was for a waiting-woman. Matthew Prior (1664-1721) also wrote a poem on *Merry Andrew*. Whatever the source, the common noun *merry-andrew* has taken its place in the language.

From American literature we may mention a few. Washington Irving gave us *Rip Van Winkle*, when he published his story by that name in the *Sketch-Book* in 1819. The ne'er-do-well henpecked husband who slept for twenty years and awoke to find everything changed appealed to all who heard of him. The story was successfully dramatized and Rip was one of the outstanding roles of the actor Joseph Jefferson. Similarly, in 1920 Percy Mac Kaye wrote the libretto and Reginald de Koven composed the music for a folk opera. All of these presentations have helped to establish *Rip Van Winkle* in the language, generally referring to some one

who has been out of things or to some one who is unaware of what is going on.

Likewise, the awkward, gawky, timorous country school teacher, Ichabod Crane, created by Irving in the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* has found a place in the language. He, completely inert in social situations, became the butt of the town's pranks. Today a pseudo-intellectual who invariably finds himself the dupe of good, simple boyish tricks or a tall, awkward, loosely built, gangly young man is often called an *Ichabod Crane.*

Far more common than either *Rip Van Winkle* and *Ichabod Crane* is Knickerbocker given to us when Irving wrote his mock-serious history of early New York under the name of Diedrich Knickerbocker. This name of *Knickerbocker* was then given to a group of early writers who were followers of Irving (among them Fitz-Greene Halleck and Joseph Rodman Drake). Then came *Father Knickerbocker*, a personification of New York. *Knickerbocker* now refers to a descendant of the Dutch settlers in New York or any New Yorker. It may also refer to loose-fitting breeches, gathered in at the knee, worn by boys, sportsmen, cyclists, and tourists and to a bloomerlike undergarment worn by women at one time. The word is often shortened to *knickers.* This usage was occasioned by the illustrations in *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, showing the Dutch wearing loose knee-breeches. *Knickerbocker* is a very common word especially to an inhabitant of the Empire State. *Knickerbocker* is picked up by various organizations in New York and used for publicity purposes. Irving not only gave us literature but gave us words that we commonly employ in daily life.

Another name that we often hear used is *Simon Legree.* It is applied to any harsh, merciless taskmaster, originating with the brutal slave overseer in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

Similarly, *Pollyanna* has become a synonym for a foolish optimist who consistently "makes the best of things" for himself and others. Pollyanna was the leading character in a popular story written by Eleanor H. Porter (1868–1920) and has immortalized herself by always looking on the bright side.

Another name from literature is *Handy Andy*, the title of a novel written by Samuel Lover in 1842, named for the good-natured, blundering Irish hero, Andy Rooney, who had the knack of doing

everything the wrong way. Today, however, the connotation of this rhyming phrase is the opposite of its original implication. *Handy Andy* is now a convenient nickname for a versatile, helpful, useful, utility man.

Then there is *Paul Pry*, referring to someone who meddles in other people's business, created by John Poole, a nineteenth century writer whose comedy by that name, written in 1825, had as its chief character the inquisitive idler Paul Pry, who always introduced himself with the apology "I hope I don't intrude."

Lazy Mary is another rhyming phrase like *Handy Andy* that has come into the language, adopted from the singing game by that name, in which the players form a ring and skip around Lazy Mary, who sits or lies in the center, answering those who are singing in the circle:

Lazy Mary, will you get up ?
Will you, will you, will you get up ?
Lazy Mary, will you get up ?
Will you get up today ?

She refuses to get up for breakfast, for bread and tea, for anything until she is enticed by the promise of "a nice young man with rosy cheeks." Then she arises and replies: "Yes, Mother, I will get up I will get up today." The name of this song has sung itself into our language. We also have in addition to *Lazy Mary Mary, quite contrary* or at times *Contrary Mary* from the nursery rhyme:

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
How does your garden grow,
With silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty maids all in a row ?

Mary is not only employed to refer to an indolent or a contrary person but to a narcotic, a marijuana cigarette. *Marijuana* was thought to be a blended word from *Maria* and *Juana* or *Mary Jane*, later shortened to *Mary*. The Army did not neglect *Mary* in the South Pacific for the native girls there were called *Mary's*. No doubt, that appellation was based on the stereotyped picture of South Sea Islanders as lazy, going back to *Lazy Mary*. *Mary* has also been used to signify a rifle and a pickpocket. This name seems to play a varied and versatile role in our language.

Mary may be lazy and contrary but Simon is simple and pure. *Simple Simon* today refers to any simpleton or gullible person. This

rhyming nickname had its origin like *Contrary Mary* in a nursery rhyme. "Simple Simon met a Pie-man," was part of a tale in one of the chapbooks of the Elizabethan era. It runs as follows:

Simple Simon met a Pieman
Going to the fair;
Says Simple Simon to the Pieman
Let me taste your ware.

Says the Pieman to Simple Simon,
Show me first your penny;
Says Simple Simon to the Pieman,
Indeed I have not any.

Simple Simon went a-fishing
For to catch a whale;
All the water he had got
Was in his mother's pail.

Simple Simon went to look
If plums grew on a thistle
He pricked his finger very much
Which made poor Simon whistle.

Simon-pure, however, was derived from the name of a Quaker in Mrs. Susanna Centlivre's comedy *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* (1718). A Colonel Feignwell in the play passed himself off for Simon Pure and won the heart of a Miss Lovely. But the Quaker appears and proves, beyond all doubt, his identity. *Simon-pure* has therefore come to mean "real, genuine, authentic." It now functions as an adjective and has become one word, no longer capitalized, the two names being joined together by a hyphen.

There was another Simon who has been immortalized in a word: Simon Magus, a Samaritan sorcerer who was severely rebuked by Peter for offering money to purchase the power of giving the Holy Ghost (*Acts* 8:9–24). This Simon came into the language in the Middle English period in the word *simony*, a term for the buying or selling of church employment. Later words which have entered the language based on *simony* are *simonism*, *simonist*, *simoniac*, and *simoniacal*. The Simons, down through the centuries, seem to have a predilection for becoming a part of our language, the latest one being the aforementioned *Simon Legree*.

Along with *Lazy Mary* and *Simple Simon* we may put *Slim Jim*, a nickname for a tall, lanky person, once the title of a comic strip,

the chief character of which was a tall, gangly young man. It is also an expression meaning "thin." One can now buy narrow neckties and narrow-legged trousers that are *Slim Jims*. These words are undoubtedly connected simply because they rhyme.

In addition to *Slim Jim* there is *Jim Dandy*, meaning "excellent" or "first class." We often describe something that we admire as being *Jim Dandy*. The expression, no doubt, was adopted from the Negro stage character, Dandy Jim, created by the American singer and comedian Thomas D. Rice around 1845. According to the *Dictionary of American English*, as far back as 1792, the earliest citation, *dandy* had come to mean "fine," "first class," "superior" and putting *Jim* in front served to intensify the meaning of the expression, as illustrated by a quotation from the *Courier-Journal* (12 Jan. 2/1) for 1887 which reads: "Dear Sir: Though a stranger to you (yet a Democrat) let me say you are a Jim Dandy."(*DAE*).

Another Jim that we have heard a great deal about recently is Jim Crow, an expression which also owes its life to Thomas D. Rice, who introduced *c.* 1828 a popular song and dance act by that name at Louisville, Kentucky, and repeated it at the Bowery Theatre in New York in 1832 and later in London with great success. Rice is supposed to have picked up the song and dance from an old Negro in Louisville, whom he heard singing:

Wheel about, turn about
Do jis so,
An' ebery time I wheel about
I jump Jim Crow.

Jim Crow, the name of an early Negro minstrel song, the Negro character in the song, has now come to mean "discrimination against or segregation of Negroes." It also functions as an adjective with a hyphen between *Jim* and *Crow*, as in "Jim-Crow laws, schools, etc." *Jim-Crow* has been used so much that usage is now divided between *Jim-Crow* with capitals and *jim-crow* without capitals.

Along with the Jims there are also a number of John's or Johnny's in our language, no doubt due to fact that *John* is popular as a name. H. L. Mencken says in his *American Language* (1936), "John remains the favorite given-name among native Americans today, as it has been among people of British stock since the Norman Conquest ..." (p. 515). The *Dictionary of American English* lists

John Yankee as a familiar name for a New Englander and *John Chinaman* as a popular name employed in referring to the Chinese as a group, citing contexts of authors employing *John* in reference to them, so widespread was the usage. In writing of the Chinese in 1855, Helper in *Land of Gold* (p. 91) wrote, "The Americans salute them all indiscriminately by the easy and euphonious appellation of 'John,'" and Beadle in 1873 in *Undeveloped West* (p. 771) said, "The melancholy 'Johns' with glazed caps and black pig tails, looking like a lot of halfdrowned crows."

There is *John Doe* which originally was a sham name employed in law as a fictitious lessee acting as plaintiff in a common-law action of ejectment. This name extended its meaning to a person, real or fictitious, in any transaction, action, or proceeding, and now it refers to any imaginary person. Similarly in England *John-a-Nokes* and *John-a-Stiles* were employed in an imaginary action at law and those names came to stand for any one.

Another English name that we often use is *John Bull*, a personification of England, the English people, or a typical Englishman. Dr. John Arbuthnot created this character in 1712 in his *History of John Bull*, originally published as *Law Is a Bottomless Pit.* We are familiar with him from the political cartoons in the newspapers.

John Barleycorn may be even more familiar than *John Bull.* He was the English and Scotch personification of barley from which intoxicating liquors are made. Hence he came to personify the liquors. *John Bull* goes back to 1712, but *John Barleycorn* was having a "pleasant new ballad" written about his murder in 1620, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary.*Robert Burns added to his popularity when he wrote in *Tam O'Shanter* (II. 105–6): "Inspiring bold John Barleycorn / what dangers thou canst make us scorn." During Prohibition in this country many brewery or community groups put on a play burying John Barleycorn. He may be buried from time to time, but he lives on in the minds and the speech of the people.

Who has not heard of John Hancock, the American Revolutionary statesman who was president of the Continental Congress (1775 to 1777)? Being president, he was the first signer of the Declaration of Independence. His signature was bold and clear, very legible. As a result, his name has come to mean "a person's signature." One often hears, "Put your John Hancock here" instead of "Sign here."

John is such a common name that it has come to designate a toilet, either for men or women. The *American Thesaurus of Slang* (L. V. Berrey and Van den Bark) also lists *johnny*, the diminutive, as a name for "latrine" under the section "places" in Army terminology.

Another *Johnny* is *Johnny-Come-Lately*, referring to a newcomer, to an inexperienced person, a novice, or raw recruit. There is also *Johnny-on-the-spot*, describing a prompt, punctual individual or an enterprising, energetic person, one who attends to business, is reliable, is always present when anything happens. Among railway employees it referred to a fireman who kept the steam pressure up to the red spot. It is this definition that no doubt accounts for the expression, for keeping the steam pressure up to the red spot would be an important part of a fireman's job. He would become *Johnny-on-the-spot.*

Johnny was a popular name during the Civil War, used to refer to a Confederate, in the designation *Johnny Reb*, which is obviously a shortening of *Johnny Rebel.* According to the *Boston Transcript* of July 25, 1898 (6/6), "The name 'Johnny' was bestowed in the first year of the War by the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac on the Confederates opposed to them in Virginia."

There is also *Stage Door Johnny*, a general term to refer to those who dance attendance to actresses and there is a *Jingling Johnny*, a nickname used among musicians to refer to a percussion instrument consisting of a crescent-shaped metal plate hung with a set of little bells. It is of Turkish origin, bearing the name of *crescent*, and is used in military bands.

Just as *John* and *Johnny* are alternates for man or fellow, so *Jane* and *Jenny* are employed to refer to a female, especially a girl or young woman. One can often hear such statements as "My! Look at that Jane" or "Where did that Jane come from?" According to the *American Thesaurus of Slang* (L. V. Berrey and M. Van den Bark), *Jane* also refers to a "woman of easy morals."

This definition applied to *Calamity Jane* who followed the Army or any group of men, such as the Jenny Geological Expedition. *Calamity Jane* was born Martha Jane Cannary in 1852, later married to Burke. She was a frontier character who became a legend in the West and was put into a popular dime novel by Edward J. Wheeler: *Deadwood Dick on Deck* or *Calamity Jane the*

Heroine of Whoop Up. The notorious *Calamity Jane* who died in 1903 has become a part of our language, designating "one who is constantly predicting misfortune or putting the worst possible interpretation on anything that happens."

Along with *Calamity Jane* we have *Plain Jane*, another rhythmic expression, like *Slim Jim*, *Handy Andy*, and others, which is currently serving the writers who give advice to teenagers on how to be popular. A young girl is warned against being a *Plain Jane*, connoting a wall flower or an ordinary girl, lacking glamor and sparkle.

Jenny is a familiar or pet form for *Jane* and is frequently used with names of animals or birds to denote a female, as in *jenny wren.* In the old nursery rhyme Jenny Wren is the sweetheart of Robin Redbreast who promises her, if she will be his wife, that she will "feed on cherry-pie and drink currant wine," to which she replies:

> Cherry-pie is very nice,
> And so is currant wine;
> But I must wear my plain brown gown
> And never go too fine.

One can see the use of *Jenny* for a "girl or woman" from a quotation from John Galt in 1821, where he says in *The Annals of the Parish*, "Take a lady of your own ... There never was a silly Jack, but there was as silly a Jenny!" and Henderson in 1832 wrote "There never was a silly Jackey but what there was a silly Jenny." This expression is quite similar to the one we often hear: "For every Jack there is a Jill," where *Jack* also means "man" or "fellow" and *Jill* a"girl," "lass," or "sweetheart." Shakespeare has Puck say in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, iii, 2:

> Jack shall have Jill,
> Nought shall go ill;
> The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.

A similar proverbial expression is "A good Jack makes a good Jill." That is, a good husband makes a good wife or a good master makes a good servant. Here, *Jack* is a generic name for "man, husband, or master" and Jill for a "woman." These sayings concerning Jack and Jill are based on the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill went up the hill / To fetch a pail of water," said to be a relic of a Norse myth, which accounts for the dark patches in the moon.

The moon is supposed to have kidnapped the two children while drawing water, and they are still to be seen with a pail suspended from a pole resting on their shoulders. There is also an unknown comedy by the name of *Jack and Jill* mentioned in the Revels Accounts as having been played at court in 1567–68.

It is interesting to see what names the comics have made popular. In the late 1920's Chic Young had a comic strip drawn for King Features Syndicate, called "Dumb Dora." Dora was a flapper. *Dumb Dora* is now used to designate "a stupid girl." At times the expression refers to a scatterbrained young woman who is rather stupid; that is, she may be "beautiful but dumb." In the *American Thesaurus of Slang* (L. V. Berrey and M. Van den Bark) under the section on "Commerce" one learns too that a *dumb dora* is a customer to whom it is not easy to sell. Here we find an extension of the earlier meaning.

Other terms employing *dumb* that are interchangeable with *dumb Dora* are *dumb bunny* and *dumb-belle.*

Another comic strip creation is "Dennis the Menace" by Henry King Ketcham, representing the typical precocious child of six or seven who is completely without inhibitions and possesses an insatiable curiosity which demands immediate gratification. As a result he commits the outrageous and embarrassing acts that boys are disposed to do and is a constant source of annoyance to his mother, particularly when her bridge friends are being entertained. Despite the actions of Dennis the Menace he has that irresistible charm which endears him to everyone. His name is now a household word employed from coast to coast to refer to a child who is actively engaged in discovering the world.

The cartoonist Harold T. Webster has given to us *Caspar Milquetoast*, a term commonly employed in the United States to describe a person who is unusually timid, fearful, and self-conscious. Webster chose this name for the hero of his well-known cartoon "The Timid Soul." No doubt, the popularity of this comic cartoon is due to the fact that there are very few who have not recognized in themselves some of the characteristics of "The Timid Soul" at one time or another in his life. So popular has it become that *Caspar Milquetoast* is a common term.

As Webster created Caspar Milquetoast, so did Fontaine Fox create the Toonerville Trolley, that belongs to every small-town

American, and the Toonerville folk, prototypes of the small town, any small town. The Toonerville Trolley may lose a wheel but the conductor gets it back to town by having all the passengers shift over to one side. The conductor also stops once a day on his route at his youngest daughter's house to amuse the little grandson for about an hour. This comic strip was so widely read that the *Toonerville Trolley* has become a part of our language.

A name that has come to us from Ireland is *Paddy*, a nickname for an Irishman. It is a diminutive of Irish *Pādraig*, "Patrick," named for St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. We often hear the comparison "as Irish as Paddy's pig."

A name that goes far back in history that is well established is *Peeping Tom*, whose appellation goes back to 1040 A. D. when Lady Godiva,the wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia and Lord of Coventry, rode naked through the streets of the town. The legend is that the Lord of Coventry had imposed severe taxes upon the people which his lady begged him to remove. He promised to repeal the taxes provided that she would ride naked through the town at midday. She agreed. An edict went out that all shutters must be closed during the ride. A tailor who violated the edict became known as Peeping Tom. His name has come down through the centuries and is used to refer to anyone who looks when he is not supposed to or knowingly peeps into places where he is not expected to be, as in the case of a window peeper or transom peeper.

Another name that has come down through the centuries is that of Thomas Hobson (*c.* 1544–1631) of Cambridge, England, preserved in *Hobson's choice*, meaning "the choice of taking what is offered or nothing at all," alluding to the practice of Hobson, who rented horses and required every customer to take in order the horse nearest the stable door or none at all. This expression was the title of a recent motion picture. Film producers have long known the advantage of using proverbial sayings in their titles.

These various names have come down to us from numerous sources, but whatever the source, they and expressions connected with them are a living part of our language. Most of us understand the common connotations of each designation or saying even if we have never heard of its creator or become acquainted with its origin.