Names in Brief

"Tom, Dick, and Harry"

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THE PROVERBIAL PHRASE "Tom, Dick, and Harry," signifying anyone and everyone or, as the *New English Dictionary* says,[1] "any men taken at random from the common run" and usually implying a somewhat depreciatory estimate, is a traditional choice of familiarly used Christian names. A depreciatory flavor is perhaps more clearly perceived in the variant form "Every Tom, Dick, and Harry", which occurs in quots. 1939 and 1949 below and is familiar to me in colloquial use. This variation seems to be rather recent in origin. A more ingenious than convincing explanation of the phrase sees in it a reference to St. Thomas of Canterbury, Richard Cœur de Lion, and Henry V.[2] There is no evidence to support such a conjecture. These three men have little in common beyond having been, each in his own way and in his own time, conspicuous in English history. One cannot easily see why their names should have been combined and, more particularly, why their names, when taken together, should suggest men taken at random from the common run. Similar phrases have been traditionally used in English for four centuries and longer, but tradition has, as far as the available evidence goes, settled upon Tom, Dick, and Harry only within the last century and a half. Why this should be the case is obscure. It does not seem likely that the choice of these

[1] 12 v. and supplement, Oxford, 1884–1913. See "Tom," 1. This will be cited subsequently as NED. Other reference works will be similarly cited in an abbreviated fashion after the first reference to them. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (4th ed., London, [1951]), p. 895 cites his *Words, Words, Words!* (1933), which I have not seen. Various phrases of similar meaning in languages other than English will be found in *Notes and Queries*, 8th Ser., VI (1894), 243–244.

[2] *Notes and Queries*, CLI (1926), 460.

three historical figures can reflect an interpretation of English history current around 1800 that might have established itself in historical writing or might represent traditional notions of the past.

The following examples of "Tom, Dick, and Harry" and kindred phrases show the variations characteristic of proverbial use during the last four centuries":

1554 M. P. Tilley *A Dictionary of Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950) T 376 Quharefore to Colzearis, Cairtaris, and to Cukis – To Iok and Thome, my Ryme sall be diractit [i. e., directed]. 1597 NED: I am – sworn brother to a leash of Drawers, and can call them by their names, as Tom, Dicke, and Francis. 1606 NED: When Tom and Tib, were in their true delight, And he lou'd her, and she held him full deare. 1617 Ernest Weekley *Words and Names* (New York [1933]) 93 a sport at which *Jac* and *Tom*, *Dic*, *Hob*, and *Will* strive for the gay garland. 1622 Tilley: I neither care what Tom, or Iacke, or Dicke sed [i. e., said]. 1655 (ascribed to James I, 1604) Tilley: Then Jack, and Tom, and Will, and Dick shall meet and censure me and my Council. 1661 Tilley: Though Dick, and Tom and Jack, Will serve you and your pack. c1693 J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley *Slang and Its Analogues* (7 v., [London] 1890–1904) VII 151. Offended to hear almost every gentleman call one another Jack, Tom and Harry? They first dropt the distinction proper to men of quality, and scoundrels took it up and bestowed it upon themselves. 1723 Farmer and Henley: Rivalling the critic's lofty style, Mere Tom and Dick are Stanhope and Argyll. 1782 *Benham's Book of Quotations* (new and rev. ed., London [1948]) 108a The man that hails you Tom or Jack, And proves by thumps upon your back How he esteems your merit. 1814 *Notes and Queries* 8th Ser., XI (1897) 487 Jack, Tom, and Harry have no existence in the eyes of the law, except as included in some form or other of the permanent prosperity of the realm. 1815 NED: So he hired Tom, Dick and Harry, and at it they all went. 1818 NED: Tom, Dick and Harry were not fit to censure them and their Council (this remark made by John Adams appears to be a reminiscence of King James's remark, quot. 1655 above). 1835 *An Account of Col. Crockett's Tour to the North and Down East*, etc. [Of uncertain authorship] 171

Loaned out to Tom, Dick, or Harry;[3] 1865 NED: Thereafter Tom, Jack and Harry; for every cab, carriage and omnibus ... is now allowed to fall in. Second half of the nineteenth century James Main Dixon *Dictionary of Idiomatic English Phrases* (London 1906) 341 "But all are not preachers and captains in the Salvation Army?" "No, there is my cousin Dick. We are, very properly, Tom, Dick and Harry" (credited to Besant without more precise identification); If that girl isn't in love with you, she is something very like it. A girl does not pop over like that for Dick, Tom, and Harry (similarly credited to H. R. Haggard). 1891 NED: The only bears still extant are the Tom, Dick, and Harry of the Bourses. 1939 Burton E. Stevenson *The Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Familiar Phrases* (New York 1948) 2338: 1 We can't have every Tom, Dick and Harry throwing the damned thing in our teeth. 1949 E. S. Gardner *The D. A. Breaks an Egg* ch. 8 (Pocket Book 69) but I don't go out with every Tom, Dick, or Harry. 1949. H. R. Patch *On Re-reading Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass. 1949) 257 Chaucer ... loves the individual Tom and Dick and Harry. 1950 R. M. Gay *The Pacific Spectator* IV 93 Utopia ... would come, if ever not by hating human nature but loving Tom, Dick and Harry.

In addition to these examples from print an oral traditional description of a young girl and an old maid at a dance will be a pertinent illustration of the phrase. The young girl moves her fan slowly while deciding which man is her choice and says meditatively, "Tom, Dick, or Har-ry?" The old maid moves her fan quickly, saying, "Anyone will do, anyone will do."

These examples show that "Tom, Dick, and Harry" has been slow in establishing itself as the standard manner of expressing this idea. They also suggest drawing another inference. Since the first example of this version (quot. 1815 above) is found in *The Farmer's Almanack* published at Boston, a popular book that cites proverbial materials of the most familiar quality, we infer that the phrase was then in common use. We can go on to infer that it is very probably an Americanism. This instance and the instance of 1818 (which is a

[3] Seven additional examples (down to 1869) and some parallels from contemporary writers will be found in the forthcoming *Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proberbial Phrases, 1820–1880* by Bartlett Jere Whiting and myself.

remark made by John Adams) as well as the free use of the phrase by nineteenth-century and later American writers support this inference. It is worthy of notice that John Adams seems to be recalling King James's remark and modifying it to suit his own idiom. Furthermore, the examples of the phrase as used by writers in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century show considerable variations among themselves. Although the phrase cannot be confidently called an Americanism until more evidence is available, all that we now know suggests that it is.

Any conjecture regarding the development of "Tom, Dick, and Harry" from earlier phrases must, in the nature of the case, be wholly a matter for speculation. To my ear its rhythm is preferable to "Tom, or Iacke, or Dicke" (quot. 1622) or "Jack, Tom, and Harry" (quots. c1693, 1814) as is also the succession of the vowels *o-i-a*, but whether others will feel the same way is by no means certain and such questions need not be explored. It is, in any case, curious that Jack, although found in various versions from 1554 to c1693 and sporadically thereafter, should have disappeared from the phrase. This fact suggests a last inference from the evidence. The actual frequency in use of names is difficult to discover. In interpreting these phrases knowledge of such frequency would require interpretation in the light of the social status of the men who bore them. Even if we had information about the frequency in use of these names and could interpret it, it would still be difficult to explain the virtual disappearance of Jack from a phrase signifying "men taken at random from the common run." Nor can I see any social or historical fact that would explain an obvious American preference for "Tom, Dick, and Harry." In any case it seems probable that this phrase and perhaps others like it do not reflect with complete accuracy the statistical frequency of Christian names at any particular time or in any particular place.[4]

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[4] Since this was written, one more example has come to my knowledge: 1864–65 Anthony Trollope *Can You Forgive Her?* (London, 1948) I 336 property which I could give to Tom, Dick, or Harry to-morrow. This seems to be the earliest instance of this version in England.

Notes on Humboldt County, California, Place Names of Indian Origin

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1. *Town of Loleta.* Gudde, California Place Names p. 191, says, "In 1893 the residents, wishing a change, [from the name Swauger] accepted Mrs. Rufus F. Herrick's choice of the present name, which according to local tradition is an Indian word." Mrs. Herrick was a person who the Indians felt condescended to them, and they bore her little love in return. Desiring to rename the town, she asked a certain old Indian to tell her the Wiyot word for the place. The actual Wiyot Indian word is /katawółoˀt/, but he was not in the mood to give out this information, and answered instead /hóš wiwítak/ "Come on, let's go to bed!" (We paraphrase an unprintable word. The first word is an interjection "come on!" and the second is analyzable into the root wiw- "to have sexual intercourse" plus -it, a hortatory suffix, plus -ak, an emphatic suffix.) Presumably Mrs. Herrick knew enough of the language to know that /hóš/ was separate, and omitted the -k for euphony. Wiyot has a strong stress on the second syllable of the word, and the quality of the first i is obscured by contrast. The story is well authenticated by first hand observers, and there is little doubt that this is the correct etymology.

2. *Mattole River.* California Place Names, p. 208. This Mattole Indian word is pronounced by the Wiyot as [mæˀto·l], phonemically /meˀtu·l/, and is a name with no etymology, according to an Indian of Bear River ancestry. The etymology suggested in California Place Names, "clear water," may be based on the Wiyot language, in which the word for "water" is /hu·l/, which changes initial h to t when appearing as the second element of a compound, according to a regular and common morphophonemic process. The initial part cannot be identified within Wiyot.

3. *Weott.* California Place Names, p. 386. Name of a town, population about 350, located on US Route #101 where the South

Fork of the Eel River branches off from the main stream (not within actual Wiyot Indian territory). Also the name, in the form Camp Weott, of a group of houses for seasonal vacations and fishing on the south side of the mouth of Eel River. This was washed out in the flood of late 1955. The word, /wíyoʔt/, is the name applied by the Indians to the Eel River, and also to the smaller Salt River, which branches off from the former at the mouth and flows down through Ferndale. It is not the name of the Indian group, who refer to themselves in their language as "those who live along the Eel River."

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Ajacan, the Algonkian Name for Hampton Roads, Virginia

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THERE IS LITTLE TO WARRANT concluding that Ajacan is a tribal country-name, – less for holding that it was an aboriginal name for Virginia. Cf. *The Spanish Jesuit Mission in Virginia, 1571–1572, Lewis and Loomie, The University of North Carolina Press, 1953*, and historians cited therein for both misconceptions. The authors of that book lean strongly to the idea that the term was the name of the specific tribal country of the Indian Don Luis.

Nowhere in Spanish narratives do we find him quoted directly, or indirectly, as so saying. He spoke Spanish und he is indirectly quoted as desiring to go to "la Provincia del Ajacan," to return to his land and people in that province, to get to Ajacan. But only a systematic mind, with little knowledge of the immediate apprehension of the primitive mind, would be likely to misconstrue what this Indian meant. Ajacan was near his native home.

We relied on the eminent Dr. James A. Geary for scientific verification of the literal. Spanish *Jacan* is phonetically *PA***shacan*: a general topographical term meaning "a crossing over water," the prefix "A-" most probably converting the general term into a specific name of a particular crossing-place. Primitives speaking agglutinate languages usually attach specific prefixes, or terminals, to be specific, seldom if ever using a general term as a name without doing so. Of course, there are exceptions to this.

In the 16th century Spanish oceanographers were convinced, from data on known ocean currents, that between Florida and the Straits of Anian (Northwest Passage) there must be a salt water

route from the Atlantic to the Pacific. They were certain they had proved the existence of such a crossing over, or by, water, through the North American land mass, scientifically. In the North Carolinat and Virginia Algonquian areas were strong, persistent beliefs that some river, ultimately emptying into the Atlantic through the Virginia capes, actually flowed from a Great Salt Sea to the west of the mountains. Scientific opinions of the time held that this was possible. Hundreds of miles of flowing would render salty sea-water wholly fresh again.

Thus one may be very certain that, the natives having no term niotistinguish between "crossing over," "crossing by," and "crossgsnon" water, when they were picked up by Spanish mariners and cdnematically questioned as to where "a crossing by water," y oaecting with the Western Sea, joined the Atlantic they immedistely apprehended it was the well-known Ajacan, or "crossing over water," called today Hampton Roads, which the Spanish sought. No doubt the Spanish were told to sail north close to the coasts beyond the last island reefs and they could not miss Ajacan.

English narratives mention Indian travellers crossing here not only in canoes but with the aid of gourd water-wings. Travellers on foot north or south along the coasts had to "cross over the water" here, or stop, or detaour hundred of miles. That the Spanish first used Ajacan to refer to this specific water-crossing seems certain. They did so thus: "del Jacan, ques la baya de Santa Maria," — in full, in English, "the crossing over water, which is (*the same as*, implicit in "ques") the Bay of Santa Maria." At the time they knew only the first harbor, or anchorage, within the capes, i. e., Hampton Roads of today. Spanish mariners so identified Ajacan as late as 1587.

As Spanish explorations expanded, they extended their original "baya de Santa Maria" to include the whole Chesapeake Bay as "la Bahia della Santa Maria;" and extended the specific name Ajacan to include all appurtenant coastal plains as "la Provincia del Ajacan." Such extensions of specific place-names, as witness California, and many others, was a Spanish trait and not an Algonquian or Powhatan one.

Clearly, Ajacan was the native name for Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Such a conclusion is etymologically sound. It is valid in relation to the cultural context of how the Spanish first learned it, conforms to what the Spanish originally understood it to be the name of,and, when related to all that is known about the Powhatan cultural context, appears culturally valid, too.

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