

Notes and Queries

The bulging folder of clippings and notes labeled "N & Q column materials" offers abundant testament to the thoughtfulness of *Names* readers as well as to concern on the part of the public – even those who might flinch at the word – with the diversions and puzzles of onomastics.

We doubt that the *Saturday Review* would be much put off by the word onomastics, but were amused to find a note in the September 22, 1962, issue about a children's book called *I Wish I Had Another Name*. The authors are Jay Williams and Winifred Lubell; the publisher Atheneum, the price \$3.25, which, since there are 40 pages, works out to eight cents a page. Perhaps the illustrations make up for what strikes us as a rather high price for a slender volume aimed at the 5–9 year old trade; it's the rationals that interests us anyway, and that seems to be that there is power in a name if its possessor can establish a rhyme-relationship between it and his heart's desire. For instance: "I wish my name were Abigail / Then I would go and catch a whale." Better yet: "If my name were Desmond O'Darryl of Dunder / I'd ride on a stallion the color of thunder." Let us not go into the poetic license that permits a stallion to be the color of thunder; let us simply acknowledge again how many things escape our prosaic adult minds but are uncannily logical to children, and turn to the question of the wish for another name.

The book note, briefer than our remarks on it, ends: "One cannot help wondering, however, why he is not allowed to choose his own name: it is chosen for him." We could, of course, tell "one" that the law requires that his birth certificate be filled out almost before he has made a warm hollow in his bassinet. We could go on about pressures to name babies after relatives dear, near, or rich; about impulses to name them after men or women of the hour, saints, personal heroes, dear and glorious physicians, and heaven knows who (or whom) else.

All of this makes us the more eager to hear the reports of Drs. Pollock, Plank, Brender, and others (see N & Q, September, 1961) at work on the psychology of name-giving and name-getting. It is possible that the interest of many an *ANS* member in the activity

of the society may originate in difficulties he has had with his own name. With this in mind, and in full awareness that we may seem to compete with the intrepid Lucy who periodically hangs out her shingle: "Psychiatric Care 5¢" in the Charles M. Schulz comic strip "Peanuts," we propose the establishment of a temporary but sympathetic center for contributions from readers whose names have brought them some special frustration, monotony, or woe and who have been tempted to wish they had another.

To begin the keening, may we tell our own tale? To our best knowledge, there is no other mortal named Audrey Rosalind Duckert with whom we can share the effect of the following: *Item*: Shakespeareans are always ready with remarks about being named "as you like it" or about wenchies, or with a little sham sympathy for the order in which the names occur. *Item*: Folklorists and practically anyone old enough to remember the child-beast during her heyday will cite "little Audrey" and possibly offer a story or two. *Item*: Philologists ask if we know the etymology of *tawdry* and proceed to give it, apparently unaware that the answer was affirmative. As for our surname, let it be said only that though we wear it proudly, pervasive mispronunciation of it has made us highly sensitive to jokes concerning the family *Anatidae*.

It is important to remember about one man's meat being another man's poison. An exciting Belgian mezzo-soprano, currently singing her first season at the Metropolitan in New York, chose Rita Gorr as a professional name to be used in place of her own Flemish one, which is Marguerite Geirnaert. "I never knew anyone called Gorr," she is quoted in *Opera News* (December 15, 1962); "my friends and I just made it up." Linguocentric Americans who wonder at the choice should remember that it does have the advantage of being short and easy to pronounce. (Every now and then a popular article appears somewhere on the amelioration of unromantic names [e.g., Fred Bickel becomes Frederic March] for the sake of an acting career; perhaps a *Names* reader with an interest in music can write us an article on musicians and their names. We suspect a very different set of motivations and effects, somehow.)

It is a moot point whether people with unusual names are really more put upon than those who must share theirs with prominent, even notorious people in fact and fiction. Songs like "Open the Door,

Richard" and "Goodnight, Irene" and "Alice, Where Art Thou?" have surely taken their toll in frayed nerves. In *People Named Smith*, H. Allen S. offered some witty and engaging consolation to his name-mates, who include, of course, the book review editor of this journal. Those of us who delight in collecting the likes of Fernando Alphonse Schultz and Bonita Schmelzkopf might just pause for a moment and consider with some sympathy the *other* people named Charlie Brown, Dick Tracy, Barbara Allen, John Glenn, Elizabeth Taylor, and even John Kennedy. Incidentally, the political magic worked by the last name for those other than the man in the White House seems to be lessening as it becomes more generally understood that *the* John Kennedy is not, at the moment, an active candidate for office. At any rate, November, 1962, brought defeat to a hopeful John F. Kennedy in New England, though of course he was running in Rhode Island . . .

A while back, a Broadway producer was able to save an ailing show by consulting the telephone book and giving away a few free tickets. He found people whose names coincided with those of the leading drama critics, treated them to the show, and then solicited their comments, which later appeared in advertisements carrying their well-known names without the newspaper or magazine identification that is customary but not, to judge by the results, essential. The show was saved and the real critics apparently accepted the spoof in good grace, though it is doubtful that the trick could be worked again.

Donald Clark, an *ANS* member who recently left Massachusetts for Santa Cruz, California, sent a clipping from the Boston *Herald* concerning Podunk, Massachusetts, and its three hundred residents. They must brace themselves for the inevitable whenever they are asked where home is. People from Kankakee, Kalamazoo, and Sheboygan have it easy by comparison, for at least the general public is willing to accept the existence of their towns; the poor Podunkian must not only endure the laughter but deny the myth. Therefore let us extend the comfort of the catharsis offered above to readers who come from "odd" places as well as to those whose personal names have been a trial. May they all find some measure of ease having told their troubles to an audience of name-collectors.