

## Notes and Queries

Somehow, the turning of the seasons affords a better moment for preoccupation with time than New Year's Eve, which begins in winter and ends in winter; and in the passage of time there is also the passage of names. It is the prerogative of every generation to claim, with great originality, that it has "marked the passing of an era," just as it is the obligation of each generation to pronounce, as it ages, that you-know-who is going to the you-know-what. Cliché experts can have a field day on cross-currents in the relationships between people and their times, yet they have no answer for the sudden bewilderment that comes, on occasion, to those of us who are now trying to bring up, teach, counsel, understand, and enjoy a generation that does not remember when there was no television and is hard put to look upon jet planes and atomic energy as anything new. Modern, yes; but not new. We strive, some of us, to learn what *is* new to them, to comprehend their language though we could not use it with any authority, to locate places called "Wayoutsville" and "Squaresville," or to ponder the mystique of the "fink" and his superlative, the "rat fink."

At the same time, we struggle for the survival of our own generation and seek to share its vanished delights with the younger one, though never in a way that might seem to reproach them for not having been there to enjoy the events, catch the timely allusions, and use the lingo with contemporary authenticity. We (editorial, not regal) think we may speak with some degree of knowing on this, having been born shortly before Lindbergh flew the Atlantic and lived into an era where adults asked who was Lindbergh and what's so wonderful about flying the Atlantic. *The Spirit of St. Louis* – now there was a grand name; it has a kind of craggy, bumptious individuality totally absent from the slick and calculating likes of convairs and astrojets and turboprops and super-constellations. Like the ill-fated *Winnie Mae* in which Wiley Post, Will Rogers, and Floyd Gibbons went down in Alaska, it lives on as a distinct and individual entity. The 2-man space capsule called *Gemini II* with self-conscious erudition, was re-named the *Molly Brown* by its commander in a not very original reference to a Broadway show; we have fallen on un-romantic times. We can't recall the name of the plane in which Douglas Corrigan made his famous wrong-way

flight to Ireland in 1936, but we'll bet a cooky it was either bold or sentimental and therefore appropriate to the time when people still spelled it *aeroplane* occasionally and said it in three syllables frequently and ran out to look when one flew over the house. We've had some good lively articles in *Names* on spacecraft nomenclature and missiles. Won't some old-timer (or a young-timer with a curiosity) favor us with some words on plane-names?

The name-dropper's life is not an easy one. In addition to the scorn his profession brings him in some circles, he has a great burden of research, and must live in constant fear of dropping a name that the *cognoscenti* have removed from the rolls. We once knew a young lady who had clearly gotten a good deal of mileage out of dropping the information that she was kin to Margaret Mitchell, and we must confess to a modicum of malicious pleasure experienced when the carefully placed casual information brought the bland question "Who's she?" from a highly intelligent and perceptive but somewhat too young victim. "She wrote *Gone With the Wind*," pursued the relative, lacing the rejoinder with the mild hint of reproach called for in the rules of One-upsmanship, only to be floored with a flat, "Oh. I guess that was before my time."

The names that one generation conjures with are readily forgotten, dismissed, or incorrectly placed by the next. Name-fads come and go, and may be studied from the record books and the tombstones. Sometimes they are revived, sometimes not. A visit to a nearby burying ground reminds us that women whose eyes knew the same rim of hills as ours scan at this minute were known and called and loved by such names as *Thankful*, *Tamesin*, and *Hopestill* – this last was short for *Hopestill-for-thy-Mercy*; and that their menfolk seemed to come thundering out of the Old Testament with names like *Gideon*, *Ezekiel*, *Ephraim*, and *Obadiah*. These seem unlikely candidates for revival, though we do know a young man whose wife calls him "Pros" and whose legal name is *Prosper*, though his kennel name is *Prosper-Thy-Works*. Sometimes a certain pleasure may be had from possessing an old-fashioned name. We belonged to a generation (or a group, perhaps) that rejected *Sarah* as a name, but that had many grandmas named *Sarah* and, consequently . . . most of them chose to become *Sally* or, even better, *Sallie*; one converted *Sadie* to *Saadi* (it didn't really help) and her sister altered old-fashioned *Clara* into smart *Claire*. At the moment,

it's our impression that *Sarah* is back in and *Sally* is headed back toward the alley.

But what of many transitory names not likely to be chiseled onto tombstones, inscribed on documents, or entered into public records? What of the names and nicknames each generation gives to its own peculiar accoutrements, to those things with which it identifies itself most firmly and surely? The time will soon be upon us, and we must face it, when "Lizzie" or "Tin Lizzie," to use the full form, will draw a blank, even as Chick Sale generally does now. The handwriting is on the wall: a young man in Connecticut, driving a restored Model-A, was involved in an accident and had no name to give to the thingamajig on the side. A state trooper supplied the term: *running boards*! Poetic justice is sure to come, though; one day this very man may have to explain what his generation meant by a *T-Bird*.

We've printed articles on names the drivers give to cars and trucks, but none on the manufacturers' names. It might amuse someone, before the automobile goes out of existence, to recount the coinages like *Reo* and *Oldsmobile*; it might be fun to remember, even in the afterglow, the past glories of the *Whippet* and the *Peerless* or the daring-in-name-only *Terraplane*, which never got off the ground. The animal kingdom has contributed heavily, sometimes in the subspecies names – the gamut runs from *Bearcat* to *Mustang*, with a recent marked tendency to go underwater and name the so-called "fastbacks" after vicious and inedible fish. We might editorialize a bit and suggest that the Detroit people try to make better harmony in their combinations of names: *Rambler* goes ill with *Classic* (a subspecies), though ours runs well enough; it goes even iller with *Ambassador*. The casual and the pretentious are ill-blent, somehow. And while we're assailing Detroit, we might as well add our protest on the matter of forced pronunciation changes. The Ford people had the nerve to tell the American public that their compact was to be pronounced [fælkən] despite the fact that medievalists and hawkers and falconers and Dashiell Hammett–Humphrey Bogart fans had all seemed to prefer [fɔlkən]. Chevrolet is not without sin, either; we don't know if they ever made an official pronouncement, but it is certain that among young men desirous of owning one, the swift-animal Chevy is an [ɪm'pælə] and not an [ɪm'palə].