

Uncommon Names for Common Plants: The Onomastics of Native and Wild Plants of the British Isles

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IT IS ALMOST 20 YEARS since I taught my first class – it was at the University of Utah – and tried to make them see the humor in that line in Thurber’s “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” where Mitty fixes a defective anesthetizer (with a fountain pen) and takes over a complicated operation when Dr. Renshaw turns pale and whispers, “*Coreopsis* has set in . . .” Nobody in the class knew what *coreopsis* meant. Nobody, that is, except myself, for I had looked it up. Yes, it sounds like a disease, all right, but it comes from the Greek *koris* (“bug”) and *opsis* (“appearance”), and though it is a plant most often recognized because of its rayed flowers, which are usually yellow, it is named for the shape of its seed.

Well, most people do not know *Coreopsis* from Coriander, nor enough Greek to recognize that *aster* means star (descriptive of the flowers) or that *nasturtium* means “nose-twister” (descriptive of the smell) in the Latin of Pliny.

Still the names of plants and flowers are interesting. If you know enough Greek, you will remember that *azaleas* need dry soil to flourish (for their name means “dry”), and if you know French you will know that *pansy* came from *pensée* in the way that Scottish dialect made *ashet* out of *assiette* (plate) and that the English *tulip* is from the French *tulippe* (or the Italian *tulipano*) from the Turkish from the Persian. You will know that a rose is a rose is not always a rose but may be a Rose of Jericho (a Resurrection Plant whose dry fronds unroll in moist air) or a Rose of May (really a Narcissus). You will know what connection the Narcissus has with the mythical *Narkissos*. And the common names of English plants? Well, onomastics is (as the Americans say) “something else,” always full of surprises. In Cockney slang, “Let’s have a butcher.” (Butcher’s meat hook = look. It rhymes, you see.)

After living a year or so in England recently, I attended one of the great social events of the London season, for it was just across the square from where I lived. It was the Chelsea Flower Show. It might not be good for your hayfever, but it certainly enlarges your understanding of

the ways of words in English to hear the discussions there and listen to the names that are thrown about. In addition, I had travelled over a good bit of the country and had heard countrymen talking of Pansies as Heartsease, grain as Corn, and the Ground Elder as Goutweed or Bishop's Weed. I heard talk of *dwale* (Deadly Nightshade) and *whissun-bosses* (Guilder Roses) and Wild Heartsease as Tickle-my-fancy. I had picked up quite a list of truly astounding words that were the common names of plants native to the British Isles. Here are just a few of the most striking: Bastard Balm and Bastard's Fumitory, Agrimony and Fritillary, Binks, Dodder, Fathen, Feverfew, Gean, Gromwell, Kek, Ledum, Loosestrife, Lords and Ladies, Rowan (the mountain ash, not half of a comedy team), Mayblob (not Mama Cass' real name), Mugwort, Non-such, Pellitory of the Wall, Ramsoms (the Broad-Leaved Garlic) and Damsons (the plums), The Roast Beef Plant, Rupturewort (which comes in two varieties: Glabrous and Hairy), Sainfoin (that is "healthy hay"), Sanicle, Scabious, the Wild Service Tree, the Tea Tree and the Way-faring Tree, Spurge, Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchia* L.), Tansy, Thoroughwax, Common Thrift, Tormentil (Common and Creeping), Touch-me-not, Common Twitch, Vervain, Vetches and Vetchlings, Wall-flower, Water Soldier, Weld (not the Tuesday variety), Whin, Woad, Wych Elm (from an Old English word which originally meant *pliant*, a cognate of *weak*), Yarrow (compare the Dutch *gerw*), and Yorkshire Fog. Farmers may have been badly treated by the English language – witness *villain*, *bumpkin*, *boor* and even *pagan* – but they have generously contributed to it.

My purpose here is not to regale you with long lists of odd words, however, but rather to go a little deeper into the stories behind some of the imaginative and inventive, occasionally clever and very often remarkable common names that the denizens of the British Isles give to their native or wild and well-established non-indigenous *flora*. In our examination, I believe, we shall learn something about the nature of language and the common people who make up names like Baldmoney (*not* Baldur's Money) for the Spignel (*Meum athamanticum* Jacq.) or notice that Green Hellebore is shaped like a Bear's Foot or who give the name of Lucerne to the hybrid *Medicago varia* Martyn. and to the common *Alfalfa* *Medicago sativa* L. They are not people who know that *alfalfa* (like *algebra*, *alkali*, *alcohol*, *admiral*, etc.) comes from the Arabic – as *asparagus* and *lilac* come from the Persian – but by way not of the Orient but of Spain: *alfalfez* from *al-ḥaṣṣaḥ* (the best fodder). They do not understand how the *beech* is related to the *book*, or *buckwheat*. They see no contradiction in calling something an Asparagus Pea, or a Sea Beet, or a White Pink. Theirs is a world in which the London Rocket (*Sisymbrium irio* L.) seems to shoot up, where daisies spring up at Michaelmas,

where Asafoetida is an evil-smelling gum (not an evil mixture of Persian and Latin), where a member of *Ophioglossaceæ* is called an Adder's Tongue "because," as it was patiently explained to me, "it looks like an adder's tongue." It is the world of the common folk thinking up common names for common things around them, making Tansy out of *Athanasia* and Tutsan (another name for St. John's-wort, which we shall come to later) from *totus sanus* (via the French), noticing that Birthwort is medicinal and that this plant looks like a Lady's Fingers, that like a Lady's Mantle.*

We shall not trace Daffodil to Affodil to the Greek *asphodelos*, but for the sake of brevity and a manageable scope devote ourselves to such names as are interesting from the point of view of onomastics and folklore among the wild and native plants that grow in the British Isles, omitting (as does Roger W. Butcher in his *New Illustrated British Flora*, 1961, a comprehensive, two-volume work to which we are much indebted) the flora of the Channel Isles (which more naturally is considered along with that of France). We omit, as he does, species brought and planted in Britain, such as the Rhododendron (a shrub whose name contains the Greek word for tree, most confusingly), all the flowers in gardens except a few wild ones that have been tamed, so to speak, and crops. Some plants such as the *Sorbus arranensis* Hedl., called the (Scottish) White Beam, are found in but one very limited area (in that case the Arran Islands), and others are common all over the British Isles. Most of all, the names we shall discuss are not the efficient, if awkward, official Latin names but the common names, known at least to all countrymen who know the plants they signify and sometimes so aptly describe.

Personal names are connected with the official labels of all plants, for the Latin name is always followed by an abbreviation of the name of the scientist who discovered (or, more properly, classified) the variety. The modern system of botanical nomenclature is binomial (as were the systems of some early herbalists) and occasionally a plant family will bear a name derived from a surname or a variety will be named after its classifier. Karl von Linné (Carolus Linnæus), the great Swedish botanist and taxonomist, set up a standard for classifying plants, animals, and minerals in his *Systema naturae* (1735) and in *Genera plantarum* (1737) classified plants on the basis of their sexual characteristics, giving many names which survive today. The initial *L.* after the Latin name of a

* Herbs include a number of plants referring to the Blessed Virgin; Our Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium*, though thyme was traditionally the "straw" of the manger), Lady's Candlesticks (*Primula*), Our Lady's Cushion (*Armeria*, the Trift of America), Our Lady's Hands (*Lamium maculatum*), Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla*), Lady's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*, also Solomon's Seal) Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*), as well as Our Lady's Gloves (*Digitalis purpurea*, or Foxglove), Our Lady's Purse (*Portulaca oleracea*), and Our Lady's Ribbons (*Phalaris*).

plant stands for *Linnæus*. The genus *Linaria* has, for instance, ten species. There are more than 100,000 species of flowering plants so far catalogued. Not only did Linnæus' priceless collection of plants become the herbarium of The Linnæan Society in England, but some of his names have passed from technical language into common English terminology. We find, for instance, Creeping Linnæa (*Linnæa borealis* L.). On the whole, however, the English have tended to avoid difficult foreign words and *Hypericum* has become St. John's-wort, as "St. Audrey" has become *tawdry*. It is only with fairly uncommon common names that we find Latinized surnames such as these: *Goodyera repens* (L.) R. Br. is known as Goodyera but also as Creeping Lady's Tresses; *Hornungia petraea* (L.) Reichb. is called Rock Hutchinsia; *Kœnigia Islandica* L., recently found in the Hebrides, is now the Arctic Kœnigia; *Ludwigia palustris* (L.) Elliott. is Marsh Ludwigia; *Pyllodoce cærulea* (L.) Bab., seen in Scotland only on the picturesquely-named Sow of Athol, Perthshire, is Menziesia (the Scots name Menzies is pronounced *Mengis*); *Mertensia maritima* (L.) S. A. Gray, very rare, seen on shingle beaches of the British Isles, is Mertensia but is more commonly known as the Oyster Plant; *Scheuchzeria palustris* L. is a mouth-full as Marsh Scheuchzeria, but (like *Scorzonera humilis* L., the Lesser Scorzonera) is seldom spoken of except by experts; *Potentilla sibbaldi* Haller fil. was once *Sibbaldia procumbens* L. and is called Sibbaldia; *Teesdalia nudicaulis* (L.) R. Br. is commonly translated Naked-Stalked Teesdalia; *Woodsia ilvensis* (L.) R. Br. is called Alpine Woodsia. Flower enthusiasts seem to have no trouble with Bougainvillea (from L. A. de Bougainville) or Fuchsia (from Leonhard Fuchs), but with the names of common plants the average man wants to call *Legousia hybrida* (L.) Delarb. not Legousia but Venus Looking Glass. The average countryman knows nothing of the personal names behind Begonia, Magnolia, Camellia, Gardenia, Lobellia, Poinsettia, Rafflesia, Sequoia, Wisteria, Zinnia, Dahlia, Loganberry, Greengage (Sir William Green), and so on. Who has heard of Timothy Hansom of Timothy?

We cannot here go into detailed investigation of the names derived from British agriculture, itself a name which originally meant the cultivation of the field (*ager + colere*) but has come to embrace agronomy, horticulture, entomology, animal husbandry, dairying, and many other things from soil chemistry to market gardening. It is a rich field for the lover of words, of course, as the *villein* husbandman becomes the *villain* and the peasant farmer the *churl*. Though agriculture has now lost the central place it long held in British life – a statute of 4 Henry VII (1488) was already complaining that "where in some towns two hundred persons were occupied and lived of their lawful labours, now there are occupied two or three herdsmen, and the residue fall into idleness," while the industrial revolution caused many to leave the farm and fall into the fac-

tory – it made and to some extent still makes its mark on the English language, especially onomastics. We deal in this paper with British wild and native *flora* and must omit discussion of the names of crops; of how *wheat* is related to *white*, and is called (with other things) *corn* – while there is a *wheat-corn* too; of how *maize* has a Cuban name and is called Indian corn; of how *clover* was once *claver* and turnips *turn-neeps*; of how Swedes are Swedish turnips, called *rutabaga* and, in Swedish dialect, *rotabagge* (“baggy root”); how *potato* comes from *battata* and *hops* from the Dutch; how the dreaded *manglewurzel* is corrupted from the *mangold* (beet) and *wurzel* (root); and how the origins of words as common as *oats* and *rye*, *harrow* and *plough* are still shrouded in mystery. But ignoring crops and all such, let us get to wild and native *flora*.

As we can see from *cereals* and Ceres, names get to be words, from the French *berquinade* (after Arnaud Berquiner’s goody-goody tales for children) and the German *ballhornisieren* (after the Lübeck printer Johann Ballhorn, who ruined books by overembellishment) to the English *bowdlerize* (after professional nice nellie Thomas Bowdler), as we have all been told many times. Those of botanists seldom get to be common names of English plants. Sweet Basil (*Ocimum basilicum* L.) is not named for a person. The succulent herbs of *Claytonia* (both perfoliate and pink) are. Among cultivated flowers there are lots of genuine names and also some plants with names like Jack-in-the-pulpit and Black-eyed-Susan (famous in a ballad and in a play by Douglas Jerrold). Growing wild we find in the British Isles Blue-Eyed Mary (*Omphalodes verna* Mænench.) and Sweet Cicely (the aromatic *Myrrhis odorata* L.), which seem to be named for girls, as girls such as Myrtle, Hazel, Rose, Iris, May, etc., are at least sometimes consciously named for pleasant plants. In England are Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* L.), another name for Moneywort; Jack by the Hedge (*Alliaria petiolata* (Bieb.) Cav. et Grande), another name for Garlic Mustard; Ragged Robin (*Lychnis floscuculi* L.), whose hermaphroditic flowers are indeed rather ragged; and Johnny-go-to-bed-at-noon (*Tragopogon pratensis* L.), which I have also heard called Goat’s Beard by younger people. Perhaps the fact that it is found in Wales as well as in Southern England explains the blunt and sharp-leaved Fluellen of the *Linaria* family. There is a Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus* L.) and a Goldilocks Daisy (*Aster linosyris* Bernh., also *Crinitaria* L.). Among the herbs are Herb Bennet, Herb Christopher, Herb Paris (the capital or the abductor of Helen of Troy?), and Herb Robert, but all the last of these I have heard called other names: Herb Bennet (*Geum urbanum* L.) is the Common Avens, Herb Christopher (*Actæa spicata* L.) is the Baneberry of the Buttercup family, and Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia* L.) is the True-Love Knot (perhaps symbolizing an intricate relationship, or a problem, as with the Gordian Knot?).

Henry VIII is probably the source for the name Good King Henry (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus* L.), given to a plant also called All-good, though I am not certain this was what I found in a salad of that name once served me as an Elizabethan dish in the period room of the Gower Hotel in London.

It was to be expected that the common people who called Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba* L.) Old Man's Beard would think of the Ivy-Leafed Toadflax as Aaron's Beard or the Great Mullein as both Aaron's Rod and Adam's Flannel (*Verbascum thapsus* L.). The *Polemonium Caeruleum* L. they named Jacob's Ladder and the *Hypericum columnae* Seb. and *Mauri* the Rose of Sharon. Several varieties of the *Polygonatum* family were called Solomon's Seal because leaf scars on the rhizomes were thought to resemble seals, and the plant became well-known as a medication for the skin. The flower of *Ornithogalum umbellatum* L., a plant of the lily family, was thought to look like the Star of Bethlehem. The Common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis* L.) was also known as the Jerusalem Cowslip and may have a Biblical connection, while the Jerusalem artichoke (native not to the British Isles but to North America) got its name from a corruption of *girasole* (turning toward the sun), the Italian sunflower. Timothy (herd's grass) does not appear to be connected with the first bishop of Ephesus and the author of two epistles, but somehow this hay does go back to the name *Timotheus*.

The language also contains such names as St. Elmo's fire, St. Vitus' dance, St. Martin's (or St. Luke's) Summer (the British equivalent of the American "Indian Summer"), and obscure references such as St. Stephen's for Parliament (since the House of Commons used to meet in St. Stephen's chapel in the Palace of Westminster) and St. Lubbock's Day for a bank holiday (instituted in 1871 by an Act of Parliament fathered by Sir John Lubbock, Bart, 1834–1913, Baron Avebury, 1900). British slang includes St. Geoffrey's Day (that is never), St. Luke's bird (an ox, the symbol of that evangelist), St. Taur (for H. M. S. *Centaur*), and the Cockneys' St. Maritan (the good Samaritan) and St. Martin's the Grand (rhyming slang for "hand," from St. Martin le Grand's church in London). When Christianity came to Britain, the bright yellow flowers of the plants in the *Hypericum* family that had been associated with the golden brightness of Baldur the sun-god came to be called St. John's-wort, as Baldur's Day became St. John's Day. The plant continued to be thought a cure for wounds and on St. John's Eve good Christians wore a sprig of it to ward off evil spirits and especially to protect themselves against the stray thunderbolts of the gods. An imperforate variety of St. John's-wort is now called St. Peter's-wort (*Hypericum Maculatum* Crantz.), but no one seems very sure why, any more than they know why *Saxifraga spathularis* Brot. should be called St. Patrick's Cabbage. Pre-

sumably it does not grow in St. Patrick's Purgatory (a site of pilgrimage in Ireland where the scenery is wild) and it is not associated with a "drink at St. Patrick's well" (whiskey) which Partridge traces back to the anonymous *A Brown Dozen of Drunkards* (1648). There are herbs called St. Bridget's Anemone (*Anemone coronarea*) and St. George's Beard (*Sempervivum tectorum*), St. Barnaby's Thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), etc.

The Bible ? That's the Book. The Book indeed
The Book of Books,

wrote George Herbert in *The Synagogue*, and The Bible has significantly affected the language of English folk. Wordsworth wrote of its translation:

But to outweigh all harm, the sacred Book,
In dusty sequestration wrapt too long,
Assumes the accents of our native tongue;

and in translation it helped the common people find names and images to attach to the common flowers and plants, not the Biblical "lilies of the field" but the simple native Redbud (*Cercis*), which tradition declared was the Judas Tree (on which the traitor hanged himself), and many others.

There is an herb called Alexanders (*Smyrniium olusatrum* L.). The connection with Smyrna is vague, unless through Antigonus (I) Cyclops, who rebuilt the city (destroyed three centuries earlier by the Lydians) and was a general of Alexander the Great. Perhaps the name suggests that the herb is beneficial, since the Greek name *Alexandros* is derived from *alexein* (to protect) and *andros* (genitive of *aner*, a man) = protector of men. It will serve as an example of the problems one encounters with names.

Insofar as learned men gave English plants familiar names they tend to some extent to reflect reading in mythology. We find names such as Amaranthus, a flower symbolic since ancient times of immortality (whence the English adjective *amaranthine*). The most colorful names for *Amaranthus* and *Amaranthine* are reserved for the cultivated varieties in gardens which are not part of our interest here: Joseph's Coat (of many colors), Love Lies a-Bleeding (recalling the subtitle of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*), Cockscomb and Bachelor's Button and (in America) Tumbleweed, not in gardens. Britain's plant names include Andromeda, commemorating the Ethiopian princess chained to a rock by the sea and rescued by Perseus. She now is remembered not only in the constellations of the sky (where we see the brightest spiral nebulae) but in British *flora*. In Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari atlanticum* Boiss and Reut.) the British recall the beautiful lover of Apollo from whose blood, the myth says,

sprang the flower, and Apollo was also connected (along with Dionysus and the nine Muses) with Mount Parnassus (now Liakoura), whence Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassa palustris* L.). Iris, goddess of the rainbow, daughter of Electra, messenger of Zeus and his wife Hera, has a whole botanical *genus* to herself and various irises grow wild in the British Isles in addition to the many varieties imported for the gardens. The British are rather expert on Iris but confused about Narcissus, whose legend is one of the best-known in Greek mythology. The Welsh Daffodill (formerly *affodil*, from the Greek for Asphodel) is a Narcissus, but the Narcissus varieties one sees in gardens are imported from the Mediterranean or the Orient if now very much at home in the British climate. British poets have called the Narcissus *asphodel*, connecting it incorrectly with the flower sacred to Persephone and familiar in Greek graveyards. In giving common names to plants and flowers, however, one did not have to have the myths straight: it was enough that they provided pretty names for common use.

If one travels around the country and talks plants with farmers, fishermen, gardeners, and so on, one hears a lot of names for plants that are not to be found in most dictionaries: names like Binks, Cottoneaster, Cotula, Cyphel, Diapensia, Kek, Ledum, Mayblob, Roast Beef Plant, Tway-blade, Water Soldier, Yorkshire Fog. These are widespread names, not narrowly local or personal names, and each has its story. One can learn how the Quitch (*Triticum repens* L., Couch-grass) became the Common Twitch. Sometimes the background is charming: how the Daisy (*Bellis perennis* L.) is really, because its flower opens early in the morning, Chaucer's "dayeseye, or ellis the eye of day." Sometimes the story is not so charming, as when it turns out that the Cowslip (also called Paigle and, in America, the Marsh Marigold) is really the Old English *cū-slyppe* = cow dung. Some problems cannot be solved: whence the *bølle* (Danish *bøllebær*) whence we get Bilberry? Whence Darnel (*Lolium*), a deleterious grass named since Middle English? Whence the Old English *fjrs* (modern Furze)? Did the Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus* L.) come from Guelders (Prussia) of Guelderland (a province of The Netherlands) – a problem we avoid in America by calling it the Snowball Tree? Pitfalls are many. For example, the Rose Burnet – *Poterium* (*Sanguisorba*) *officinale* (L.) S. A. Gray – is a tall, little-branched perennial, while the Burnet Rose – *Rosa pimpinelliflora* L. – is a low, erect or spreading shrub. Is *Campion* from the same root as *champion*? What is the relation of *Columbine* to the dove (color?) or *Chives* to the Latin *cæpa* (onion) – or *shivvy* (*shiv*, *chiv*, *chive*, *shive*, *chev*, *sheive* add Wentworth and Flexner in their *Dictionary of American Slang*, 1960), the low-life cant for *knife*? Is – to turn to Greek, as fewer are able to do each year – *Chervil* compounded of *χαῖρε* and *φύλλον* or *Chickory* from the neuter plural of

κίχόρεια? If Coriander came from κορίαννον and Crocus from κρόκος, where did the Greeks get those odd words? Is Dittander from δίκταμνον and that from Dicte in Crete, where the herb is supposed to have grown? (The *Oxford Universal Dictionary* gives us "Dittany of Crete" dated 1658.) It is clear enough that Fescue is from the Old French *festu* ("straw") and the Latin root is preserved in the *genus* name (*Festuca*), while the Hard Fescue, Sheep's Fescue, and Meadow Fescue are obviously translations of *Festuca duriuscula*, *Festuca ovina*, and *Festuca pratensis*, but whether Eglantine can be traced to *acus* ("needle") plus the suffix *lentus* may be debated. Sure, Gladiolus is a diminutive of *gladius* ("sword") – but why is it also called Corn-Flag and Gladdon (a name also used for the Iris)?

Here are some remarks on common names taken almost at random from the thousands available, skipping over the well-known stories (how Asparagus was confused as Sparrowgrass, etc.) and attempting to illustrate some of the complexities and delights of name study in this field:

Balm: There are real balms (such as Balm Gentle or Balm Mint, *Melissa officinalis* L.) and a Bastard Balm (*Melittis melissophyllum* L.), a Field Balm (*Calamintha nepeta* L.) and others in the tradition of the healing Balm of Gilead (or Mecca) derived from *Balsamodendron gileadense* L. (not native to Britain – there is no Balm of Gilead in Britain). The connection between *balm* and *balsam*, *embalm* and *balmy* (more correctly in slang *barmy*), is interesting and illustrates well how apt one thing is to lead to another in tracing these things.

Blaeberry: Named for its dark blue berries – Old Norse *blá* and dialectical *blae* = blue – the Blaeberry is also called the Bilberry (by Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, 5, the Bill-berry) and the Whortleberry. It has no connection with the Blueberry but is of the same family (*Vaccinium*) as the Cowberry and certain Cranberries (Low German *krónbere*). Names here do not help to straighten things out.

Bindweed: Probably derived from "bind with," Bindweed (*Convolvulus*) is often confused with *Similax*, *Tamus* and other plants called Bindweed, while Bindwith is *Clematis vitalba* L., otherwise Traveller's Joy.

Dodder: Dodder seems to come from the German *Dotter* ("egg-yoke") as a result of its yellow stem. It has no connection with the Cockney *dotterer*, a senile old man, a pottering bumbler. Dodder is of the *Cuscuta* family, so probably is not related to the cat's-tail (in dialect, *dod*), for that is usually Reed Mace (*Typha latifolia* L.).

Dwarf Elder: Not a dwarf Elder (*Sambucus*) but really a Gout Weed (*Ægopodium podagraria* L.).

Feverfew: This could be either *Pyrethrum parthenium* L. or *Erythæa centaurium* L., but in any case its name derives from the Latin: *febris* and *fugare* = to drive away fever. It was used to treat fever, hysteria, etc. It is called "Bride's Button" in America.

Fritillary: This name, which sounds very English, comes from the *genus* name *Fritillaria* and not from some Elizabethan *jeu d'esprit*. It serves also, by the way, for the names of certain butterflies.

Galingale: This sounds like some piece of Elizabethan clothing, but it is a species of sedge (*Cyperus longus* L.) mentioned in use as a seasoning by Beaumont and Fletcher. The word seems to derive from *khalanján* (Arabic) which some trace through Persian to the Chinese *ko-liang-kiang* = mild ginger root from the province of Ko.

Gentian: *Gentiana* gives us stomachics and tonics (but not gentian violet) and includes Felwort, Fringed Gentian, Gentian-worts, etc. Lindley uses the genus name *Gentianaceæ*. The whole thing seems to come from Gentius, King of Illyria (mentioned by Pliny, *H. N.*, XXV. 71: *Gentianam invenit Gentius, rex Illyriorum, ubique nascentem, in Illyrico tamen praestantissimam...*).

Gromwell: This sounds very English, probably because confused with Oliver Cromwell, but it will serve to introduce the influence of French in common English names for plants. I have written in *Names* on what the English did to French surnames and so was not surprised to hear that *Gromwell* (*Lithospermum*) is the Old French *gromil* — perhaps with a touch of Speedwell (*Veronica*), of which there are at least two dozen varieties, thrown in — which my reference book tells me was “formerly used as a cure for gravel” (in America we should say “kidney stone”). Here we might add that Gean is the French *guigne* (origin unknown), a name for the wild cherry *Prunus avium* L. which came into Scotland from France and thence mizzled out (as the Scots would say) of foreign status into dialect. As Dandelion is the *dent de lion* from the teeth on its leaves and Sainfoin is healthy hay, so many French words have become English and some, such as Spurge (*Euphorbia*, the common name derived from *espurgier* = cleanse, purify; a cathartic), are well disguised. Who would expect that Samphire was first *sampere*, what the English tongue (that created *Sidney* and *Buckley* and *Seymour*) made of [*herbe de*] *St.-Pierre* = St. Peter’s herb?

Loosestrife: This is another name that resulted from a bungle. It is translated from *Lysimachia* but the plant is actually named for its discoverer, Lysimachus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great. The superstition that it can unleash strife (or dissolve strife) is silly, just as is that associated with Dock (*Rumex*), in Old English *docce*, “in dock, out nettle,” an ancient charm for removing stings. To get into the magical properties of plants, however, would be quite another story than just discussing their names, though from the Mandrake to the Mistletoe there is lots of fascinating folklore there and some worthy names for comment too.

Lords and Ladies: This is one of those plants named because someone saw in it something “obvious” that the rest of the world has since most often found very difficult to observe. Who sees the “bear” in *Ursa Major* in the sky? Who sees the “lords and ladies” in the light and dark spadices (succulent spikes) of this plant? But when there are nearly 100 kinds of Sedge, for instance, they must be distinguished, and if some are called Distant-Flowered or Scorched or Bottle or Beak, people strive to see those characteristics in them and accept the designation. Does this Willow look Woolly-Leaved to you? Does that Hawkweed look like a Mouse-Ear? Well, why not? The trouble comes in when one tries to imagine anything wolf-like about a Lupin (which is only *Lupinus* translated), as a result of ignorance, or tries to connect Scabious (*Scabiosa*) with the skin diseases for which it used to be used.

Rowan: This mountain ash (*Pyrus aucuparia* L.) gets its name from the Scandinavian — my guess is the Norwegian *roun*, via Scotland — and is but one of those plants whose names can be traced to Viking influence.

Mugwort: Mugweed, Motherweed, Motherwort, even Wormwood or *Artemisia vulgaris* L., the plant gets its name from the German. It is a fly-attracting plant: *mugjo* (midge) + *wurti-* (plant). Nothing to do with the face, a drinking vessel, a dupe, a grimace, study, robbery, or any of the other meaning of *mug*.

Nonsuch: This is one of those complimentary names for plants: All-good and such. It used to be Nonesuch (nothing like it), of course. There used to be a royal palace in England of the name. It is a species of Lucerne (*Mendicago*) and is also confusingly used as a name for both apples and pears.

Pellitory of the Wall: Clearly this Pellitory (*Parietaria*) grows at the bottom of walls. The Pellitory of Spain (*Anacyclus*), which was imported, was applied for toothache, but it is not the Toothwort. That is *Lathraea squamaria* L. and is parasitic on the roots of trees and has tooth-like lobes on its corolla. There is a False Pellitory of Spain (*Peucedanum*) otherwise known as the Masterwort. The Bastard Pellitory (*Achillea*) is the Sneezewort. Actually the name Pellitory is from a Greek word that ought to have come over into English as Feverfew, but (as we have seen) we got a Feverfew from Latin.

Ramsons: The robust *Alium ursinum* L. or Broad-Leafed Garlic gets its name from an Old English plural: *hramsan* = wild garlics. Its name derives from the Greek for *onion*. Like Chives, whose name we have seen derives from the Latin for *onion*, it is used to enliven the taste of food. The taste has always been popular: Herodotus reports nine tons of gold were spent on onions for the men who built the pyramids. Also from the Old English (*syrf*) comes the Wild Service Tree (*Pyrus torminalis* L.) which bears a bitter, pear-shaped fruit which can be eaten when ripe (or, more exactly, over-ripe), which used to be called *serves*. Other plant names from the Anglo-Saxons are Weld and Woad. The latter is comparatively well-known, for the wild aborigines of the British Isles used to paint themselves with a blue dye of Woad to render themselves more horrible to the enemy. In Old English it was called *wád*. Weld (Old English *wealde*) yields a yellow dye.

Rupturewort: Extracts of various plants were regarded as specifics for various diseases. Rupturewort in folk medicine (in science it is called *Herniaria glabra* L.) was regarded as a cure for rupture or hernia.

Tea Tree: This small shrub (*Lycium halimifolium* Mill.) of course does not produce tea, but like Camomile and Yerba Mate and even the Myrtle, its leaves can be used as a sort of substitute, and so can those of the Wayfaring [Man's] Tree or Traveller's Joy (*Viburnum lantana* L.), which in America is called the Hobble Bush, oddly enough.*

Squinancywort: This is one of those examples that one knows is going to be interesting even before one gets down to research. Also called the Small Woodruff — not to be confused with the Sweet Woodruff, *Asperula (Galium) odorata* L. — Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica* L.) is connected with quinsy sore throats and the dialectical *squinsy* (suppurative tonsillitis). The plant was formerly used as a medicine for sore throats and the name confuses $\sigma\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\chi\eta$ and $\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\chi\eta$, both Greek words referring to throat diseases.

Tansy: Though related to the Everlasting and the Immortelle, Tansy goes back to the Greek like Squinancywort, to $\acute{\alpha}\theta\alpha\nu\alpha\sigma\iota\alpha$ = immortality, which explains why it was put into coffins, like statice and yarrow and amaranth. The name is also used for Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina* L.), Goosegrass, Dog Tansy, Wild Tansy, etc. Tansy has also been called *Chrysanthemum vulgare*, *Herbe St. Marc*, and Bitter Buttons. Pepys' *Diary* speaks of him eating it and it is said that Tansy was put in omelettes at Eastertide to commemorate the "bitter herbs" that the Jews ate at the Passover.

Thoroughwax: One might guess that a thorough wax might be obtained from this plant. Not so. Thoroughwax (also called Hare's Ear, *Bupleurum rotundifolium* L.) has branches that appear to grow (wax) through (thorough) the leaves. Enough to put one into a state of Agrimony, which sounds as if it ought to be a bad mood but is really a *genus* of plants (*Agrimonia* or *Aremonia*) with a name derived from an unexpected Greek source.

* "It is called commonly *Viorna quasi vias ornans*, of decking and adorning ways, and hedges, where people travel, and thereupon I have named it The Traveller's Joy." — John Gerard (1545–1612), *The Herball*.

Thrift: There is Common Thrift and Tall Thrift. *Armeria maritima* L. and *Armeria vulgaris* L. grow at the seaside and in the mountains (alpine) respectively and also are called Sea-Pink, Sea-Gillyflower (a name given to many plants with a clove scent, from the Old French *girofle*, *gilibre* = clove), Lady's Cushion, etc.

Tormentil: The plant, used in medicine and in commercial tanning, is connected with *tormentilla* (little torture), but nobody knows exactly how. There is a Common Tormentil, *Potentilla erecta* (L.) Rausch., and a Creeping Tormentil, *Potentilla procumbens* Sibth. or *Potentilla anglica* Laichard. Both are also called Septfoil.

Touch-me-not: A native English plant that reminds us of the cultivated Forget-me-not (*Myosotis*). The *noli me tangere* name, more suitable to the Scottish thistle, is appropriate because the seed vessels break at a touch. The Yellow Balsam (*Impatiens noli-tangere* L.) is one variety and the Squinting Cucumber is another.

Tutsan: Formerly a vulnerary, *Hypericum androsæmum* L. is outside England called the Chaste Tree or Abraham's Balm (*Vitex agnus-castus* L.). The *Agnus Castus* is a result of an early confusion of the Greek name of the tree ἄγρος with ἄγρός.

Vervain: The name of a kind of hummingbird and of a kind of Mallow (*Malva alcea* L.), Vervain (the famous *Verbena* family) comes from the Old French *verveine* and *Verbena officinalis* L. was one of the mainstays of the mediæval pharmacopia. Chaplets of it were worn at bonfires on St. John's Eve (which people observed through branches of larkspur, to improve the sight during the coming year).

Vetch and Vetchling: Vetch (*Vicia*) and Vetchling (*Lathyrus*) come from the Old French *vecce* (the modern spelling is *vesce*) and the Latin *vicia*. The varieties may be listed to give some idea of the varieties of names; of vetches: the Bitter, Bithynian, Bush, Common, Hairy, Horse Shoe, Jointed, Kidney, Milk, Narrow-Leaved, Northern, Spring, Tufted, Wood, and Yellow; of vetchlings: the Crimson, Grass, Hairy, Marsh, Meadow, Tuberos, and Yellow. Thus a plant may be named for its shape, color, time of flowering (such as the Lent Lily and the Pasque Flower), taste, place where found, etc.

Wallflowers: Finally, last in this little list because of the alphabet and, perhaps, out of shyness, comes the Wallflower, a name also given to homely girls who stay on the sidelines at dances. Botanical Wallflowers (*Cheiranthus*) grow on walls, but they are also called Gillyflowers, which confuses them in the popular mind with the clove-scented Pinks (from the color or because their edges are pinked, *Dianthus caryophyllus* L.), a cultivated garden flower, and other non-related flowers such as the English Carnation, the Dame's Violet, the Soapwort, the Water Gillyflower, etc. It would be nice if each plant had but one name, a name of its own.

These are but a few (I hope interesting) examples. Etymologies are obscure or unknown for the Periwinkle (also the name of a mollusc of the *Littorina* family), Privet (which does not come from *privacy* obtained by planting hedges), Salsify (Italian: *sassefrica*, origin unknown), Sloe (perhaps traceable as far as the Lithuanian *slywas* = plum by those who have had a taste of *slivowitz*), Tamarisk (from *Tamarix*, origin unknown), and many other common names. While one might accept the story that Sauce-alone (*Sisymbrium alliaria* L.) is so called because in the Renaissance it was thought sauce sufficient to season salads, etc., all by itself, one becomes wary of explanations offered for some other common names. Take Pennyroyal and Marigold for example. Pennyroyal is derived, they say, from the Anglo-French *puliol real*, royal (or real) thyme (Old French

puliol = thyme). In Britain Pennyroyal is *Mentha pulegium* L., used for medicinal purposes, but in America it could be one of the *Trichostemma* or *Isanthi*. Marigold may possibly be from [Blessed Virgin] Mary + gold, allegedly the original name of the flower. It is true that Marigold used to be called Goldbloom and Buttercups used to be Gold Balls and that we still have a Goldflower (*Helichrysum*) and a Gold of Pleasure (*Camelina*). But what about the Marigold Apple? The problems make one yearn for a direct if not so pretty name – say the Inelegant Rag-wort. Nobody knows why the Baldmoney is so called or why the Ground Elder or Gout Weed is Bishop's Weed (*Ægopodium podagraria* L.) as well. Any sign of a mitre or cope or pastoral staff there?

Let us now look a little more closely at how common names for British flora were created not by the scientists in the field but the people in the fields themselves.

In Anglo-Saxon *bana* meant *death* and we have the word *bane* now, though usually only in combinations (such as *rat's-bane*) or in literary expressions like Milton's "precious bane" or the proverbial "bane of my existence." Plants that could poison animals, especially precious livestock, were given names in warning: the Baneberry (Herb Christopher) and the Fleabanes of the *Erigeron* family were joined by Cowbane (*Cicuta virosa* L.), or Water Hemlock, and the Horsebane, one of the Dropworts (*Eranthe*), the Hemlock Water Dropwort. In what the botanist called "disturbed soil" grows Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger* L.), not merely one of the

rank fumiter and furrow-weeds

With burdocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,

Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow

In our sustaining corn,

as Shakespeare says in *King Lear* (IV, 4), but a narcotic and poisonous plant. It did, however, have some medicinal use, as did Hellebore. This name has nothing to do with Hades but is derived from the Latin *elleborus*. *Helleborus* or the Buttercup family includes the Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger* L.) and other toxic, medicinal plants formerly used in the treatment of mental disease. America has a False Hellebore (*Veratrum*) seen in such plants as the Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viride* L.) from which a powerful insecticide is derived. Rue (in Latin *ruta*) and Yew (in Old English *iw*) are two perennial evergreens closely associated with these medicinal plants, used in folk medicine and magic, but were not regarded as banes, for animals would not eat them. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, in *Life Thoughts* (1858), said that flowers were the loveliest things that God ever made and forgot to put a soul into, but in folk medicine and magic some plants were thought to be soul-destroying

and those toxic to livestock were carefully identified and given *bane* names. It is interesting that practicality seems to have triumphed here – *cowbane*, *horsebane*, *henbane* are hardly clever names – and the imaginative people who christened *Lamium galeobdolon* L. (also known as *Galeobdolon luteum* Huds.) Weasel Snout and Yellow Dead-Nettle and even Wild Archangel opted for something direct and simple in naming plants dangerous to their livestock. “A man’s nature runs either to herbs,” wrote Bacon in an essay, “or to weeds.” Nature itself has both health-giving and deadly plants and those that are toxic must be named so as to give simple warning.

Although the individual *bane* names are simple, a problem arises from the fact that in dialect any toxic plant may be called a banewort but Banewort usually means the Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula* L.), thought to cause bane (since the mid-nineteenth century a word used to mean disease or rot) in sheep. Belladonna – a beautiful woman is apparently thought to be fatal – or Deadly Nightshade is a name that is confusingly used to cover several different plants. The same is true with the name Leopard’s Bane, which could be the common *Doronicum pardalianches* L. or the plantain-leaved *Doronicum plantagineum* L. or, less frequently, even *Arnica montana* L. or Herb Paris. In old English heraldry a leopard is a lion passant guardant, one of the symbols of the Plantagenets (who took their name from the *planta genesta*, broom, having worn sprigs of it in their helmets as a cognizance), so pard lions, leopards, Plantagenets, *pardalianches*, *plantagineum*, may all be related. The whole thing is the bane of scholars of names. But just as there are plants thought to be especially good for various animals – Hog’s Fennel (*Peucedanum*) also called Sulphur Weed from its yellow flowers; Lamb’s Lettuce (*Valerianella*) or Corn Salad; Swine’s Cress (*Coronopus*) or Wart Cress – Cowbane, Horsebane, and Henbane are supposed to be especially bad. The earth brings forth poisons as well as Spring Beauty (*Claytonia*) and the common names of plants reflect the common sense of people on this topic.

The common people were ready to cope with the Trefoil, Cinquefoil, and Milfoil families (*Trifolium*, *Potentilla*, *Myriophyllum* respectively) but when it came to hard words like *Nuphar* and *Ajuga* and *Triglochin* they just used their common sense and asked, “What does it resemble?” To them *Triglochin palustris* L. in the marsh and *Triglochin maritima* L. in the sea both looked like Arrow Grass, as the leaves of the *Sagittaria* family looked like Arrowheads. With the grasses they were direct, naming them Bent Grass (*Agrostis*), Beard Grass (*Polypogon*), Cord Grass (*Spartina*), Hair Grass (*Deschampsia*), Knotgrass (*Polygonum*), and so on. The fruit of the yellow water lily *Nuphar lutea* L. looked to them like a Brandy Bottle. *Ranunculus* looked like Buttercups (or Spearworts, Goldi-

locks, and Crowfoot). The rasps on the Raspberry and the bunched fruit of the Cloudberry (both of the family *Rubus*) gave birth to names. The large yellow flowers of *Trollius europæus* L. were seen as Globeflowers, the showy yellow flowers in dense panicles on *Solidago virgaurea* L. as Golden Rods. *Aconitum anglicum* Stapf. resembled a Monkshood. The association of flowers with beautiful and delicate women made the Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria* L.) into the much nicer Lady's Fingers. The Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis* L.) became Lady's Smock, *Spiranthis* Lady's Tresses, *Alchemilla* Lady's Mantle (though one *Alchemilla arvensis* Scop. is known as Parsley Piert or, in French, *piérce pierre*). Is it not better to describe a kind of orchid *Cypripedium calceolus* L. as simply Lady's Slipper, which the common man can understand and remember, instead of launching into a botanical catalogue like this:

Flower 40–50 mm. wide, usually solitary; bract large, leaf-like; perianth segments maroon, outer ovato-lanceolate, erect, lateral narrower, directed downwards; lip shorter than perianth segments, pale yellow with reddish spots inside; ovary pubescent . . . ?

Only a Samuel Johnson would prefer to say *panduriform* instead of "shaped like a violin," *reniform* instead of "kidney-shaped," *ensiform* instead of "shaped like a sword," *deltoid* instead of "triangular." Botanists need terms like these to be precise, but the common man introduces a little poetry or perhaps practicality into his nomenclature and *Scandix pecten-veneris* L. is his Shepherd's Needle, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* L. his Shepherd's Purse. A dish of apples and cream on his dinner table gives him a name later in the field when he sees the Great Hairy Willow Herb (*Epilobium hirsutum* L.): he calls it Codlins and Cream. We begin to feel we are in the world of James Thurber, who told us about fabulous prehistoric animals such as the Queeches, the Cobble-Tufted Wahwahs, the Woani, the Hippoterranovamus, and the Common Thome. We are, in fact, in a very down-to-earth world of common people and common names.

These are the common people who, observing the appearances and actions of other animals (if that is not too unflattering a way to put it), called an emotional outburst a *catfit* and an engagement between fighter planes a *dogfight*. So our American Indians noticed that a locomotive is an *iron horse*. The Englishman saw that a certain kind of lash was a *cat of nine tails*, remarked that a straw hat was a *donkey's breakfast*, and distinguished between being *as sick as a dog* (vomiting) and *as sick as a horse* (not vomiting, for a horse does not have the canine ease of regurgitation). Thus, when it came to naming common plants and flowers, while they very simply gave some names because of the use to which the material was put – as Bedstraw (*Galium*) in all its varieties – they named other plants and flowers because they resembled other creatures in nature.

Hence we have the Adder's Tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum* L.), the rarer Small Adder's Tongue (*Ophioglossum lusitanicum* L.) found only in the Isles of Scilly, and the Serpent's Tongue Spearwort (*Ranunculus ophioglossifolius* Vill.). There are also a Hart's Tongue Fern (*Phyllitis scolopendrium* L.), a Hound's Tongue (*Cynoglossum officinale* L.), and a Bristly Ox-tongue (*Picris echioides* L.).

There is a Beak Sedge (*Rhynchospora*) and a Beaked Parsley (*Anthriscus*) and a Crane's Bill (*Geranium*) and a Stork's Bill (*Erodium*) while the resemblance between certain leaf arrangements and the claws of birds have given us the Bird's Foot (*Ornithopus*), the Bird's Foot Fenugreek (Greek hay, *Trigonella* [*Trifolium*] *ornithopodioides* L.), Bird's Foot Trefoil (*Lotus*), Cock's-foot Grass (*Dactylis glomerata* L.), Crowfoot (*Ranunculus*) and Goosefoot (*Chenopodium*). A resemblance between the flower and a bird's nest has given us the Bird's Nest Orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis* [L.] Rich.) and the Yellow Bird's Nest (*Monotropia hypopitys* L.).

There is a Coltsfoot (*Hymogyne alpina* [L.] Cass.) and a Hare's Foot Clover (*Trifolium arvense* L.), even a Bear's Foot (*Helleborus viridis* L.), Green Hellebore. Even more parts of plants look like ears or tails to the peasant and we have: Mouse-ear Chickweed (*Cerastium*), Hare's Ear (*Bupleurum*) and Hare's Ear [Treacle] Mustard (*Erysimum* [*Conringia*] *orientale* [L.] Crantz.), Cat's Ear (*Hypochaeris*), Cat's-tail Grass (*Phleum*), Dog's-tail Grass (*Cynosurus cristatus* L. for the Crested variety), Mouse Tail (*Myosurus minimus* L., called "Minnie Mouse" Tail by students trying to recall the species), Rat's-tail Fescue (*Festuca myuros* L.) and Squirrel's-tail Fescue (*Festuca bromoides* L.), Fox Tail (*Alopecurus*) and Fox-tail Mint (*Mentha alopecuroides* Hull.), Horsetail (*Equisetum*) and Mare's-tail (*Hippuris*) also called Foxtail.

There is a Stag's Horn Clubmoss (*Lycopodium alpinum* L.) and Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus* L.), Pheasant's Eye (*Adonis annua* L.) and Bird's Eye Primrose (*Primula farinosa* L.) also called the Mealy Primrose, Ox-eye Daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* L.), and the "teeth" in the well-known Dandelion (*Taraxacum*) and the lesser-known Dog's-tooth Grass, often called Bermuda Grass (*Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers.). There is Eel Grass (another name for Common Grass-wrack, *Zostera marina* L.), Goat's Beard (*Tragopogon*), Hawksbeard (*Crepis*), Monkey-musk (*Mimulus*) and the rare Moth Mullein (*Verbascum blattaria* L.), and Spider, Fly, Butterfly, Monkey, Frog, Wasp, Lizard, and other orchids.

It is a lot easier to say that a plant looks like such-and-such an animal, or part of one, than to handle mouthfulls like the Hoary Twisted-podded Whitlow Grass (*Draba incana* L.) or the Faintly Square-Stemmed Willow-Herb (*Epilobium obscurum* Schreb.), awkward names which verge a trifle on the ridiculous.

While it is sometimes easy for the observant person to see that the Hornbeam (*Carpinus*) has wood as hard and close-grained as horn, or that the root of the Bistort (*Polygonus bistorta* L.) is twice twisted (whence it is also called Snakeweed), he is frequently at a loss to see the fox in Fox Sedge (*Carex vulpina* L.) and even False Fox Sedge (*Carex otrubæ* Podp.) or the dog in the Wild Cornel (*Cornus*) called Dogwood. Chickweed (*Cuc. baltis*) does not resemble but is apparently eaten by chickens, a similar explanation accounting for Pig Nut (*Carum (Bunium) bulbocastanum* (L.) Koch.), Frog Bit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranæ* L.), Sheep's Bit (*Jasione montana* L., a variety of Scabious), Goosegrass (*Galium*), Lamb's Succory (*Arnoseris pusilla* L.), or Crow Garlic (*Allium vineale* L.) and perhaps even Goat Willow, another name for the Sallow Willow (*Salix caprea* L.). The dictionary guesses that Harebell (*Campanula rotundiflora* L.) was named "perhaps as growing where hares frequent," and a countryman will argue that Duckweed (*Wolffia*) floats on the water like a duck. But no one seems able to explain the connection of fox and glove in Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea* L.) or dogs with Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis* L.). False Mercury (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus* L.), which we have had occasion to mention earlier as All-good, is a pot herb, but Dog's Mercury has no such use. Perhaps Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica* L.) can drive away pesky parasites with its odor (it is also called Stinking Hellebore) but in a name like Horehound (*Ballota*) there is no "hound" at all. (That comes from the Old English *hár hîne* – a hoary *hîne*, whatever plant that may be – and through the Middle English *horhowne*. The explanation that it hounds away sore throats when made into coughdrops is a folk etymology which, like the one that derives *hangnail* from a nail that hangs, instead of from a nail that causes *ang* or pain – as in *anguish* – just ignores the Anglo-Saxon origins.) Nor does there seem to be any toad in Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius* L.), not even for those who can see a Toad Mouth in what others call the Snapdragon. Some of the "simple" names that refer to animals and such are in the long run more baffling to the average person who looks into their origins, though significantly not to the unthinking person who uses the names in common speech, than "hard" words like *anemone*, which (as John Moore reminds us in *You English Words*, 1965) is supposed to make spring to mind "the *wind* that tosses the frail white blossoms in March." Still, the man who cannot see that a tulip resembles a turban (a Persian word) does note that this leaf resembles a rabbit's ear or that stalk a rat's tail. For him the willow weeps with no memory of Babylon, where the exiled psalmist hung his harp upon the tree still called *Salix Babylonica* L., and his bosky dell carries no memory of the Italian *bosco* or the Royal Oak of the pretty woods at Boscobel. He is the common man loose in the wonderful world of nature as Adam was free

in Paradise, wandering about and happily if sometimes naively giving names to everything. He calls (says W. J. Turner) “a far-off glow Arc-turus / And some pale weeds, lilies of the valley” – or Ladders to Heaven. He imagines, he notices, he connects, he invents, he borrows for a language that took *cheroot* from the Malay for *cigar*. He names the freedom fighters (*maquis*) of World War II for the wild, aromatic Corsian thickets in which people hid. His common names for plants and flowers of the British Isles can be most uncommon indeed, and though we have not ventured into the vast area of names for imported and cultivated plants in that paradise of gardeners, the British Isles, nor outside that political entity, in the hundreds of names of British *flora* mentioned in this article it is hoped that there are some certainties and some surprises and some entertainment and instruction for those who are fascinated by words, words (as Emerson once remarked) every one of which was “once a poem.”

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Dr. Arthur R. Dunlap, Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Delaware, died on August 2, 1974, at Newark, Delaware. He had served on the board of managers of the American Name Society, edited the Elliott V. K. Dobbie souvenir issue of *Names* (June, 1972), and was the author and co-author of works on Swedish and Indian place-names. An obituary will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Names*.