

# Is There Anything Funny About *Your* Name?

A rose may smell as sweet if you miscall it a daisy, but there are many people who will be annoyed if you think that the spelling of their names is any guide to the way they should be pronounced. This article is taken from a radio talk given by George Joseph.

ONCE upon a time in China before the days of Confucius, it was sacrilege to say aloud the name of the Emperor, and anyone who did so could be sentenced to death. And now in England it has become necessary to count three before uttering the name of certain of our blue-bloods—not because of sacrilege, but just to give the speaker time to decide whether the famous one is a member of the Earl of Bogus family and therefore insistent on the pronunciation of his name as Boggo—or a Shropshire Spoo, pronounced as Spiff! Pronunciation of our names is the dearest of our vanities. Call a Smyth Mr. Smith, or a Broun Mr. Brown,

## (If You're Brown You're More Than Smith)

*Smith is not the most common English name. Brown, according to statistics, just has the edge on Smith. And here is a coincidence. The most common German name is Schwartz, which means black. The most common French name is Blanc, which means white. So if ever there is a European triumvirate of England, Germany and France, their colours should be Brown, Black and White.*

and there may be more resentment than if you had said he hadn't a sense of humour.

Because of persistent protests against name pronunciation, the BBC has used a handbook to its announcers containing 4000 English family names and their correct phonetic pronunciation. So we learn that the members of the Earl of Featherstonehaugh's family may challenge you to a duel if you address them as Featherstonhow. Some bourgeois people spell their name exactly the same, but insist on being addressed as F A N S H A W, others as F E E S O N H A Y. Finally, and these must be the parvenus of the name, a certain family with exactly the same spelling, require to be known as F E E R S T O N H A W. The Earl of Leicester possesses as his family name C O K E, but it must be pronounced K O O K. The untitled Cokes are satisfied with Mr. Coke. And amongst those present is the name of Mr. Corlswyn, who is the only Corlswyn in the world. He has registered his name by deed poll and published a notice in London dailies giving the correct pronunciation as K A W R S L O O I N, so now no one has any excuse for mispronunciation.

## Troublesome Wellington Street

The Earl of Baughan insists on being called Bawn, while Sir Roderick Baughan will not reply if called Bawn, although he spells his name the same. He requires to be addressed as Boffin. An old Wellington dispute is settled by the BBC volume. Majoribanks Street has been called Major Banks, Marjoribanks and Marshbanks. The last name is correct—Marshbanks.

The first Earl of Coldend was born just John Winterbottom! The family name of the Earl of Portland is Wallop. All our successful diplomats have at least one hyphen.

But why must England inflict Mr. Knigge-Calway-Brundsley-Piggot on Moscow? Mr. K. C. B. P. with his three hyphens discussed Admiralty matters with the Soviet. Surely they have enough troubles with their Doistoievskis, Karbolonskis, Baronouskis, Loush-inovs and the rest. Who has ever heard of a hyphenated Russian? But there was once a thrice-married lady who retained the names of her previous spouses, plus hyphens, and gloried as Mrs. McKay-O'Shea-Hohenstein. She was known to most of her friends as just the man-eater.

## In Europe Your Name Sticks

In England and America and in the dependencies of these two countries a man can select any name he wishes. If you have been born plain John Smith, you can rename yourself Anthony St. John Carfax and no one can say you nay. But in most countries in Europe, a man cannot change his name without the authority of the State; an authority which is rarely given.

In England and America a man may bestow on his child any Christian name he desires. Not so in France. The Christian name or *prenom* must be the name of one of the saints or of a person famous in history. This is obligatory by a Statute known as the Law of Germinal 11, passed in the eleventh year of the Republic.

## Little Fairy Ann

An elderly Frenchman married a young English girl in London. The husband was transported with joy when he learnt he was to become a father. He set his heart on a son, and selected a fine-sounding name for him. However, as often happens, the child was a girl. The Frenchman was broken-hearted, and took no interest in his daughter. At the christening, the vicar asked him what name he wished to bestow on the child. The brokenhearted Frenchman replied listlessly that it didn't matter what name was bestowed.

He said so in French, "Ca ne fait rien." And the vicar named the child Fairy Ann. Fairy Ann now weighs at least 17 stone, and was known at Chelsea as "Blobs."

The origin of names in England falls into three classes: appearance names.—Rufus, Longshanks, speak for themselves—occupational names—Smith, Taylor, Miller—and place names—Derby, de Bath.

## FAMILY AFFAIRS

*The most common name in Wales is Jones, with Thomas and Rees taking places. On an excursion steamer leaving Cardiff one bank holiday, it was found that although there were nearly 500 passengers, they had only eleven names amongst them. More than half were Joneses or hyphenated Joneses. The Aberdare University Rugby Team of 1936 possessed nine Joneses and four Thomases.*

The London telephone directory, two huge volumes, offers an interesting study in names. There are two Sniffs and a Mr. Potbelly. There is a Mr. Gargle and a Mr. Gurgle. There are several Bickersnicks, Candys, Boggles, Pickwicks, Tupmans, but only one Jingle. So Charles Dickens did not draw so much on his imagination after all.

## The Purpose of Names

The fundamental purpose of names is to distinguish men from each other. Names have therefore passed through the same development as clothes. Clothes were originally designed to hide our nakedness, and to keep us warm. They developed into something to emphasise physical attraction. And now names have become vanities. It has become a mental reaction to be impressed by a high-sounding name. Thus one of Mayor La Guardia's rivals in the New York municipal elections was Jabez Squintly. Mr. Squintly was bottom of the poll. And so in his life of Johnson, Boswell says: "The last city poet was Elkannah Settle. There is something in names. Elkannah Settle sounds so queer that one cannot expect much from that name. Now, we would give preference to John Dryden, from the names only, without knowing anything of their respective merits."

## Balzac was a Beggar

This is perhaps why Honoré de Balzac changed his name. He was born Monsieur Guez, which means a beggar. Balzac had no literary success as M'aieu Guez, but you know his fame as Balzac. The famous French poet Dorat had as his real name Disnemandi, which signifies one who dines in the morning and has no other meal than his breakfast. So he changed his name to Dorat, which means gilded. He had luxurious blonde tresses.

Finally, there is the tale of a gentleman who came to the registrar and asked to be allowed to change his name. He said: "My name is Horatio Stinker. I have a very bad time. Everyone teases me about my name. They laugh when I say my name is Horatio Stinker." The registrar sympathised with him. "Yes, it is an unfortunate name," he agreed. "What do you wish to change it to?"

"I want to change it to John Stinker," was the reply.