

MISCELLANEOUS.

ORIGIN OF OUR NAMES.

Up to a certain point in the world's history the number of people was sufficiently small and communities were far enough apart to avoid confusion of single names, but as the population increased, and communication became more frequent and practicable, the supply of names was not sufficient to meet the demand, and the result was that Toms, Dicks and Harrys were in danger of becoming mixed up with one another. It was this condition of affairs which gave rise to the adoption of surnames, not only as a means of obviating the embarrassments occasioned by a multiplicity of similar names, but for the purpose of distinguishing families. Many years before surnames were finally adopted the use of sobriquets had become customary—that is, names given to individuals as a special mark of distinction. These names were generally founded upon some personal trait or some incident in the life of the person, or referred to the place of his nativity, as Richard the Lion-Hearted, Edward Longshanks, John Lackland, Judas Iscariot. But these sobriquets applied only to the individuals and died with them, and did not, therefore, serve the purpose of family names.

It is impossible to determine definitely when surnames first came into existence, for, like nearly all human customs, the adoption of family names was the result of circumstances, and was of slow and gradual growth; but it was probably somewhere in the neighborhood of the year one thousand that they were first officially recognized and used to any extent.

The term "surname" is supposed by some to be derived from the French *surnom*, meaning "over-name," because a person's family name was formerly written above instead of after the baptismal name. It is just as likely, however, that the term was originally "sirname" or "sire-name," as the first family names were those derived from the name of the father. Instead of referring to a man as John, the son of Jacob, in order to distinguish him from John, the son of David, or William, or Robert, as had long been customary, the appellation was shortened to John, Jacob's son; and this, in turn, became simply John Jacobson, and all of the children and descendants of this particular Jacob thereafter bore the name of Jacobson. In the same manner the family names of Johnson, Davidson, Williamson, Robertson, Thomson, Lawrenceson, Peterson, Duncanson, Stephenson and others of a like kind came into existence.

Many of the Scotch and Irish surnames originated in the same way; the word "mac" (son of) being prefixed to the name of the father, and from this source we have the McArthurs, MacDonalds, McHenrys, McMichaels and many more that will occur to the reader. The old Normans prefixed to the paternal name the word "fitz," probably a corruption of the French "fils," meaning son, and from them we have the names of Fitzhugh, Fitzpatrick, Fitzgerald, Fitzsimmons (son of Simon).

Until within a comparatively recent time the Welsh people adhered to the

primitive custom of distinguishing a person as the son of his father by the use of the word "ap." Thus, David, the son of Howell, was known as David ap Howell. Very frequently, however, this was not a sufficient distinction, and it became necessary to add the names of the grandfather and great grandfather, and sometimes several ancestors beyond, so that an individual carried his pedigree in his name. It was, therefore, not unusual to hear such combinations as Evan ap Rice ap David ap Adam ap Roger, and so on to the seventh and eighth generation back.

A story is related of an Englishman who, riding among the mountains one dark night, heard cries of distress issuing from a deep ravine. "Help, master, help!" came a voice from below. "Who are you?" asked the traveler, peering in to the darkness. "Jenkin ap John ap Robert ap William ap Richard ap Owen," replied the voice. "Lazy fellows that ye be," cried the Englishman, setting spurs to his horse, "to lie a-tolling in that ditch, half a dozen of ye! Why in the name of common sense don't ye help one another out?"

To this curious custom, however, we are indebted for the names of Pugh, Pritchard, Powell and Price, which are simply modifications of ap Hugh ap Richard, ap Howell and ap Rice. When the Welsh finally adopted a simpler system of patronymics they made use of the paternal name in the possessive case. Thus, Griffith, the son of Robert, instead of being called Griffith Robertson, was known as Griffith Robert's—the son being understood. The possessive form was soon abandoned, however, and the surname became reduced to the simple one of Griffith Roberts. Many of our most familiar names are derived from this source; and we are at once reminded of Williams, Hughes, Richards, Andrews, Harris (Harry's), Adams, Phillips, Owens, Rogers, Howells, Daniels, Reynolds, Matthews, Jenkins, Edwards and our old friend Jones, which is merely a modification of John's.

In times gone by nearly every name had its corresponding nickname or diminutive, just as today we still have our Dick, Jack, Billy, Frank and Harry. Many of these nicknames and nursery forms were also drawn upon for surnames, so that a single name was oftentimes the source of half a dozen different cognomens. Thus, from John, we not only have Jones and Johnson, but Jenkins, Jenkin, Jennings, Jackson, Janson and Hanson. From Arthur, we have McArty, Atkins and Atkinson. From Robert we have Roberts, Robertson, Robinson, Robson, Dobson, Hobbs and Hobbson. Dennis is responsible for Dennison and Tennyson. Hawkins, Harris and Harrison come from Henry. Richard has given us, in addition to Richards and Richardson, Dick, Dickens, Dixon and Dickinson. Anderson and Henderson are derivatives of Andrews, and to William we are indebted for Wilson, Wills, Willis, Wilkes, Bilson, Wilkins, Wilkinson, Wilkison Wilcox, Willet, Willard and Billings, besides Williams and Williamson.

In a great many instances the Christian name was retained unaltered as the surname, and there is probably not

one of the more common early names that is not now borne by some family. In addition to the many familiar ones which will at once come to the mind of the reader—as Thomas, George, James, Owen, Henry, Francis, Charles, Lewis—there are several others which may, perhaps, not be recognized as baptismal names, by reason of the fact that their use as such has, to a large extent, been abandoned, and they are now generally regarded as family names only; among these are Reynold, Ellis, Godwin, Goodwin, Randal, Rice, Sampson, Morgan, Martin, Giles, Cuthbert, Baldwin, Bryant, Barnard, Howell, Arnold, Rupert and Meredith.

In addition to thus immortalizing their Christian names, our ancestors have left to the world an undying record of their trades and occupations in the shape of another class of family names, the foremost among which is the abundant one of Smith. Some of the members of this numerous family have, however, sought for a different and more ancient origin, than that represented by a village smithy, and to this end they have convinced themselves that they are the direct descendants of Shem, the son of Noah and the father of the Shemites, whose progeny through the exercise of some graceful orthographical jugglery, became transformed into Smith in the following manner: Shem, Shemite, Shemit, Shmit Smith.

At the time of the adoption of surnames every artisan whose work required the striking of blows on metal was known as a smith or smith, and the community, therefore, had its blacksmith, whitesmith, goldsmith, silversmith, arrowsmith and several others of the same character. The number of Smiths at the present day may, therefore, be readily accounted for, when we remember that each of the different kinds of smiths was as much entitled to the use of his trade name for a cognomen as any other artisan. John, the blacksmith and John, the coppersmith, were both known as John, the smith, an appellation which naturally resolved itself into the family name of John Smith. In the same way Peter, the Carpenter became Peter Carpenter; and John the miller, was the founder of the family of Miller. In this manner the various trades and callings became the source of surnames, and are to this day represented in those of Baker, Shoemaker, Tyler, Chandler, Mason, Cutler, Carter, Sadler, Slater, Butcher, Draper, Thatcher, Fletcher (arrowmaker), Hooper, Cheeseman, Turner, Joiner, Cooper, Gilder, Mercer, Skinner, Coleman, Sawyer, Tanner, Spicer, Cook, Sutor (shoemaker), Miner, Driver, Weaver, Gardner, Merchant, Porter, Wainwright, Taylor, Shepherd, Glover and a number of others.

Such names as Hall, Stair, Garret, Kitchen, Chambers, also record the occupations of our forefathers, who, in these cases, were engaged in the households of the nobility and had charge of such apartments as the names suggest. Others again held higher offices, and from them we have the surnames, Page, Butler, Proctor, Forester, Steward (and its modified forms of Stewart and Stuart), Bailey, Fowler, and Woodward and Hayward, the keepers, respectively of the forest and cattle.

While it is very evident that our fathers pre-empted the honor of establishing family names, there are three or