

SURNAMES

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Surnames by B. Homer Dixon

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B. HOMER DIXON

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C O N T E N T S.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	v
ABBREVIATIONS	xxvii
PREFIXES AND POSTFIXES	xxix
SURNAMES	1
CORRIGENDA	86

THE First Edition of this work (June, 1855) was written on the spur of the moment, and principally for my own amusement. By reason of its many imperfections, I have made this new edition, in the hope that, upon its receipt, my friends will kindly consign the old one to the flames.

Etymologies are, however, at all times deceptive; and I feel assured that many errors will still be discovered in my deductions, but plead in apology the old proverb, "Noli equi dentes inspicere donati."

INTRODUCTION.

ALL SURNAMES originally conveyed a meaning; but from the corruption in spelling, and number of words that in the course of time have become obsolete or wholly lost, it is often impossible to discover their true signification.

Until within about the last two centuries, the orthography of but few had become fixed; they being generally written according to the fancy of the writer, and, when spelt as pronounced, often lost all trace of their original.

To show how easily transformations can be made, we have only to look for the names of the Alehouse, Andrew Mackay, Billy Ruffian, and Currant Juice, in a Royal Navy List; for so were generally stiled the *Æolus*, *Andromache*, *Bellerophon*, and *Courageux*. These, to be sure, were misnomers of the illiterate; but it is not many years ago that all England was talking of "Abraham Parker," in whom I must confess I did not at first recognize one whom I had learnt to like, after seeing in the East the deeds he had performed. It is very true that Ibrahim Pacha was so called in jest; but undoubtedly many of the lower classes believed it to be his real designation.

Even in the names of the nobility, what stranger would for Chulmley write Cholmondeley; Marchbanks, Marjoribanks; Beecham, Beauchamp?

A source of great confusion in the middle ages was the translating and retranslating of names. One family in Cornwall are called, in various records, de Albo Monasterio, Blanchminster, Whitminster, and Whitchurch. In all its four changes, this name was never misinterpreted. But they did not always understand what they translated; as, for instance, the names Goodrick and Godshall were turned into de Bono fossato and de Casa Dei, when I think it probable that both are personal names, — the first being Powerful or Rich in God; the other, God's servant; a name similar to the German Gottschalk, the Gaelic Gilchrist, the French de Dieu, etc., — all tantamount to Christian.

Wingfield became, in mediæval Latin, *Ali Campi*, when it is apparently either Battlefield or Field of victory; and Freemantle was rendered *Frigidum Mantellum*: but I prefer my own definition; viz., Frieze-mantle, or cloak made of Friesland cloth.

Beaufoy has been Latinized both de *Bella fago* and de *Bella fide*, — in the one case signifying Dweller by or Lord of the Beautiful beech-tree plot, and in the other equivalent to Trueman or Trusty. That the first, however, is really the name is clear; for its earliest forms are de *Bella fago*, *Belfou*, *Beaufou*, and *Bewfowo*.

As early as the ninth century, the significations of many Gothic names were lost, as appears by their strange transformations in a record of the year 816, of the Abbot Smaragdus, of St. Michael's Convent in Lorraine, wherein *Altmir* becomes *vetulus mihi*; *Ratmunt*, *consilium oris*; *Rainmir*, *nitidus mihi*; *Ainard*, *unus durus*.

In the following pages, I have collected a few surnames from the principal Teutonic branches of the Gothic language, — viz., Old and Anglo Saxon, English, Lowland Scotch, Frisian, Dutch (of the Netherlands), Low German (*Platt Deutsch*), and High German; from all the branches of the Celtic excepting *Manx*, — viz., British, Armoric, Welsh, Cornish, Erse, and Gaelic; and from

some branches of the classical, as French, Italian, and Spanish, which are derived from the Latin.

Of living tongues, the Frisian resembles the English more than any other. The principal characteristic of the true Frisian patronymics is their almost invariably ending in *a*, as *Æbinga*, *Abbema*, *Albada*. In the termination of their local names, the Saxon "heim" is generally changed to "um;" as *van Ewsum*, *q. v.*, *van Ittersum*, *van Oostrum*. This latter peculiarity occurs in our American idiom in such names as *Barnum*, *Birkum*, *Farnum* and *Varnum*, *Hannum*, and *Van Arnun* and *Van Ornum*, for *Barnham*, *Birkham*, *Farnham*, *Hanham*, and *van Arnhem*, *q. v.*

In Brittany, "poul" and "ker" answer to the Cornish "pol" and "car." With this trifling difference only, the old rhyme—
"By Tre, Ros, Pol, Lan, Caer, and Pen, you may know the Cornish men"—will apply as well to Breton men.

When it is remembered that names were formerly adopted and changed with but little ceremony, it is singular that so many inelegant ones have not only been appropriated, but also retained and handed down to posterity.

At the present day, there is a British peer surnamed Parnell, a German count styling himself Barefoot (*von Barfuss*, *q. v.*); and there is, or was lately, a noble Spanish family named Frying-pan (*Padilla*, *q. v.*), and an Italian called Little-pots (*Pignatelli*, *q. v.*). In Belgium, a family bear the name Teashop (*Vermoelen de Theewinkel*, *q. v.*); while, in England, Arms have been granted to the name Beanshop; and Ship's coppers would probably be a sailor's definition of the Spanish name *Calderon de la Barca*. Even in our own city, a family are styled Trull. They may claim relationship, by name at least, both with the Trollope who visited this country a few years since, as well as with the Right Honorable John Vesey Parnell, Lord Congleton.