

Why permit a man to change his name? Who benefits by it? True, it does enable the individual who effects the change to deceive the public. This is, indeed, its very object and purpose. But is it consistent with public policy that such change of name should be permitted; and should the State be asked to go even further and assist the individual to pass himself off as something he is not?

Modern law accentuates the importance of protecting commercial interests, as well as the general public in every way, by preventing deception from being practised upon it. The altogether modern doctrines of Unfair Trade now prohibit one merchant from dressing up his goods to resemble in shape and colour those of a rival, provided that his purpose is to deceive the public into the idea that they are really purchasing his rival's goods and not his; nor can, indeed, a man employ his own name in trade, if his purpose in doing so is clearly to deceive the public. In view of these absolutely established and necessary refinements and restrictions, it becomes evident that if a man can no longer be permitted to pass off his manufactured goods as the manufactured goods of another, how much less should he be permitted, by means of a falsely assumed name, to pass himself off as someone else?

It is even doubtful whether any really good and valid reason can be advanced for a change of name. Where, under a will, family estates are to devolve upon one not of the name, blood and lineage of the testator, it is questionable whether the name of the donee should be permitted to be changed as a condition of receiving the gift. As in all cases of change of name, this is a deception, notwithstanding that it is permitted by law. The sole object can only be to convey the idea of ancestry that does not exist, or to gratify a pride, which a practical age has no time to waste over.

Two recent instances of change of name, occurring in England during the war, may be briefly adverted to: Sir Joseph Jonas and Charles Alfred Vernon were prosecuted some two years ago for aiding the enemy. Jonas was formerly Lord Mayor of Sheffield. Both were found guilty and sentenced—Jonas to pay a fine of £2,000 and Vernon to pay a fine of £1,000. At the trial of these persons, it was claimed that both were born in Germany but were