

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR'S FORTHCOMING VOLUME ON THE ORIGIN, SIGNIFICATION, TRANSLATION, CLASSIFICATION
AND ETYMOLOGY OF PROPER-NAMES

By Mr. C. BAILLAIRGE

To be read before section II of the Royal Society of Canada at its May meeting at Toronto, Ont., 1902.

In 1871, Mgr. Tanguay published a work in 7 volumes: "Genealogical dictionary of Canadian Families", with, at the beginning of the 1st volume, some remarks on the etymology and history of proper-names.

His insufficient acquaintance with the English language caused him sometimes to consider as onomatopoeias or homonyms certain names which are by no means of such a class.

Thus he gives *deaguan* as an English translation of the name *D'Acauan* an ancient province of Spain, while *deaguan* is from the French *degaun*, Italian *dragano*, Danish and Swedish *dragua*, Latin *decurarius*.

Tanguay derives *collier* (charlommer) from *Coleman* while *col* has not the meaning of *coal*, but that of the German or Dutch *cuhl*, a cabbage, (Webster).

Again at the word or name *Maygan* which he translates into *chaudronnier* boiler maker, *maygan* is the popular name in the middle of France for the silk worm, while *maugue* says Littré has the meaning which Tanguay would give to *Maygan*.

Now we have *Donaldson* which Tanguay derives from *D'Ancogan*, a town of France, as if the homonymy or similarity of sound were conclusive of the fact. On the contrary the true derivation of *Donaldson* is self-evident: a son of Donald or McDonald. To mention but one more of the errors of the learned abbé, we find at *Berthmann* that he derives this name from the Saxon or Scandinavian *berht* brilliant, illustrious and from *helm* Saxon (= helmet.) But the celebrity of any head-gear can hardly be supposed to confer the same renown on the wearer. The error here is of mistaking *helm* for *helm* German and Dutch, Saxon *helm*, Danish *helm* which signifies a hamlet, a house, a residence, a home, and hence the termination *helm* or *mann* of the name under consideration *Berthmann*—with the meaning of one at the head of a princely mansion, a house celebrated for its hospitality, etc., or that the man himself was known as liberal and generous; and to this day, a representative of the name is found, he who generously fitted out an expedition last year, to test the practicability of winter navigation of the St. Lawrence, proves that there is or may be something in a name.

It is in no way however, for the purpose of signalizing or commenting on such errors, that the writer has undertaken the composition of the work to which this introduction is intended as a preface. It is on the contrary, because he considers this etymological chapter of the Revd. Abbé's work of extreme interest, and because the "dictionary", on account of its cost, is likely to reach but a very few of the community, that he has thought it advisable in a less expensive form to put readers in the way of looking into the origin, the why and wherefore of the present family name or appellation of each of them.

The writer would add that he deems himself fortunate that no one has had the idea of forestalling him in this etymological enquiry into the origin of words and names, which has always been to him a labor of love, while tiding over such moments of leisure as his studies and writings on engineering and scientific subjects have left him for the purpose.

In 1824, one Salvestre, a French author and from whom Mgr. Tanguay quotes at length, published a work in two octavo volumes on this subject of the origin and etymology of proper and family names.

"Mr. Salvestre says that of all the modes of distinguishing an individual, the most natural is to give him a name recalling his qualities physical or mental, as the *big* or *little*, *tall* or *short*, the *fat* or *lean*, the *good* or *handsome*."

Such are also the names of colours, of creatures of the earth's fauna, the trees and flowers of its flora—of workers at the arts and industrie, and of the tools and materials made use of. We also have names expressive of structures of all kinds and of the component portions thereof. Certain names are suggestive of comestibles, articles of furniture, of dress, of domestic implements.

The several soils or varieties thereof more or less suitable to horticultural, agricultural requirements, are also rehearsed in the names of many men. There are names biblical and names clerical, astronomical, meteorological, as well as those expressive of coins, weights and measures; and the vast family of names topographical or of towns, cities, rivers, lakes and etc., with others indicative of the nationality of the individual.

On this head, says Salvestre, we know not with any certainty, either what the original sense was of such names of places, or to what extent the name may have been altered, as well from the desire of attaching it to some religious legend, to some historical tradition, or through lapse of time. Then, how can we say whether the names belonged originally to physical objects rather than to real personages, the human species.

A thousand names may be mentioned of which the meaning or signification applies equally to a man or to a flower, a rock, etc. A man has often adopted the name of a place or given his name to a locality and it is more especially in the United States of America that the truth of this assertion becomes palpable. The occurrence is moreover rendered probable and even certain from the fact that most proper names have originated centuries ago in the mother country, and that in emigrating to America a new or theretofore supposed to be a new or as yet undiscovered and uninhabited country, where places had not previously been named except may be in a few cases, in the Indian or aboriginal vernacular, topographical points had to be named for the purpose of identification—hence it is we find the names of individuals as Adams, Evans, etc., with a list of suffixes attached indicative of the object named as Adams'ville, Adams'creek, Adams'ford, Evans'town, Evansfield, Evansborough, with a hundred other such suffixes or terminations as cliff, mountain, haven, port, bridge, landing, burg, ham, dorf, cape, brook, lake etc., etc.,—and thus also perpetuating their names or handing them down to posterity.

Let us rather, says Salvestre, fall back on history: *Cyrus*, it is said, was nursed by a goat, *Raculus* by a wolf, the Persian *Arcturus* by an eagle.

The legend that Saint *René*, rose from the dead or came to life again some 7 years after his death has no other foundation than that the verb *renaître* (comes to life again) was under the synonymy or similarity of sound *renait* expressive of such a fact, or had thus become a pious or religious legend of the time. But it does not follow that *René* is a mythical or mysterious being.

And while on this head we may, remark that *Ternay* may possibly be a make-up of *petit* and *René* the name having by usage and frequent repetition become "tit René", and finally and onomatopoeically written or as pronounced *Ternay*; in the same way as the French word *quière* or *quiere*, to fetch, by contraction or elision became *qu'ir* and finally *rei*, or as the word *cheminée* carelessly spoken, has given rise to its being written *chaufé*.