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THE NAMING OF CHARACTERS IN THE
WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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THE NAMING OF CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

Introduction

An extensive examination of the names of characters in the works of the majority of nineteenth and twentieth century novelists would obviously be of little value, for the growing tendency toward the commonplace in realism has necessitated the selection of neutral names or names taken outright from actual persons. Though few of the characters in recent fiction are so handicapped by inappropriate names as are many people in real life,—where, to quote a modern poet, “surnames ever go by contraries”—still, with the contemporary novelists, there is usually nothing in a name to denote an intimate correspondence between it and the character to which it belongs. It may be that the aversion to the grotesque or the descriptive in nomenclature springs from a conviction that the liking for peculiar names is obsolete, and that it has passed from the world of letters, as the brilliantly flowered waistcoat from the pages of fashion; or it may be that it is merely an illustration of loss of caste by a literary mode, which appears in succeeding generations in varying degrees of degradation.

That such “degradation” does occur more frequently than “elevation” has been noted in the change in use and meaning of many words, which in one period are regarded as befitting the vocabulary of persons of refinement, but which a century later are rarely employed by discriminating writers. For example, the appellation *imp*, which no one would now consider a respectful epithet, was applied by Shakespeare to no less a personage than the king:

“A lad of life, an imp of fame;”¹

and the term *brat* was evidently not looked upon by Gascoigne as implying a young child in a deplorable state of unwashed raggedness, when he apostrophized the chosen people:

“O Israel! O household of the Lord!

O Abraham’s brats! O brood of blessed seed!”²

¹*King Henry V*, Act IV, Scene I.

²Gascoigne. *De Profundis*.

Literary types often share the fate of words in loss of dignity, for the tale of knighthood and chivalry is no longer a theme of absorbing interest to critical readers, but it, along with the game of tag and other recreations formerly enjoyed by court ladies, is relegated to children. Such names as appear in the morality plays and in the early Elizabethan drama have fallen into disrepute as a feature of literature. It was doubtless a great convenience in the ante-program days for the audience to be able to conjecture from the name of a character whether to applaud him as a hero or to execrate him as a villain. The early novelists made use, with more or less freedom, of this custom of descriptive nomenclature, as shown by the names of characters, strikingly in Smollett, less so in Goldsmith. Modern literature is marked by a nearly complete disappearance of the names that give a clue to the occupation or nature of the character to which they pertain; the heritage of Ben Johnson's "humours" and the antics and clowns of the Elizabethan stage has fallen to the comic supplement of the daily paper.

Except for Trollope's strongly individualized portraits, many of them catalogued with descriptive names, the last noteworthy appearance in fiction of names that pertinently distinguish the characters is in the works of Charles Dickens, especially in his early books. Frequently the personages that he dismisses with a few words, or shows only in a sketch, are those bearing the most clearly descriptive names. Probably his familiarity with Goldsmith and Smollett is largely responsible for the presence in his works of that to which Chesterton refers as the "last cry of Merry England."¹ But it is not alone in the non-Puritanic attitude toward religion (as mentioned by Chesterton) that Dickens brings back the spirit of the early days; there is something of the same rejuvenescence in the prodigality of his genius, in the exuberance of his fancy, in the irrepressibility of his humor, and especially in the whimsical facetiousness of the names he bestows upon his characters.

Even if he had not acknowledged his debt to Smollett and Goldsmith in *David Copperfield*, his acquaintance with their

¹G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*, p. xx.

books might be surmised from indications in his works. From these authors he came to appreciate the artistic possibilities of studies in the life of the poor, and to realize his own powers of observation and expression. His later fondness for Ben Jonson may have confirmed him in the use of descriptive names, especially for the characters who had not heroic rôles to play; but he evidently owed his initial interest in nomenclature to the early influence of *Roderick Random* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and to the types of names employed by his immediate predecessors in humor, Hook and Pierce Egan.

In Dickens' works the number of characters possessing a distinct personality is so great that one can readily understand the amazement of the old charwoman, who, as Kitton relates,¹ thought that it must have taken three or four men to write *Dombey and Son*. It is difficult to decide whether it is because the types presented are so clearly distinguished, and the portraits so convincingly painted, that the mention of the name of one of his characters raises a vivid mental image of that character, or whether much of the individuality has its source in the peculiar suitability of the name to the personality. There must have been something in the name of the untidy old nurse, Sairy Gamp, which was felt to be suggestive of the disreputable umbrella she carried, for her name was retained as a contribution to the language in order that large and baggy umbrellas might thenceforth be designated as 'gamps'. The skill with which Dickens' characters are drawn may have contributed to the spell which seems to belong to their names, but still, it is impossible to imagine a Weller masquerading as a Jones, and unable to "spell it vith a *we*."

This evident affinity between the names and the characters provokes an examination of the nomenclature of Dickens; and, although the multitude of characters which he introduces prevents the considering of them all in the narrow limits of a single article, names characteristic of the various tendencies in his works may be selected, and from their study (it is hoped) Dickens' methods will be fairly revealed in example.

¹F. G. Kitton. *Charles Dickens. His Life, Writings, and Personality*, p. 160.

I

Names of Characters Whose Originals Have Been Identified

In an investigation of the names of characters in Dickens' works, one of the first questions to be considered is the number of names derived from actual people. Though Dickens seldom made a deliberate portrait, faithfully reproducing all the traits of his model, still he is known occasionally to have drawn a character from life, and at times to have borrowed the name of some real person.

Those names which his biographers have identified¹ as belonging to people with whom Dickens was acquainted illustrate the two leading tendencies in nomenclature in his books. The names in some cases are directly descriptive of the characters to whom they belong; in the majority of other cases they are appropriate to the characters, in sound suggesting the personality of their owners. The principles underlying the suiting of sound to sense in the giving of names will be more fully treated later, but attention should here be called to the slightness of the changes made in certain names to harmonize them with the characters.

Among the names taken without change from actual persons several are vaguely felt to be well adapted to the characters. Such, for example, is the name Pickwick, which surely could belong to a hero of no other stripe than Dickens drew,—a Hamlet by the name of Pickwick is unthinkable. The famous Mr. Pickwick was a namesake of Moses Pickwick, a coach owner of Bath, whose name Dickens saw on the door of a coach. The coach owner was probably not so greatly disturbed by the identity of names as were Mr. Pickwick and Sam, who resented the liberty taken with his master's name. "Not content with writin' up Pickwick, they puts 'Moses' afore it, vich I call addin' insult to injury, as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English langwidge arterwards."² The poetical

¹The authority for the identifications is to be found in Forster's *Life of Dickens*, Kitton's *Charles Dickens*, and Philip's *Dickens Dictionary*.

²*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter XXXV.

Snodgrass, Mr. Pickwick's friend, borrowed his name from a ship-builder of note in Chatham and Bath. The ruddy-nosed Mr. Stiggins, for whom Tony Weller had so great an antipathy, derived from a man living in Higham at the time when *Pickwick* was written. One of Dickens' former Chatham neighbors furnished a name for Mr. Magnus. The original Mark Tapley had a wide acquaintance at Chatham, but unfortunately records do not state his proclivities for being "jolly" under trying conditions. The graciously benign Father of the Marshalsea, whose character resembled that of Dickens' own father, was evidently named for a prisoner, Dorrett, in the King's Bench, who was confined there at a time when Mr. Dickens, senior, was paying a similar penalty for debt.

Occasionally, and with varying success, Dickens made use of the names or the personal peculiarities of his friends. It seems scarcely a grateful return for kindness shown to the sensitive and almost friendless lad in the blacking warehouse for Dickens to have given Bob Fagin's name to a corruptor of London boys; and one is curious to know if the real Fagin felt resentment toward the author, as did General Rigaud, whose friendship for Dickens lost something of its warmth after the appearance of the notorious villain of *Little Dorrit*.

Of unmistakably deliberate intent is Dickens' selection of names that describe his characters. Usually such names are clearly whimsical in origin, but several have been traced to sources in actual life. It is doubtful whether Dickens was aware of the entry of 1567 in the Salford Register, noting the birth of a son to Oliver Twiste, but there is a suggestiveness in the meaning of the word *twist* that hints at the "wrenching out of place," the intertwining of forces good and evil that seek to influence the course of the boy's life. That this interpretation is not fanciful may be seen from Dickens' own comment: "I wish to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last." Rosa Dartle derived her name from a Rochester family, but the melodramatic darting of fierce words at Little Em'ly, and the consistently savage temper of the vindictive Rosa may have caused the selection of this name as suggesting the word *dart*.

Madeline Bray is one of the few characters who seem to be misnamed; but the exigencies of the story require her to have a particularly disagreeable father, and she suffers the temporary inconvenience of bearing his name until she can change it for one less objectionable. It is not known whether Dickens' former schoolmate at Wellington House furnished a suggestion for the personality, or merely the name, of Walter Bray. The sour-faced parochial undertaker, Sowerberry, was not without precedent in regard to his name, at least, for the church register at Chatham records the existence of others with whom the author was probably not unacquainted.

At times Dickens slightly disguised familiar names, or took liberties with their spelling, as when he converted the not uncommon Smith into Billsmethie, Smif, and Smifser,—the name of the last mentioned rejected suitor of Mrs. Nickleby sounding like a timidly polite "Smith, sir." But little alteration in spelling was required to change Edwin Trood, landlord of the Falstaff Inn opposite Gad's Hill, to Edwin Drood, a name more suitable in sound than Trood for the victim in a murder mystery. Newman Knott and the Blunderstone carrier, Barker, may not have recognized themselves as Newman Noggs and the willing Barkis, but if they were aware of their relation to the characters, they must have appreciated the fact that the altered names were more appropriate than the original. The bluff John Browdie was indebted for his personal qualities to a Yorkshire farmer, and for his name to Broodiswood, the farmer's home. Dickens had come into contact with the "honest John" during his investigation of Yorkshire schools through letters referring to a supposititious "little boy who had been left with a widowed mother anxious to place him at a school in the neighborhood."¹

In other instances Dickens borrowed traits of character from friends and relatives, but concealed them more or less effectively from the knowledge of the originals by changing the names. The similarity of sound in the names Dickens and Nickleby was so slight that Dickens' mother fortunately never associated the loquacious Mrs. Nickleby with her talkative

¹F. G. Kitton. *Charles Dickens, His Life, Writings, and Personality*, p. 61

self, though it was known that Kate and Nicholas were intended as portraits of members of the family. Dickens' father furnished elements for the insolvent J. Wilkins Micawber, though Kitton is authority for the statement that Dickens' brother was employed in an office in York with another prototype of Micawber, and that at the same time the name Wilkins was a byword in York for impecunious or shabby persons. Landor and Leigh Hunt were aware of their likeness in the blustering Boythorne and the carefree Harold Skimpole of *Bleak House*. Hunt, in particular, was seriously offended, although Dickens had altered his original conception of the character, and had changed the Leonard to Harold to prevent Hunt's recognition of himself in the irresponsible spendthrift.

At times Dickens intentionally cast a thin veil over the identity of his characters. Sir Stephen Gaselee could not but recognize himself as Justice Stareleigh; and the name and personality of Mr. Laing were so little disguised under the name of Fang, that the home-secretary had no difficulty in removing the unprincipled incumbent from the bench after the publicity given his character in *Oliver Twist*. Dickens' deliberate purpose in painting the justice is shown in a letter of June, 1837, to Mr. Haines, who then had general supervision over the police reports for the daily papers. "In my next number of *Oliver Twist* I must have a magistrate; and, casting about for a magistrate whose harshness and insolence would render him a fit subject to be *shown up* [the italics are his], I have as a necessary consequence stumbled upon Mr. Laing of Hatton-garden celebrity. I know the man's character perfectly well; but as it would be necessary to describe his personal appearance also, I ought to have seen him, which (fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be) I have never done. In this dilemma it occurred to me that perhaps I might under your auspices be smuggled into the Hatton-garden office for a few moments some morning. If you can further my object I shall be really very greatly obliged to you."¹

¹Quoted in Forster's *Life of Dickens*, Volume III, p. 25.

II

Directly-Descriptive Names

Prominent among the literary customs now obsolete is the fashion of punning upon names. In the Elizabethan drama a comedy that contained no play upon words was rare,—Slipper mentioned his leathery kin, or Slender lamented his small face and slight physique. Smollett's *passée* Miss Wither and beautiful Miss Sparkle followed in fiction nearly two centuries later, with Goldsmith's pessimistic Croaker and other characters whose names were appropriate because of their indicating the appearance or the disposition of the character, or the social standing of his family.

Clearly, Dickens' disowned Neville and Helena Landless, and the comfortably established Mr. Grazinglands, together with the penniless Sir Thomas Noland, are to be associated with Goldsmith's wealthy Miss Richland. Mr. Pott might have originated with Smollett as a name befitting the editor of any paper in the borough of Eatanswill (it is amazing that in spite of the vulgarity of the name of Eatanswill, 'Eat-and-swill', two towns, Ipswich and Sudberry, should contend for the doubtful honor of being considered the original of the picture). Smollett might have been guilty of the grim humor of making a Mr. Mordlin (Maudlin) a member of the Ebenezer Temperance Association, and of giving to its president the name of Humm,—a word known to Jonson and Fletcher as signifying a drink of strong ale. A similar satiric humor seems to have prompted the giving to the ferociously profane showman, Mim, a name which means *primly silent, quiet*; but there is as well an ironic bitterness in the names of two of Squeers' victims, Little Bolder and Cobbey (cobby,—brisk, lively).

In the same category as Goldsmith's Croaker appears Job Trotter who "trots off" on a rainy night, leaving Mr. Pickwick in the garden of Westgate House to be apprehended as a housebreaker. No less disagreeable in name are the Reverend Melchisedech Howler of the Ranting persuasion, and the Mr. Gusher who talks for an hour and a half to boys and girls of charity schools to raise money for a testimonial to the philan-

thropic Mr. Quale. It is not surprising that an emphatic gentleman should be known as Mr. Snapper, or that a bailiff should be called old Fixem. Susan Nipper merits her name when she first appears, because of her custom of pinching or otherwise disciplining her young mistress. The little restless eyes and inquisitive nose of Mr. Pickwick's lawyer must have suggested the name Perker (perk—to peer, or look sharply), and the sounds made by Jeremiah Cruncher when he went “fishing” were probably responsible for his name. One inclines to think that Mrs. Bayham Badger has deserved her name because of badgering her guests with minute observations of Captain Swosser, her “first”, and Professor Dingo, her “second.”

The money lender, Arthur Gride, owns a name disagreeable in sound and significance, indicative of the harsh nature of the man. Scrooge has a similarly unpleasant name, corresponding to his character. Although the spelling varies slightly from the word meaning to crowd or press, still the origin of the name is apparently *scrouge*, a word long in use. Ralph Nickleby's guest, Colonel Chowser, carries in his name a warning to the public, for the verb *chouse* means to cheat or to swindle. Mrs. Corney, who becomes the wife of Mr. Bumble, acts with consistent hardness of hand in her treatment of the unfortunate creatures in the poorhouse. The “old friends” of the very new Veneerings, in two cases at least, suggest in their names that the acquaintance has not been of long standing. Of the four “buffers” who share with Twemlow the honor of being old friends of the family upon their second meeting, Brewer has in his name an insinuated “state of preparation,” while Boots bears the name applied to the youngest officer in a regiment, and to the youngest and most recently acquired member of a club.

The Bigwig family would be expected to be “the stateliest people there-about,” and it is not to be denied that the Stiltstalkings would necessarily be well endowed from a “sanguineous point of view.” No one would be surprised to find among the brilliant lights of society the young barrister Parkle and Edmund Sparkler, the “swelled boy.” There one would see the sympathetic Mrs. Coiler ingratiating herself into the graces

of near-titles, and Fascination Fledgeby exploring his unfledged chin with tentative forefinger. Mr. Flamwell's acquaintance with fashionable folk would be less readily believed if his friends were to notice that the first syllable of his name signifies a falsehood. The rollicking, irresponsible Jingle carries in his name his introduction to society, which would look for him to be "Mars by day, Apollo by night,—bang the field piece, twang the lyre."¹

Some of the characters are gifted with names figuratively descriptive, several of them reminiscent of Goldsmith's Honeywood, like the hypocritical philanthropist Honeythunder; the unfortunate Stephen Blackpool, who finds life all a muddle; and the serious-minded, respectable schoolmaster Headstone, whose name may have been intended to suggest his hard, passionate nature, or the end to which it brings him. No less obvious is the correspondence between the name and the appearance of Mr. Solomon Daisy, who is described as wearing many queer little buttons so like his eyes "that as they twinkled and glistened in the light of the fire, which shone too in his bright shoe-buckles, he seemed all eyes from head to foot."² Foxy Brass, the deceased father of Samson and Sally, was possessed of the qualities of the fox in his sly shrewdness, and he left to his son and daughter a large inheritance of obdurate assurance and brazenness. The Smallweed family is small in stature and so much of a nuisance to George Rouncewell and other good people that there is no question of the benefit to society that would ensue upon their being pulled up by the roots. Mrs. General musters her recruits in the "papa, potatoes, prunes, and prisms" rank, with military firmness and dignity. In the Veneerings, as in their furniture, the surface "smells a little too much of the workshop, and is a trifle sticky." Mr. Chirrup "has the smartness and something of the quick manner of a small bird." The innate cruelty of the magistrate Laing,—to whom reference has been made,—and his wolfish lack of mercy seem to have suggested the name Fang, which serves the double purpose of slightly veiling his identity and describing his character in metaphor. Upon our

¹*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter II.

²*Barnaby Rudge*, Chapter I.

first acquaintance with Mr. Nupkins' footman, Muzzle, we find him chiefly bent on aiding his master in so prosecuting offenders as to render them, as Sam Weller expressed it, "Dumb as a drum with a hole in it." It may be that Lightwood and Steerforth are meant to hint in their names the aimless drifting of the one, and the reckless determination of the other to carry out his own plans. Tom Pinch appears to owe his name to the "pinched" conditions that oppressed him at the home of his false benefactor, Mr. Pecksniff. Otherwise "Pinch" would be a misnomer.

In several instances Dickens facetiously varies the orthography of his descriptive names, as in the case of the steady John Steadiman commanding a boat of survivors from the wreck of the *Golden Mary*, or the undoubtedly genuine Mrs. Jiniwin comforting herself with supposition of her son-in-law's decease. The mysterious Messrs. Noakes and Styles prove to be the Jack Nokes and Tom Stiles formerly in requisition on papers of ejectment, and filling much the same position of honor as that now held by John Doe and Richard Roe. It is with no great surprise that we notice that Mr. Prosee is a counsel, and we feel assured that the haberdasher, Mr. Phibbs, is not over scrupulous in regard to truth in selling his goods. Fanny Squeers' pronunciation of the name of her maid Phoebe (Phib) is most fitting to this shrewd flatterer of her unlovely mistress. The Reverend Temple Pharisee commends himself by name to our good graces, as does Pecksniff's relation, Chevy Slyme, who is "of too haughty a stomach to work, to beg, to borrow, or to steal; yet mean enough to be worked or borrowed, begged or stolen for, by any cat's-paw that would serve his turn; too insolent to lick the hand that fed him in his need, yet cur enough to bite and tear it in the dark."¹ We know of Miss Knag's facility in rendering unhappy those whom she dislikes, and we expect a flinty indifference to the woes of his charges on the part of the workhouse overseer, Mr. Grannett.

It is a question whether Miss Charity Pecksniff's wretched fiancé, Augustus Moddle, was so named from his being a *model* of sorrowful obedience until the moment of his despairing

¹*Martin Chuzzlewit*, Chapter VII.

flight, or from the circumstance of everything being in such a *muddle* that all dear to him was the property of "Another." Miss Flite may have received her name after Chancery troubles made her flighty, but Mrs. Tibbs' boarder, Mr. Gob[b]ler, seems to owe his to a constitutional selfishness. The Porkenhams are undoubtedly a substantial family, but clearly of a plebeian taste, and surely not of the same social standing as Mrs. Nupkins, whose name seems to point to the use of table napkins, at that time peculiar to the fastidious. It must have been a great relief to the entire Pickwickian community when Bob Sawyer offered his medical services in place of those of the late Nockemorf. The name of the street Arab Gonoph has become a common noun, the slang appellation of an amateur thief or pickpocket. The junior barrister, Mr. Phunky, who was conscious of being "kept down" by want of means, or interest, or connection, or impudence, might have ascribed the fault for his being an underling not to "his stars," but to his name. Mr. Styver, on the contrary, might have been proud of his, as indicating his capacity for shouldering others from his path. It may be a groundless fancy, but the maiden name of Mrs. Alfred Lammle seems intended to foreshadow the disappointment of her husband when he found her "acres sham" (Akershem). The predilection for puns on names which Dickens shows unmistakably in so many instances has caused the suspicion that Miss Havisham is in her hypochondriachal state, even to herself, half-a-sham, and that her false lover, Compeyson, is made ironically to suggest his absence of compassion. However this is probably too far-fetched.

That Dickens did not often attempt to veil the obvious meaning of the name by changes of spelling is evident from the frequency of such characters as Mr. Goodchild, Mr. Glib, and Thomas Idle. The knowing Alderman Cute who "put down" the poor, and the ill-natured Mr. Dumps share with Mr. George Meek the disadvantage of having others know their character from their names. The amiable Mr. Kindheart could never have been guilty of an action so dastardly and presumptuous as Mr. Boldwig's sending Mr. Pickwick to the pound. Mr. Cheerful and Tom Smart are plainly men of an attractive personality, but Betsy Snap and the house-maid

Streaker probably experience a frequent change of employers, and Dr. Callow must certainly lose patients to Dr. Wiseman, if there is anything in a name.

The *Mudfog Papers*, a satire on the proceedings of the Association of British Science, under the guise of records of the Mudfog Association, would be expected to show as little reverence for the names of the members as for the name of the society. It is not recorded whether Dickens was satirizing the foibles of particular scientists of the day, or whether he shot at random, but it would seem probable that the paper was written with the natural effervescence and exaggeration of a youthful reporter intolerant of academic theories. Though the short article is not of great value, it is of interest as an example of Dickens' broadest humor, and of an ironical treatment of the pauper problem upon which he was writing at that time in a different vein in *Oliver Twist*.

In these papers all of the names are facetious but not all of equal rank, for, although Sowster and Mr. Tulrumbles have not the most euphonious names possible, still they are without the suggestion of idiocy that attaches to Dr. Buffer and Professor Muff. The famous trio of professors, Snore, Doze, and Wheezy, do not fare so badly as Mr. Purblind, Mr. Coppernoze, and Mr. Woodensconce,—the last named being evidently of the same family as Sir William Joltered and Mr. Timbered. Professor Nogo and the famous Messrs. Leaver and Scroo are remarkably qualified for discussion of mechanical science, while the medical profession can surely boast of no more illustrious members than Dr. Soemup, Messrs. Pessel and Mortair, Dr. Kutankumagen, the well known Dr. Knight Bell and the renowned physician W. R. Fee (Double-your-fee?).

With a suggestion of the same boisterous humor with which he assails the scientists, Dickens gives names descriptive of personal appearance to various characters, not in his early works alone, but in the more serious later novels, although here the names are not always jocular. In *Pickwick* a slender young gentleman with his hat on his right whisker answers to the soubriquet of Slimmery, and in *Oliver Twist* appears the grim-faced Mr. Grimwig who constantly proposes to eat his head. Mrs. Nickleby's young Lukin suitor, and Mrs. Wrymug

with her serious household, savor of the puns in Smollett, as does the name of the plump old gentleman whom the great Mr. Gregsbury recognizes as his old friend Pugstyles. Among the gamblers into whose clutches Little Nell's grandfather falls is a man whose broad cheeks, coarse wide mouth, and bull neck correspond appropriately with the name Mat Jowl; and the bewigged benevolent old gentleman in the *Christmas Carol* could not have been called anything more suitable than Fezziwig. Mrs. Skewton's wan thin page is named Withers, and the gnarled, crooked, cadaverous old man in *Bleak House* is Mr. Krook. The wiry detective sergeant Straw, and the Thames policeman, Peacoat, were evidently named with a thought of their appearance; and Pip's friend Startop may easily have merited his name because of the "delicacy of his features." The blooming Miss Peecher and the button-displaying Sloppy are as vivid mental images as is the pretty Rosa Budd in Dickens' last, unfinished work.

Not infrequently a word descriptive of the character's appearance or personality is lengthened by a suffix and applied as a surname. Several such names have been mentioned above, but it may be well to assemble a number of examples to illustrate the type of suffixes employed. Tilly Slowboy is no young man, but a girl of exceedingly sluggish intelligence. Mr. Bounderby, the self-made man, is a bounder, or in modern parlance a "society climber." Julius Slinkton is a slinking, cowardly murderer. Mr. Grummer is morose and of a forbidding countenance, and the teacher, Miss Grimmer, is regarded by her captive pupils as a wicked fairy or a great beast. The primly dignified and sparsely emotional housekeeper of Mr. Bounderby is a Mrs. Sparsit, and the timorous middle-aged lady betrothed to Mr. Magnus is well named Witherfield. The daughter of Mrs. Wugsby is severely reprov'd by her mother for presuming to think of dancing with the poverty-stricken Mr. Crawley. The Cheeryble brothers are responsible for the happiness and prosperity of Nicholas Nickleby and others. The alias (Sparkins) of the detected clerk, Mr. Smith, seems to indicate that he was not destined to dazzle society for any length of time, especially if the suffix *-kins* was intended to signify the diminutive of a possible Horatio Spark. Mr.

Skimpin, the assistant of Serjeant Buzfuz on the Pickwick trial, skimpy with news as with all else, opened the case, "keeping such particulars as he knew, completely to himself, and sat down, after a lapse of three minutes, leaving the jury in precisely the same advanced stage of wisdom as they were in before."¹ It may be merely a coincidence,—although the word *gup* with other phrases brought from India had appeared in English literature early in the nineteenth century,—that the Hindu *gup*, meaning gossip or slander, should be an element in the name of Mr. Guppy, who is one of the agents in bringing to light the secret of Lady Dedlock.

Dickens made provision for names appropriate to the occupation of their owners not only in the *Mudfog Papers* but in his other books as well. It surely could not have been by accident that Noah Claypole, when taking an alias, selected the name Morris Bolter. He knew that bolting would be advantageous to a house breaker who was averse to being caught. And the excellent hairdresser in the *Uncommercial Traveller* could have wished no better advertisement for his wigs than his name, Mr. Truefitt. Other names that would prove serviceable in business are those of Thoroughgood and Whiting, who might be plasterers and painters as well as bill printers, Sheen and Gloss,—invaluable names for mercers,—and Blaze and Sparkle, who are unmistakably incomparable jewellers. It could not possibly be an unpremeditated act of the author to make Mr. Ladle the head cellarman of Wilding's wine establishment, or to give the name of Grind-off to a miller. It is not surprising to hear of a Mr. Struggles playing cricket, of a Mr. Hubble making wheels, hubs and all, or of a Spiller being an artist, though we have a pardonable curiosity as to the nature of his portraits.

Dickens' disapproval of the system of education prevalent in the nineteenth century is well known from his attack upon the schools in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Hard Times*; and it appears as well in the sketches of the schoolmistresses and schoolmasters,—in the little eccentricities of Miss Pupford and Miss Twinkleton, in the name of Miss Griffin, who seemed to the children "bereft of human sympathies," and in Mr.

¹*Pickwick Papers*. Chapter XXXIV.

Feeder and Mr. M'Choakumchild, whose names are suggestive of forcible feeding. We would trust Professor Mullit to "mull" his educational pamphlets until, like his signature, they should need to be read backward to be understood; just as we look to Toby Crackit to break into houses for a living, and Bob Cratchit to "scratch" for his. *Cratch* may be accounted for as an obsolete form of *scratch*, or the loss of the initial *s* may be due to a facetious perversion of the word.

That Dickens does make use of obsolete words as surnames is shown by the Pickwickian attorney, Solomon Pell, and by Deputy Chaffwax. Pell signifies a roll of parchment, and the now obsolete officer of the exchequer who entered bills and receipts upon parchment rolls was known as the Clerk of the Pell. The chaffwax, or chafe-wax, was formerly an officer in Chancery who prepared the wax for the sealing of writs and other documents.

Jim Spyers and the policemen, Sharpeye and Quickear, must certainly be exceptionally skillful in the apprehension of criminals, and with Inspector Stalker to act as detective, the most wary thug would speedily be brought to trial. Sir Charles Rampart and Lieutenant Slaughter are indubitably brave men, evidently worthy to receive a decoration *pro merito*. The undertaker, Mr. Mould, Surgeon Payne, and Mr. Dombey's family physician Dr. Pilkins, have names appropriate to their professions. The speed with which Surgeon Slasher accomplishes his work is shown in an incident related by an eye-witness:

" 'You consider Mr. Slasher a good operator?' said Mr. Pickwick.

" 'Best alive,' replied Hopkins. 'Took a boy's leg out of the socket last week * * * exactly two minutes after it was all over, boy said he wouldn't lie there to be made game of; and he'd tell his mother if they didn't begin.' " ¹

The relation of Dickens to Smollett and Goldsmith is well illustrated by the manner in which the nobility are introduced. Lady Stately might have belonged to the same family as Dickens' Honorable Sparkins Flam and Sir Richard Airy, while Earl Strutwell and Lord Quiverwit might have joined

¹*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter XXXII.

Mortimer Lightwood on the fairy Tippins' list of lovers. In *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens portrays the type of gentleman-villain seen in the novels of the eighteenth century,—like the wicked lord in *Evelina*, and the companions of the young squire in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, which Goldsmith rather suggests than depicts; and he draws the picture with Smollett's brush rather than Richardson's. Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht carry an index to their character in their names, like Earl Strutwell and Lord Quiverwit; and they prove themselves members of that class of nobility, not then extinct, who upheld their claim to superior breeding by such sportive pleasantry, that to Miss Petowker, the conception of gentility was inseparable from ruffianly horse-play. "'What do you call it,'" she asked, "'when Lords break off doorknockers and beat policeman, and play at coaches with other people's money, and all that sort of thing?'

"'Aristocratic?' suggested the collector.

"'Ah! aristocratic,' replied Miss Petowker."¹

The tradition that Dickens was unable to portray a gentleman probably dates from the type of noblemen presented in this early novel, reminiscent of *Peregrine Pickle* in the absence of Grandison manners in Mulberry Hawk and Sir Matthew Pupker (Pup-cur?) of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company, and in the lack of dignity in such names as that of Mrs. Witit-terly's pompous physician, Sir Tumley Snuffin, and that of the poet Sir Dingleby Dabber, who, in Mrs. Nickleby's prophetic vision, was to pen "Lines on Contemplating the Portrait of Lady Mulberry Hawk". But, although such Smollett-like characters as the dowager Lady Snuphanuph, Count Smorltork (Small-talk) with his great work on English customs, and the feeble-minded Lord Mutanhed are typical of Dickens' earlier titled characters, in his later works he abandoned the eighteenth century literary nobility to depict other types, drawing the pictures from life. These were seen, not with the reverential gaze of the *bourgeoisie*, not with the coolly impudent stare of the professional humorist, but with the clear penetration of a man who was unmasking injustice and tyranny. He

¹*Nicholas Nickleby*, Chapter XV.

wished to free the masses from ignorant fear of the Sir Leicester Dedlock who blocks the wheels of progress, and the noble Tite Barnacles who impede the movement of the ship of state.

The harsh names of Sir Barnet Skettles and Lord Snigworth indicate that Dickens was not more disposed to cater to position and rank in his later works than he was in his early days, when he caused the world of society to exclaim that here was a vulgar fellow who maligned people of culture and refinement. The names he gave to his upper-class characters indicate clearly his attitude toward them,—as Chesterton says, not the point of view of one who belongs to, or is interested in perpetuating that type. “He described them in the way in which he described waiters, or railway guards, or men drawing with chalk on the pavement. He described them, in short, * * * from the outside, as he described any other oddity or special trade.”¹

One of Goldsmith's favorite comic subjects was the presumptuous toady who claims to be on intimate terms with people of wealth and prominence. He enjoyed picturing the unsophisticated dupes who listen with every appearance of awe to preposterous names of non-existent lords, and never suspect a man like Lofty of not patronizing Lord Cumbercourt and Lord Neverout, or of inability to “set down a brace of dukes, two dozen lords, and half the lower House.”² With much the same ease Dickens' egotistical couple refer casually to their acquaintances, Lady Snorflerer, Sir Clupkins Clogwog, and the Duke of Scuttlewig; and the confident Wisbottle (Wise-bottle?) and Flamwell act as we would expect of gentlemen of their names,—assert their knowledge of the Dowager Marchioness of Publiccash, Lord Gubbleton, and the Honorable Augustus Fitz-Edward Fitz-John Fitz-Osborne. One of the most graceful pretenders to society of the great is the gifted Jingle, who modestly recounts among his experiences with titled characters a cricket match with Sir Thomas Blazo in India under a blazing sky. A more dramatic experience of his must be told in his own words to be appreciated.

¹G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*, p. 125.

²Oliver Goldsmith, *Good-Natured Man*, Act III, Scene I.

“‘You have been in Spain, sir?’ said Mr. Tracy Tupman.

“‘Lived there—ages.’

“‘Many conquests, sir?’ inquired Mr. Tupman.

“‘Conquests! Thousands. Don Bolaro Fizzgig—Grandee—only daughter—Donna Christina—splendid creature—loved me to distraction—jealous father—high-souled daughter—handsome Englishman—Donna Christina in despair—prussic acid—stomach pump in my portmanteau—operation performed—old Bolaro in ecstasies—consent to our union—join hands and floods of tears—romantic story—very.’”¹

III

Vaguely Suggestive Names

Though the punning and directly descriptive element in the appellations of Dickens’ characters is not inconsiderable, it is responsible for less than one-third of the total number of the names he uses. Many of the characters who bear in their names obvious indexes to their occupations and personalities, are intended, like Mulberry Hawk and Bounderby, to represent types rather than individuals, or, like Mat Jowl and Mrs. Coiler, to appear but for a short time in the story, having their names serve as introduction, instead of being shown in full delineation. The majority of characters who have become real people to Dickens’ readers, and who are remembered and quoted, for the most part are those whose names seem to be appropriate in a vague, indefinable sense, like Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Gamp, and Mr. Pecksniff. It is not an easy matter to say just why these names should seem to be so appropriate, but in some instances the sound of the word produces an impression similar to that caused by the character itself, and in others there is an inexplicable “eternal fitness” that baffles investigation. Because of the great number of these characters, it would be impracticable to attempt to do more than outline the tendencies noted in the giving of such names.

While the deliberate intention of the author is evident in the puns upon many of the names in his books, it is not generally

¹*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter II.

known that he consciously sought for suitable names for his characters. His biographer and intimate friend, John Forster, gives a list of names which Dickens had assembled as being available for characters in novels and sketches; while the changes he made in the title of *Martin Chuzzlewit* indicate his efforts to find a satisfactory surname for his hero, variously considered as Martin Sweezleden, Sweezeback, Sweezlewag, Chuzzletoe, Chuzzleboy, Chubblewig, Chuzzlewig, and finally as Chuzzlewit. In proportion as the plan for the story grew in dignity in his mind, so the name gained in impressiveness, until it retained eccentric individuality without the suggestions of a straining after the ludicrous. A similar evolution appears in the projected titles for *David Copperfield*, concerning which he wrote to Forster: "It is odd, I think, and new; but it may have A's difficulty of being 'too comic, my boy.'"¹ We would agree with the biographer that for a novel containing so many serious, if not wholly tragic scenes, the following would be "too comic."

"Mag's Diversions.

Being the personal history of
MR. THOMAS MAG THE YOUNGER
of Blunderstone House."

Dickens was not satisfied with the result, and after considering several tentative titles, selected "The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger, of Blunderstone Rookery, which he never meant to be Published on any Account." Kitton traces the development of the hero's name from Trotfield, Trotbury, Copperboy, Copperstone, to Copperfield,² and quotes Dickens' notes as evidence of the evolution from the purely facetious to the not improbable in the names of minor characters. Among these appears Mrs. Roylance—the original of Mrs. Pipchin—as Mrs. Wrychin, Mrs. Tipchin, Mrs. Alchin, Mrs. Somching, Mrs. Pipchin.³

Dickens' fondness for peculiar names is illustrated by the

¹Forster, *Life of Dickens*, Vol. II, p. 464.

²F. G. Kitton, *Charles Dickens, his Life, Writings, and Personality* p. 175.

³*Ibid*, p. 164.

nicknames he gave to his own children, several of which names he later applied to characters in the novels. In a few of these is seen the same growth from descriptive epithet to fanciful appellation that is shown in the Pipchin note, but the stages in the evolution of others are not recorded. In a letter to Henry Austin, September 25, 1842, he writes:¹

"P. S.—The children's present names are as follows:

"Katey (from a lurking propensity to fieryness), Lucifer Box.

"Mamey (as generally descriptive of her bearing), Mild Glo'ster.

"Charley (as a corruption of Master Toby), Master Floby.

"Walter (suggested by his high cheek bones), Young Skull.

"Each is pronounced with a peculiar howl which I shall have great pleasure in illustrating."

Nicknames that appear in his later letters are Chickenstalker—a name he utilized in the *Christmas Carol*;—Ocean Specter, corrupted to Hoshen Peck; Skittles; and the various appellations of his youngest son, Plornishmaroontigoonter, Plornish-Maroon, Plornishghenter, The Plorn, and Plornish—the last being given to a character in *Little Dorrit*.

Of the names given to the Dickens children by their father, Hoshen Peck is recorded as being a humorous corruption of a descriptive term, and Floby of an evidently playful nickname. It is probable that many of the peculiar names given to the characters in his books took their rise in such a corruption of words originating either as neutral names or as descriptive epithets. The fairy Grandmarina is clearly a perverted Grandma, Todgers hints at Lodgers, and Squeers has a haunting suggestion of many words.

Though the nickname Chickenstalker may have had foundation in some family incident, not known to the public, possibly it originated merely as a whim of Dickens. Surely Plornishmaroontigoonter could not be accounted for as the perversion of any single recognizable word of good English standing. To the same jocular caprice must be ascribed the creation of Mr. Snittle Timberry, whose cognomen was employed later

¹*Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. I, p. 76.

in the Dickens family history as the name of a pet dog, and the facetious pleasantry of many names in the novels.

Of the names which appear to have originated as perversions or "corruptions" of punning or neutral names the most obvious are the whimsical modifications and the agglutinative compounds of short words. Peg Sliderskew, the infirm housekeeper of Arthur Gride, seems intended to suggest by her name a variation of *slide askew*, and perhaps her deviation from the path of rectitude in vengefully carrying off Gride's papers is thus formally recognized. Mr. Snawley might be regarded as a perverted form of Snarly, or an amalgam of *snarl*, *crawly*, *small*. Mr. Lillyvick's surname seems to be a humorous alteration of the phrase describing his appearance. He is introduced at the anniversary party of Mrs. Kenwigs as "a short old gentleman in drabs and gaiters, with a face that might have been carved out of *lignum vitae*, for anything that appeared to the contrary."¹

Among the agglutinations that have almost the force of a pun are such names as Flintwinch and Crisparkle. Respect is paid to the clever Jeremiah's obduracy (flint) and to his "windlass" qualities (winch = windlass) in drawing others to conform to his purposes, while the similarity of sound in *winch* and *wrench* would seem to suggest his "wrenched" appearance. The Reverend Mr. Crisparkle (crisp sparkle) might be imagined by one knowing his name to be "fair and rosy, and perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water in the surrounding country;—early riser, musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, and boy-like."² The name of Mr. Pecksniff is composed of two words unpleasant in significance when considered separately, and when united, hinting of a petty, "pecking," nagging, "sniffing," hypocritically mournful disposition. It is thoroughly in harmony with his name that he says to his daughter, "Charity, my dear, when I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr. Anthony Chuzzlewit, who has done me an injustice."³ The names of Skimpole and Sliverstone are of the same type.

¹*Nicholas Nickleby*, Chapter XIV.

²*Edwin Drood*, Chapter II.

³*Martin Chuzzlewit*, Chapter IV.

Probably of a similar origin are the names which appear to be the telescoping of two or more words¹, like the well-known "portmanteau" forms of the lays of the *Snark* and the *Jabberwock*, in which "galumphing" is economy of effort for "galloping" and "triumphing." In many instances it is impossible to assert that the names were derived from a definite combination of two certain words in Dickens' mind, but in others the intentional blending of the elements is clear. Hannibal Chollop seems indebted to *chop* and *collop* for his name, and the villainous Mr. Murdstone would be excepted to show indifference toward suffering from the mingling of *murder* and *stone* in his cognomen. Miss Creeble bears a suggestion of *creep* and *feeble*, while the name of Roger Cly may have been intended to indicate a *clever spy*. The medical student, who is instrumental in supplying Jonas Chuzzlewit with poison, has a personality and a function in the book that consort with the name Lewsome. The word *gruesome*, which obtrudes itself upon the attention at the name of Mr. Grewgious, ill suits the character of Rosa Budd's guardian, and we resent the imputation of an *egregious grudge* as well. The last mentioned name is certainly not a definite blend, but it belongs rather to the vague or indefinite composites, and it is possible that Cly and other names given here should be referred to this class.

Those names that fail to imply definitely the elements entering into their composition belong to the group of reminiscent amalgams (indefinite composites) rather than to the order of intentional blends. Into the formation of these echoic fusions frequently enters the principle of onomatopoeia, and the unconscious symbolism of sounds. They suggest some meaning because of vague resemblance to other words or because of the effect produced by the quality of the sounds themselves. The more striking of the echoic composites will be discussed in connection with the blend formations, as suggestive of the perversion of descriptive names, but the onomatopoetic and symbolic names will be considered among facetious appellations.

¹See Louise Pound, *Blends: Their Relation to English Word-Formation*, Heidelberg, 1914; also "Indefinite Composites and Word-Coinage," *Modern Language Review*, 1913.

Names formed by indefinite amalgamation which most distinctly suggest the words that may have gone toward their composition, frequently are not without a certain imitative quality, but unless such echoing of the natural sound should be clearly manifest, attention is not here given to it. Simon Tappertit, with a name made up of short vowels and voiceless consonants, could never succeed in being a heavy villain, especially since his tripping name carries with it an echo of *tap*, *tapper*, *dapper*, and the diminutive *tit*. Mr. Bumble's name calls to the mind of a child the unpleasant officiousness of a bumble-bee; but the word may have had rise in an English term of contempt for an unpopular dignitary, the bumbailiff, shortened by influence of the verb *bumble*—to scold. The dirty repulsive physician of the Marshalsea has in his name, Haggage, evidence of his unloveliness, because of the association with *hag*, *haggard*, *haggish*, *baggage*. Mr. Quale's inamorata, whose mission it is to free Woman from the tyranny of Man, could hardly make much of an impression upon an anti-suffrage audience, for Miss Wisk is too strongly suggestive of *wisp* and *whisk* to be a convincing advocate of her cause. Mrs. Lirriper could not have derived her name from the obsolete liripipium, of which she probably never heard, but in her cheery garrulity she hints at being a *chirrip-er*. Young John Chivery is as chivalrous as his name would indicate, but unfortunately the suggestion does not stop there, but it carries us on to the "shivery" picture of Young John sitting disconsolately catching cold in the "tuneless groves" of washed linen in the prison yard.

Among the words which combine the elements of the indefinite blends with a more evident symbolic suggestion than is noticed in Tappertit and Haggage are the names with initial *s*. The prolongation of the sibilant, especially when followed by a nasal or liquid, often gives the impression of something without great powers of resistance, something soft and yielding. Sleary, the owner of the circus, whose muddled head is never sober and never quite drunk, has in his name the objectionable *sl* sound that occurs in *slush* and *sleazy*, and the elements of *leer*, *blear*, *bleary*, preparing us for the description of his eyes. The brisk barber Slithers might be

considered as echoing the sound made by the razor and strop, and suggesting the *slippery* sound of *lather*, or his name might be directly due to the word *slither*, which includes *slide* and *slippery* among its elements.

The stop consonants in the name of the defendant Sludberry emphasize the possibility of the impact of blows. The suggestion of a physical encounter is so marked in the name of the complainant Bumble in the hint of *bump*, *pummel*, *bummel*, *rumple*, and *stumble* that the account of the brawl is amusing. "It appeared that on a certain night, at a certain vestry meeting, he—Thomas Sludberry—had made use of and applied to Michael Bumble, the promoter, the words, 'You be blowed;' and that, on the said Michael Bumble and others remonstrating with the said Thomas Sludberry on the impropriety of his conduct, the said Thomas Sludberry repeated the aforesaid expression, 'You be blowed;' and furthermore desired and requested to know, whether the said Michael Bumble 'wanted anything for himself;' adding 'that if the said Michael Bumble did want anything for himself, he, the said Thomas Sludberry, was the man to give it him;' and at the same time making use of other heinous and sinful expressions, all of which, Bumble submitted, came within the intent and meaning of the [brawling] Act."¹ In addition to the unpleasant sound of their names, two prominent citizens of Eatanswill, Slurk and Slumkey, bear the stigma of having words of unattractive meanings always attaching more or less closely to them in *slung*, *slur*, and *lurk*, and in *slum*, *slump*, *slunk*, *lummo*, *flunky*, and *lummy*. Mr. Wackford Squeers is obnoxious in name as in nature, with the disagreeable harshness of vowels and consonants, and the association of such words as *quack*, *whack*, *squeeze*, *squint*, *squirm*, *queer*, *squeal*, and *squeak*.

The whimsical humor that found expression in such a name as Plornishmaroontigoonter is seen in the names of many of the characters. The young Bagnets of *Bleak House* rejoice in "geography names" that Mrs. Wiggs might have originated, —bestowed as a memento of their birthplace upon Malta, Quebec, and Woolwich. The great diversity in the names of Vincent Crummles' theatrical company might have been

¹*Sketches by Boz*, Scene VIII.

intended by themselves to serve as potent advertisement, but the author's sense of humor would be capable of contrasting Mr. Fluggers and Miss Snevellicci just to see how they would look together. One of the names most obviously whimsical belongs to the young dancing master in *Bleak House*. It seems to have been given to him merely for the sake of Caddy Jellyby's apology for it. "Young Mr. Turveydrop's name is Prince," she says; "I wish it wasn't, because it sounds like a dog, but of course he didn't christen himself. Old Mr. Turveydrop had him christened Prince in remembrance of the Prince Regent. Old Mr. Turveydrop adored the Prince Regent on account of his Deportment."¹ It is unnecessary to mention other facetiously eccentric names, though the Alphonse that "carried plain Bill in his face and figure," Tattycoram, Peggotty, and Uncle Pumblechook are tempting subjects, as well as the jingling lists of rhyming names like the Aggs, Baggs, Caggs, and Alley, Balley, Calley, of Mr. Lightwood's clerk, and Chizzle, Boodle, and Buffy with their associates in *Bleak House*.

A result of Dickens' great affection for children and his constantly telling them stories is seen in the appearance in his works of names bearing the marks of what Weekley terms "baby phonetics,"² the whimsical perversion of a word in accordance with the tendencies in pronunciation common to children. With a child's ease in substituting a dental stop for a troublesome fricative or palatal, which is exhibited in the "Tound it out, have you?" of the boy in *Mugby Junction*, there appear on Dickens' list of available names Toundling (Foundling), and Tatkin (Catkin), as well as the Mrs. Todgers (Lodgers) of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Mr. Twemlow's name suggests a child's attempt to say *trembler*. The familiar loss of initial *s*, which is illustrated by the boy in *Mugby Junction* when he makes clear to the obtuse adult that "cool" is school, has been referred to as the explanation for the name Parkle. It appears again in Mr. Casby's agent Panks and Mrs. Pipchin's boarder, little Miss Pankey, as well as in Jonas Mudge (Smudge) of the Ebenezer Temperance Association and the

¹*Bleak House*, Chapter XIV.

²Ernest Weekley, *The Romance of Names*, pp. 39-40.

alliterative Tommy Traddles (Straddles). The name Skuse, found in the available list given by Forster,¹ may not have been intended for a character showing the indicated apologetic attitude toward life, but it seems reasonable to account for it as evincing a similar facetious imitation of childish forms. The prefixing of an inorganic *s*, which is common in child word formation, occurs in the names Smangle and Spodger, and possibly Smauker.

Other whimsically appropriate names are those that carry a suggestion of their suitability in their imitative quality. Unmistakably onomatopoetic in nature are the famous trio of the Mugby Railway refreshment room staff, Mrs. Sniff, and her able assistants, the Misses Whiff and Piff. Captain Swosser of the Royal Navy could not have wished a name better fitted to convey the idea of the splashing of water, unless perhaps he had lighted upon that of Henry Swoshle. Mrs. Tisher, the deferential widow with the chronic sigh, clearly had her continual sighing to thank for her name.

Although the attempt to discriminate between such names as Wititterly and Kitterbell may seem to be a "distinction without a difference," yet in the one class the onomatopoetic or symbolic element appears more prominently than in the other. Such a name as Kitterbell, by suggesting the combination of *kitten*, *titter*, and *bell*, depends for effect principally upon the suggestion conveyed by the blended elements, rather than the effect produced by the sound of the name. Though Mrs. Kitterbell and Mrs. Wititterly have a phonetic relationship in the short vowels and the similarity of consonants, and an associational likeness in the word *titter*, Mrs. Wititterly has the greater cause for langour and assumption of delicacy, for the effort required to pronounce her name is less considerable than to enunciate the *bell* of the former. Poll Sweedlepipe may hold an imitative suggestion of the "sweet" of his birds but the psychological association of *swing*, *tweedle*, *wheedle*, and *pipe* accounts for the jocular formation of his name. The Peerybingle name is reminiscent of a blending of *peer*, *cheery*, *tkinkle*, *bangle*; and the apparent symbolic harmony between the name and the characters possessing it, seems due to the

¹Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, Vol. III, pp. 295-296.

association of such words as these with the phrase *cheery jingle*. Mr. Podsnap's name is not phonetically attractive with its stop consonants and the disagreeable *sn* sound, but a subtle suggestion is present in an element of *ponderous*, *prodigious*, and *snap*. Mrs. Gummidge might claim consideration as one of those whose names are rather phonetically than associationally suggestive, for there is a subdued mournfulness in the very sound of her name. But there are several words, *glum*, *grump*, *grumpish*, *grumble* and *gummy*, which alone could furnish material for the discouragement of the "lone, lorn creatur." Silas Wegg seems to have been given a name rhyming with *leg* for the purpose of emphasizing his physical deformity, and the mysterious Batchery seems to blend the elements of *catch*, *thatch*, *badger*, *catcher*.

The words that are considered phonetically associational may have few of the elements of blends, or of echoic composites, but they indicate their meaning through imitative sounds, or suggest it by means of the physical effort involved in their production. The lack of exertion with which the name of Chillip is normally pronounced, the ingratiating semi-stop with which it is introduced, the short close vowels, the lack of force in the medial liquid and the final breathed plosive,—all contribute to the general effect of lack of force, characteristic of the depreciatory little doctor. The mention of a possible relation to *chill* and *fillip* seems unnecessary. On Dickens' list of available names are found both Doolge and Horlick, which he altered slightly and combined to serve as the appellation of one of his most impressive villains, Dolge Orlick. Neither of the words is melodious, the *-olge* of the given name being heavy and not easily articulated, and the *-lick* of the surname having an inconsequential sound.

A very different character is Mr. Toots with his monosyllabic name which no one expects to take seriously. The jocular intention of the author in his portrait is marked in the shortness of the name, the two light consonants, and the onomatopoetic suggestion of a brief note on a wind instrument. A name tinged with melancholy is that of Mr. Mell; though association with *bell* and *knell* might be supposed to influence the spirit of the word, yet the absence of harsh consonants and

the presence of a "mellow" vowel followed by *l* gives it a suggestion of quiet sadness. Uriah Heep's humility has been so frequently quoted, that the very name seems to have become imbued with the idea. But evidently Dickens' purpose was only to give him a name that would be suggestive of a disagreeable character; for the aspirate followed by the long close *ee* gives a sensation of decided friction, especially if one pronounces the word with the emphasis of Mr. Micawber. The name Uriah forms with Heep a dismal combination, possibly because of the muscular activity required of the tongue in the rapid alternation of close and open vowels with the rough medial aspirate. Montague Tigg is another inharmonious combination, not because of the rapid movement demanded of the tongue, but because of the abruptness with which the sonorous Montague is brought up against the monosyllable with its short close vowel and its voiced stop. A polysyllable with rounded low vowels and a liquid consonant would have furnished a name suitable for a genuine gentleman. The Tigg undecieves the public—Montague is no gentleman. Baps is short, suggestive of lightness of movement in its voiceless stop, and of graceful continuance (of motion) in the final *s*,—a suitable name for a dancing master. Of Quilp and Gamp much need not be said. The name Gamp suggests a stronger personality in its voiced *g* and *m* and its heavier vowel than Quilp. The umbrella's *flapping* and its *frump*-like owner are hinted in the sound. The sense of something unpleasant connected with the name Quilp may be strengthened by association with *yelp*, *quill*, *quell*.

The number of peculiar characters endowed with phonetically suitable names is so large in Dickens' works that one can do little more than to select occasional examples. The names given to teachers have been mentioned as corresponding with Dickens' attitude toward the inefficient school system of the times; but the pupils, from Toots down to Traddles, experience a kindly playfulness at the author's hands. Alice Rainbird, Letitia Parsons, Kitty Kimmeens, Master Blitherstone, William Tinkling,—none of them have impressive names, none with heavy long vowels to retard the syllables, with the possible exception of Parsons, which is "lightened" by the concomitant Letitia.

Mr. Minns¹ might be pictured from his name as a precise tidy bachelor, with a horror of noise and confusion. The two nasal consonants, separated by a short "close" vowel, suggest by their sound something weak or attenuated, while the prolonging of the slight tension and parting of the lips, in enunciating the word, might easily be extended by the speaker to the character of the owner of the name. While in general the name of the sour old maid, Miggs, sounds much like Minns, yet the abruptness of the stop, producing a friction to be overcome, brings a sense of something rather disagreeable, or at least not attractive. One would surmise that in her nature would be found less gentle primness and more acidity than in Mr. Minns'. The same economy of effort is noted in both names, precluding any supposition of portly presence or pompous manner.

It should be pointed out once more that the suggestions as to the names treated in this section are suggestions merely; and some of them are, no doubt, fanciful. The subject of the phonetic suggestiveness of words may very easily be pushed too far.

IV

Neutral Names

Not all of Dickens' names are grotesque or suggestive of eccentric and ridiculous characters. Irrespective of those which openly describe or designate the personality of the owner, there are a few names, not traced directly to people whom Dickens knew, which are not unbecoming ordinary characters. Mrs. Martha Bardell, Bob Sawyer, and the alliterative Arabella Allen of *Pickwick* have not unusual names. In *Oliver Twist* appear Rose Fleming and Edward Leeford, but they are known throughout the story as Rose Maylie (figuratively descriptive) and Monks (eccentric). Mr. Brownlow, Oliver's benefactor, has a not uncommon name. The name Nickleby of the next novel, has been regarded as being a possible perversion of the author's own name, given to a hero founded on his brother-in-law.

¹Minns is a contemporary English surname, and it may, of course, have been known to Dickens. But the special propriety of his use of it is not abated by its source whether reality or fancy.

In the fourth novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, there appear the names Garland, perhaps intended as figuratively appropriate to the rosy family, and Trent, suited in its subdued sound to Little Nell and her grandfather. *Barnaby Rudge* has Edward Chester, who approaches the colorless literary hero of romance, and other characters of neutral names like the Haredales, the Willets, and Mark Gilbert. The only one with a distinctly neutral title in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is John Westlock, the suitor of Ruth Pinch. If the book had originated with less of the spirit of deliberate facetiousness, probably her brother, Tom Pinch, would not have been given a name so at variance with his nature. In this instance Dickens had conceived the whole book as containing none but ludicrous names, or he had christened Tom Pinch before he was fully aware of the nobility he would afterward develop in the character.

The name Dombey in the seventh novel is not without a degree of dignity, suitable to the characters, and perhaps it was arrived at through some such evolution as that recorded for *David Copperfield*. Spenlow and Wickfield are neutral names in the latter book. Ada Clare and Richard Carstone, the wards of Jarndyce, share with Esther Summerson the distinction of having more attractive names than other people in *Bleak House*. It has been surmised that Allen Woodcourt's name was intended by the author to suggest that he "would court" Miss Summerson. Possibly such a supposition is out of place.

In *Hard Times* the names of Mrs. Pegler and James Hart-house appear to have been taken from life. Among the neutral names of *Little Dorrit* are Arthur Clennam, Henry Gowan, Mr. Merdle, and Miss Wade. Since in *The Tale of Two Cities* the gravity of the theme does not admit of jocose names being given to many of the characters, those who take a prominent part in the movement have names that are not unusual, from Sidney Carton to Madame Defarge. The strongly beautiful character in *Great Expectations*,—Joe Gargery,—has not a romantically heroic name, but it is one taken from actual life, and of all the names in the book it has the least suspicion of weakness or of fictitious peculiarity. His is the "normal"

personality needed to give a wholesome tone to the study of abnormally eccentric or morbid characters.

Infrequently Dickens seems to have given a character a name temporarily suitable, but later outgrown. Such a character is the one contrasted with Joe Gargery, Philip Pirrip, known as "Pip," a name appropriate to the frightened child on the marshes; to the sensitive boy undergoing humiliations at the hands of his virago sister, his Uncle Pumblechook, and the haughty Estella; and to the selfish youth made into a gentleman by the convict's money. But the short "light-sounding" name does not beseeem a man of the dignity to which he has attained at the end of the book. Then the neutral Pirrip appears more fitting than the childish Pip.

In *Our Mutual Friend* the hero, John Harmon, conceals his identity under other neutral names, Julius Handford and John Rokesmith. Boffin and Wilfer seem neutral names; but when Nicodemus is prefixed to the one and Reginald to the other, there is a humorous effect not wholly neutral. Eugene Wrayburn has an inconspicuous name suitable for a gentleman.

It is difficult to say how much of the charm of Dickens exists in the whimsicality of his humor and in the sympathetic quality of his style, but the permanence of his characters as literary types and the persistence of their figures in the imagination would seem due, in no inconsiderable extent, to the close affinity between name and personality. Names are with him not mere tags for puppets serving but to prevent confusion in the assemblage of characters. Rather they partake of the nature of the people to whom they belong: whether they describe personal traits, as in the case of the lion hunting Mrs. Leo Hunter of *Pickwick*; whether they are neutral names given to not extraordinary characters; or whether they are ludicrously grotesque, like the names of the American group met by young Martin Chuzzlewit,—Colonel Diver, General Fladdock (flounder-haddock?), Major Hominy, and Lafayette Kettle,—the inventive genius of the author is as evident in the names he bestows as in the creation of the characters themselves.

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For location of the characters whose names have been mentioned, see Philip's *Dickens Dictionary*.