

# Brand of the Movies on Babies' Names

By HELEN BULLITT LOWRY.

**D**OUBTLESS she was christened Maybelle—at least, her best friend called her that.

"Oh," sighed Mabelle, gazing down emotionally at the last Summer sales in the August shop window, "I've decided at last what to name my boy. He's going to be Gabriel, because I did get the most wonderful thrill when Evangeline said, 'Oh, Gabriel, my beloved,' on the picture last night."

"Really," sympathized Maybelle's most intimate friend. "I'm going to name mine Francis"—softly she uttered the whole sweet name of a screen star.

And so I knew that it was upon us—the motion-picture name period. Our poor country has passed through the Tennysonian invasion until the Mauds and Guen-é-vers are practically extinct. The diminutive flower and "ie" period is safely over, so that hardly a Pansy or a Hattie survives on the public school grammar school roster. Annes have become Annes and Nellies Helens. But is it only that we may be thrown at last into the jaws of motion-picture nomenclature?

Breathlessly I rushed to the Birth Registration Department of the Board of Health that I might know the worst.

And there they were.

Mixed in with the Rosanas and the Giovannis of the imported element came the babies of our good, sturdy American stock surnamed Smith and Jones. Norma and Pearl they were, Madge and Billie, Mae (spelled just as the electric lights spell it) and Blanche (with the "e"). Also a renaissance of Marys. On through the foreign Oscars and Giuseppes, Marys appear in quantities unprecedented. And last on the list, came Ivanhoe Jenks and Jean val Jean Shultz.

So is our history being indelibly written in the names of our children. Seven hundred years from now—or seven thousand thousand—dry-as-dust etymologists will have the goods on this our motion-picture period. I carried the news to a scientist versed in the lore of the origin of races. And he grinned quite unscientifically.

"Can't expect," he said, "that this race and this decade shall be exempt from the biological law that each era shall write its philosophy and its religion, suggest its pleasures and betray its taste, in the names of its sons and its daughters."

Just as the pre-Celtic period is stamped upon Britain to this day by such words as "Monmouth," legacy of forgotten men who owned England before the flint age, so, though every haircloth sofa and every walnut whatnot of the mid-Victorian era become ashes, the mid-Victorian era will survive in the Maggies and Ellas of old tombstones. Wherever you look you find it—this telltale proof of what mothers were thinking about ten thousand years ago—or one year ago.

Suppose you are a mother in cannibal isles, all nicely converted and wrapped and vegetarianized, but still imbued with the same reverent desire to honor your grandfather that to this day christens in-

nocent sons of Vermont Eli and Josiah. In all good feeling you will find yourself naming your firstborn "Man Who Was Broiled on a Spit," and your second "Sliced and Distributed," in memory of an ancestor's soldierly end. You do it as proudly and as naively as the descendants of Nathan Hale, supposing he has any, would preserve the name of Nathan for each oldest son. Missionaries may come and missionaries may go—but the history of the race will be written in names.

Man started doing it; the learned scientist is to be believed, just as soon as he emerged from the pre-human Darwinian fastnesses with his smug, indestructible belief in his own immortality and with a name of his own that meant he was an individual apart. This name was his Ego. It was He. It was so much He that sometimes a wicked enemy stole your name and registered it on the wall of his cave. Practical bodies even sold their names, which was about the same thing as selling a business with the "good-will" attached. In primitive tribes today names are still sold, though it's held to be much worse form than selling a half dozen of your wives and your birthright for a mess of breadfruit. Or supposing again that your child have an illness. Change his name quickly. You've evidently given him an Ego that is bad luck.

Now, anybody can see that, with names so immensely important in primitive tribes, it would never do to allow primitive mothers the leeway we give ours, to stamp our children Maybelle and Viola—not to mention the recently scenaried Gabriel. The elders of most primitive tribes have a way of solving the problem which with us is so far from solution that our Tessies are allowed to weigh two hundred pounds on the subway scales and yet retain their original diminutives.

The elders of the tribe merely allow the mother to name the child first, so that she may get the Tessies, the Lena Rivers and the Gabriels out of her system. No plaintive savage female of massive build need ever have to say apologetically, as I once heard a poor girl do, "My parents were too young to name a child. My name's Mabel Ione." Our scientific friend, who chances to be one of those who feel that they can't say that civilization has improved things much, scores a point at this juncture.

The obliging savage elders let the fond mother call the child Snow Man

if he chances to arrive in a snow-storm, or Wind of the West if she happened to dream about winds the night before. Boiled down, these childhood primitive names are as full of maudlin sentiment as any young mother from Des Moines, Iowa, could make them with the examples of Blanche Sweet and June Caprice to inspire her. But does that savage mother get away with it forever? Not any more than the law would allow American mothers to compel adult sons to wear Lord Fauntleroy velvet suits.

By the time the man child is adolescent he gets a new deal, and this time the wise men and sachems are called in to do the job up right. Maybe they name him for some quality which he has had time to develop, like Snoring Boy—or, if it's she, Jumping Girl. More probably they will name him for his ancestor, so to speak—for the Wolf or for the Bear from which his strain boasts that it is descended—rather indicating that any of your Darwinian theories would come to the primitive mind with no such shock as they did to a civilization brought up on the Adam-and-Eve idea. The Bear Scratches His Nose may become the honorable and manly name of him who in childhood had to bear up under some such pretty testimonial of doting mother love as, say, Moon Beam.

In yet other tribes some great warrior is asked to bestow the name. This he proceeds to do by mentioning one of his own great deeds. So the youth becomes He Who Bears on His Belt the Scalps of Thirty Enemies. "Why smile?" asks the sci-

entific person. "Do you think that we had improved upon the method when the Dewey Baby came in? We have our Theodores, our Woodrows, and our Pershings. Man doesn't change—only the clothes that he wears and the weapons with which he strikes down his food and his enemy."

Yet our civilized customs are such that one personal name must do us for a lifetime—even as was the fate of Pork Chop Jones, whose mother explains, "Yessum, yessum, dat be his name, Po'k Chop. The census man he done been 'round and wrote his name down Po'k Chop Jones, and now it done gone to Washington, an' we can't change it no more. No'm."

You can't get away from it. Man's thoughts, his hero worships and his society are written in his name. In Rome, where class was class and there was no crossing the social border line, the very names were exclusive. At one time there were only thirty-four "first names" that were proper for Patricians. Later that thirty-four was sifted down to eighteen. Fortunately for high school freshmen, this was the period incorporated into Latin One, since the vocabularies include Marcus and Caius as well as amo and mensa. Those were the days when mothers knew their place well enough to nickname their defenseless children jewels instead of brandin' them for life as Ruby or Pearl.

But never in the history of the world has a race really had such privileges as this American one of ours to name and to misname. Our melting pot destiny is written in our names as they wander over that same birth registration book from Alla Nazimova O'Shay to Doug Martinni.

No such Bolshevist right was granted to mothers in that other melting pot of the world when Barbarians and Romans were getting boiled down into a new Romanesque race. You had to name your child for a saint—and if you tried not to, you were a heretic, and the Bishop named him for you.

All you had to do was to pick your favorite saint from the list. Yet, for all restrictions, human nature will out. Each King has left his mark upon England and upon France in the Louls and Henris, the Richards and Henrys, far and near. If you wanted to boom a saint, all you had to do was to get a King named for him, and the job was done for a century.

Revolutions and conquests, reformations and royal backslidings—all, all are written in the names that dotted every simple countryside, while the great men fought. Doubtless there is a dearth of new-born Wilhelms today in Germany. Certainly there was a dropping off of Charleses and Jameses and a flood

of Olivvers, Jeremiahs and Adams when the Commonwealth men came in.

When America graduated from England the names told the tale. In the Southern colonies particularly old English names had prevailed—that is, till the name English got changed to Damned Red Coats.

Then, along with other things British, English names fell into a certain disfavor. As the French were our allies, French names seemed pleasanter for a while—or, at any rate, French terminations. It was then that the country began to get overrun with towns ending in -ville instead of -ton and -town, and this in regions quite remote from French settlement. There, of course, -ville was a natural growth, as it is in Louisville, and as it is not in Nashville.

Good republicans instinctively also shrank from the taint of royalty which attached to all of contemporary Europe, even when it was not King George's Britain. In New England the habit of using Biblical names furnished a refuge, but in the rest of the country, with babies as well as with new-born towns, to name, the parental gentlemen of the period betook themselves to their well-thumbed classics. This was not so much a part of the classical art revival all over the world, as it was a special case. Because in Greece and Rome alone in familiar history were republicans who could be called brother. And Americans were taking republicanism very hard in '76.

So Rome, Athens and Sparta came into being, and ostentatiously democratic places like Demopolis, Alabama, which is good Greek for Common People's Town.

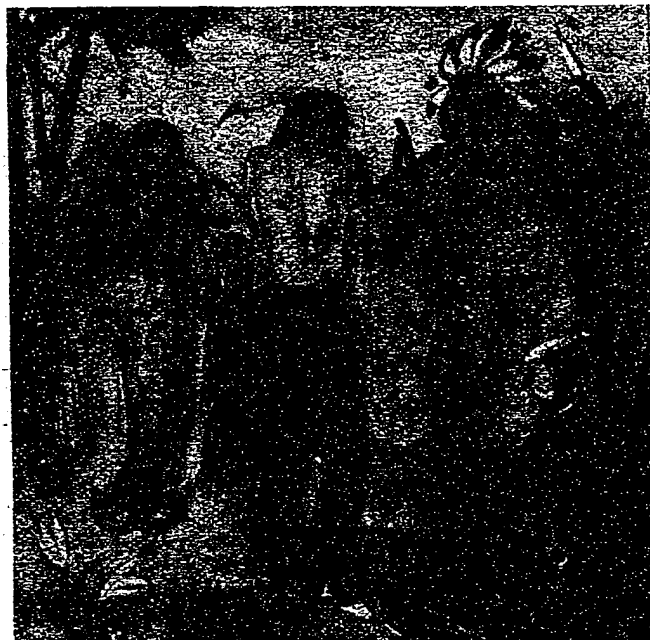
Not only that, but one good studly popular Roman name was apt to get into the birth register of every loyal family. Cassius is a hereditary name in Kentucky in one branch of the Clay family. The very slaves became Caesar and Pompey—names which linger still among the grandparents of the Booker T. Washington Johnsons, the Sheremans, the Lillys, and the unlimited T. R.'s.

Looking again at the Book of Registration I observe, as I turn the pages, that "for two years now names have been growing shorter. Here are Doug and Jack and Will and Pearl."

Then it leaks out that only will the Motion Picture Age in general brand this generation with its mark—but the very mechanical difficulties will have their effects upon the form of names, to whisper, 7,000 years from now, to learned men, "Yes, yes, this was the time when the electric light signs required the stars to use short names. The result was a tendency toward monosyllabic names throughout the generation."



"A cannibal ancestor's soldierly end."



"The wise men and sachems are called in to do the job."