

Nomenclature.

General Origin of the Roman Family Names.

Gentlemen's Magazine.

After a man's first name came the name of his clan, which always ended in ius. The ancient Roman clan seems, like the Highland clans of today, to have been often designated from the name of a supposed ancestor. As the descendants of Donald are called MacDonalds, so the descendants of Marcus were called Marcuses, those of Quintus, Quintians, and those of Publius, Publians, Servius and Lucius bore the names Publilian, Manilian, Servilian and Lucilian. When all the members of a clan have the same surname and the stock of first names has from any cause become limited, it is obvious that a good deal of confusion may arise. The Highlanders obviate this inconvenience by a resort to descriptive nicknames. Now, just as in the Highlands, people might distinguish between two Ferguson Macdonalds by calling one Longbeard and the other Curlyhead, just so in Roman history were read of a Titus Quintus Barbatus, and a Titus Quintus Cincinnatus. The Romans, however, went a step further than the Highlanders have done, for with them the nicknames became hereditary as a family surname. There were many Romans who (either from their special celebrity, or because their surnames were extremely common) bore, in addition to the regular set of three names, an individual nickname called the agnomen. It is worth noting, as a relic of prehistoric usage, that Roman women had no regular names except those indicating the clan to which they belonged. The eleven daughters of Cornelius and nothing else. In the family circle they would, of course, be distinguished by designations analogous to our modern pet names; but on this subject our information is singularly limited. The complexity of the Roman name system was not easily understood by the Greeks and Jews, and the Roman names in the New Testament are curiously confused. Sometimes a man is spoken of by his first name, as Galus, Publius or Marcus; sometimes by his surname, as Pudens or Niger, in Simon the Cyrenian we have a remarkable example of the mixture of languages brought about by the Roman conquests; a native of Africa, bearing a Hebrew name, called one of his sons by the Greek name Alexander, and another by the Roman surname Rufus.

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