
Maryvonne?

Dictionary of First Names

17.99

erally fascinated to learn
s mean, so a book on first
safe bet for any publisher.
le is, the genre has been
while. There are several
ames. How to distinguish

crucial. Nobody wants to
and find it missing. So, a
nal checks. All my family
Where next? What about
ent through the first issue
pared. The only omissions
ndably, various foreign
w, *Lech*, *Meir*, *Salman*);
tus), an author (*Ngaio*), an
star (*Lane*), and *Mary-*
xcuse them all except the

names and their associa-
— from Adam and Eve to
n”, the front cover says.
e to one of the biases of the
levision names are in (such
Kermit), as are the recent
es (*Beatrice*, *Zara*, *Euge-*
e internationally known
But no *Garfield*. My young
d.

ncludes several very rare
Adina, *Candida*, *Cosmo*,
) and I cannot see why.
e common in Bloomsbury.
have had fewer names and
on. Some of the entries are

a bit short on facts and theories. For instance, Julia Cresswell does not mention that *Albert* has been declining since the 1920s, or that *Cecil* is currently out of fashion. Nor does she report the liking in the United States for *Blake* and *Calvin*, the Australian use of *Beverley*, and the Black American Muslim use of *Aisha*. The problem is that she *does* sometimes give this kind of information (in *Bradley* and *Brandy*, for instance), so the reader may assume that when these qualifications are not mentioned, they do not exist.

There is a certain inconsistency of treatment which worried me. I do not mind if *Alexander* is by far the longest entry in the book (it is the name of the author's son, so fair enough); but some entries get very little — *Bernard(ette)*, for instance, where there is not even a reference to *St Bernard* (saint or dog). I am a bit miffed that *David* gets only seven lines. Even *Cosmo* gets twice as many.

Cresswell writes in a friendly, leisurely style. She does not approach the depth of detail of Dunkling and Gosling's succinct historical accounts, in their *Everyman* book, and she is not as good on spelling variants and social explanations. Only occasionally does she try to say why a name has become popular or unpopular. The book's bias is noticeably British — she talks about "on this side of the Atlantic", for instance. But it provides sensible basic information about all the common names, and there is a good cross-referencing system, so that you can trace interesting connections. I thought it was especially informative on Celtic names. In short, an enjoyable book for dipping into, which as a bonus contains an introduction of some depth.

One last thought. No names book yet written gives a hint of the humour in

attendance when people start to think about names. There is a great deal of Old Testament seriousness and symbolism, and not enough New Testament joy. My own favourite first name story comes from a fine friendly Douai monk I met when I lived in Reading. "The name's Godric", he said, when we first met, "but you can call me God."

David Crystal