

## “Your Name”

### ACKERMAN

Ackerman(n)—that is, ‘acre-man’ or ‘farmer’—is a very common occupational surname in the Germanic languages. The compound noun makes its appearance at an early date. Aelfric’s *Gloss*, about 1000 A.D., equates Old English *acremann* with *agricola* and *acerceorl* with *rusticus*, and the word continued in use as a common noun throughout the Middle English period. (*Ned*, s.v. *acremen*). Old High German, Old Norse, Swedish, and other early Germanic forms are cited in the Grimm brothers’ *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. As a surname, however, Ackerman seems to have been more freely used by the Germans than by the English, and most of the English Ackermans today are probably of German origin. The first element of the name, *acre*, has an impeccable Indo-European background, being cognate with Latin *ager* and Greek ἀγρός. The word has been associated with Latin *agere* in the sense of ‘to drive’; hence, *acre* may originally have meant ‘a place where cattle were driven.’

### BEELER

The family name Beeler [bi:lər] shows a not uncommon American variant spelling of a name which is also written, e.g., *Buehler*, *Bühler*, *Poeller*, or *Bieler*. This name is of frequent occurrence in Switzerland, Austria, and southern Germany, where the appellative *bühl* ‘hill’ is found in such place names as Dinkelsbühl, Kitzbühl, Pöhl, and Bieler See. The basic meaning of Beeler is therefore equivalent to that of the English “Hillman,” and may have once signified something like ‘peasant, farmer.’ South-German dialect *bühl* continues Middle High German *bühel* and Old High German *buhil*, *puhil* “hill.”

### GUDDE

In many books on family names the name Gudde [gööd:də] is associated with the large group of names which are derived from Gothic *gup*, ‘god’ or Germanic *gôdaz*, ‘good.’ The latest instance of such derivation we find in Albert Carnoy’s *Origines des noms de familles en Belgique*, reviewed in *Names*, March 1954, pp. 65 ff.

While there may be instances where the modern name can be traced back to these sources, the name of the editor of *Names* is not one of them. His name is derived from the Pruzzian *gudde* meaning ‘bush’; it has kept the same spelling throughout the centuries. The Pruzzian language forms with the Lithuanian and the Latvian the Baltic group of the Indo-European linguistic family. Pruzzian became extinct in the 17th century; the same fate threatens its sister languages under Russian domination. The root of the word is also found in a number of place names in the former German province of Ostpreussen: Gudicus, Gudynken, Godan.

### ASSAR JANZÉN

The Christian name Assar Janzén is often considered to be identical with the well known biblical name *Asher*, one of Jacob’s sons. The Swedish form *Aser*, still more reminds one of the name in the Old Testament. *Assar*, however, is of native Scandinavian origin. In Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian it appears as *Qzurr*, *Auzur*, *Azor*, *Adzer*, *Assar* etc. in Old Swedish as *As(s)ur*, *Osur*, *Usur*, *Assar* etc. in Old Danish as *A(d)tsor*, *Aztor* etc. An Old Danish runic inscription has the form *asur*, which shows that the initial vowel was nasal. On Old Swedish rune-stones appear such forms as *ansuar*, *onsur*, *ontsuar*. These forms have often been treated in onomastic and linguistic literature. Earlier they were considered varieties of Old Danish *A(n)sfrith*, Old Swedish *Asfridh* (Proto Norse \**AnsufrīðuR*), Old High German *Ansifrid*, Old English *Osfridh*, *Osferd*. This etymology does not, however, explain most of the actual forms. The latter element has also been given as an unidentified Old Norse *vqrr*. The most probable, now generally accepted, interpretation of *Assar* gives the Proto Norse ground-form as \**AndswaruR*, a *nomen agentis* meaning ‘he who answers’; cf. Old Norse *andsvar*, n. ‘answer.’ It is possible to explain all the different forms listed above as having developed from this primitive form.

The family name Janzén is the result of an effort to reduce the enormous number of Swedish family names ending in -son, i.e. Anderson, Jansson, Johansson, Svensson. It was formed in the middle of the 19th Century by Janzén’s grandfather whose name was Johansson. The pattern of the stressed suffix -én is quite common in Sweden: Franzén, Hedén, Kjellén.

## SAROYAN

The etymology and origin of the name, so familiar to readers of present day American literature, has not yet been fully explained. The similarity to the Scottish name Sareoghan is purely accidental. The Armenians and the Scots do have a few things in common: austerity, bag-pipes, haggis, and the music seems to be related in spirit. But the name Saroyan is decidedly Armenian. The original form was *Saro Khan* or *Saru Khan*, and older people belonging to the clan still use this version in speech. There is no clear accounting for the mutation by which it became Saroyan. *Sar* means 'mountain' in Armenian and it is quite possible that this forms the root of the Christian name, *Saro*, immortalized by the best known Armenian opera, *Ahnoush*, and its great aria, *Saro-i Yerk*, 'Saro, his song.' In English-speaking countries the name is predominantly Saroyan, pronounced American style; one branch of the family spells it Sarouhan, pronounced Irish style.

## ELSDON SMITH

Approximately one out of every hundred persons in this country is surnamed Smith. In England and Scotland the proportion is a little more, and in Ireland somewhat less. In most European nations the name, in the language of the country, is common, as *Schmidt* in Germany, *Lefevre* in France, *Ferraro* in Italy and *Gonzalez* in Spain. The name refers to the worker in metals, although in early times it was also sometimes used for the worker in wood. At and before the time surnames became fixed, the occupation of the smith was held in high esteem in European countries. In many primitive places he was thought to possess supernatural powers. There was one smith, and generally only one, in every village in England. Consequently that man would naturally be described as "the smith" when it was necessary to identify him. And since the calling was respected, the smith had no objection to the name and was proud to pass it on to his children.

*Elsdon* is the name of a parish in Northumberland. It is also found as a surname and means 'Ellis' dene or valley.'

## STEWART

Stewart, a north English and Scottish form of 'steward' is from Old English *stigward*. *Weard* means 'keeper' and *stig* probably means

‘hall.’ After the year 1000 the word took on the meaning of ‘manager’ of a household, and the Lord High Steward became an important royal official. The nobles bearing that title in Scotland assumed it as a family name, and the great majority of Stewarts are so called because their ancestors were once retainers or clansmen of that family. The variant spellings, although some people try to attach importance to them, are of little significance. Steward would theoretically indicate a southern English origin, but might just as well be a meaningless shift of spelling, such as often occurred in earlier times when orthography was considered less of an exact science than it is now. In George Stewart’s own family, for instance, the grandfather was Stewart; the great-grandfather, Steuart; the great-great-grandfather, Stuart. As far as spelling is concerned, George Stewart may therefore be related to Jeb Stuart, and that seems to be the chief interest that Southerners have in the name. The royal family used the Stewart spelling until the adoption of Stuart by Mary, Queen of Scots, who lived in France during all her formative years. Any Stewart who has ever sojourned among the French will appreciate why she made the change. The French made the name into an almost unrecognizable something like *Stevárr*.



GOD hath most excellent names: therefore call on him by the same; and withdraw from those who use his names perversely: they shall be rewarded for that which they shall have wrought.

—*The Koran*, Chapter vii