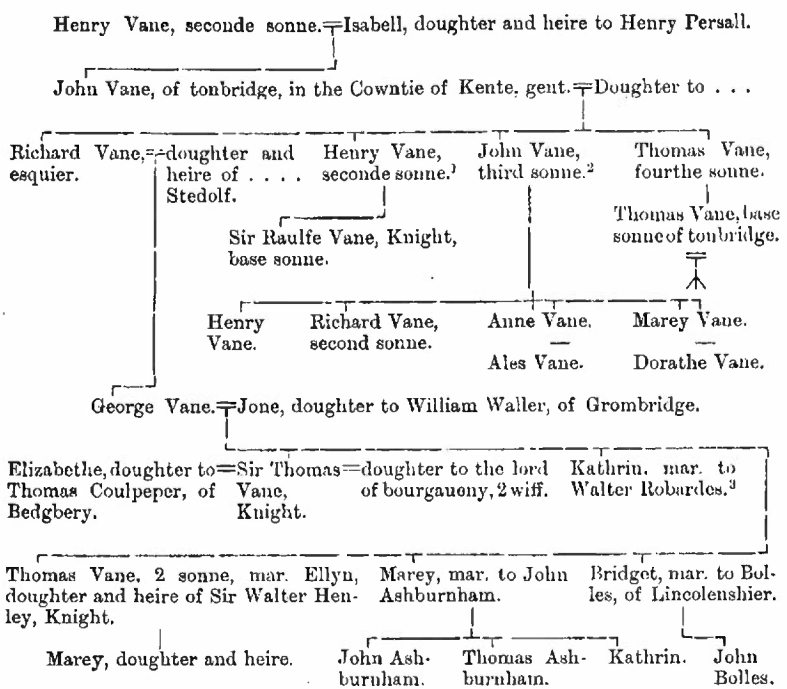
THE WELSH DESCENT OF THE FANE FAMILY.

To "test the authenticity" of an ancient pedigree is by no means a light task, and as a rule one of two principles will be found to influence the mind of the genealogist undertaking an analysis of this nature, for either the subject to be dealt with is assumed to be mythical until proved by indisputable evidence the reverse, or genuine until proved to be false. The latter seems to offer a more equitable basis on which to work, and it is quite evident that had the writer of "The Pedigree of the Fane and Vane Family"[1] proceeded on such lines, he would not have arrived at the conclusions put forward in that paper, not, as he calls them, "facts" deduced from researches in the public archives. His deductions are marshalled under four heads, but it is to the second only that special attention need be drawn. It reads as follows:—"That the earlier descent of the family as given in the Heralds' Visitation, and especially its first eleven generations with their Welsh origin, is rendered so doubtful by negative evidence, as to be no longer capable of support."

Having thus decided against the genuineness of the pedigree registered by a Herald acting under Royal Commission, Mr. Fane concludes by giving a table showing the result of his researches, and on comparing this table with the Visitation pedigree, it will be seen that the one substantially proves the other to be correct. Unfortunately Mr. Fane has not discovered earlier evidence in the Public Record Office, which it is to be presumed has been thoroughly overhauled for the purpose, otherwise some of the first eleven generations might also have been authenticated. These first eleven generations do not, by the way, suggest any abnormal descent for a family now proved to have been in as good a position as other Kentish families, a position, moreover, according to the Visitation, held or acquired by the second son of a second son. That one of the family should have gained distinction on the field of Poictiers does not strike me as being something to marvel at, or that a Welsh family or a branch of it should migrate from Monmouthshire and in course of time settle at Tunbridge should not present a very startling picture to anyone at all experienced in genealogy. But the reason why Mr. Fane should try and persuade himself, as he appears to do, that his family was indigenous to "the district immediately round Tunbridge" is certainly a problem yet to be solved.

Now let us examine in detail the points which have determined him in condemning the recorded descent, but before doing so it may be as well to give that descent as it appears in the record from Henry Vane, the earliest ancestor of the family at present acknowledged by its elucidator.

[1] *Genealogist* current volume, page 81, *et seq.*



It is contended that on testing the foregoing "by the light of contemporary records" it is found to be "constantly incorrect," and the arguments adduced against its genuineness may be arranged as follows:—

(1) That Henry a Vane did not marry Isabel Persall, although the record states that he did, because he mentions in his will a wife Margaret.

(2) That "Collins' Peerage following one copy of the pedigree in the Heralds' Visitations provides Henry a Vane with four other sons, not one of whom is mentioned in his will, and who cannot therefore be believed to have been alive in 1456, if indeed, they ever existed."

(3) That "the first appearance of the Vane pedigree . . . is in the year 1574, in which Sir Thomas Fane, senior, of Badsell, was about to marry Mary Nevile."

[1] His will, in which he is styled "Esquire," is dated 12 May, 25 Hen. VIII, not 1534, as stated on pages 83 and 86. Mr. Fane marries him to an Alice Fisher, probably because he mentions in his will his brother-in-law, John Fissher. If his will is the only evidence relied on for this marriage, it is another instance of arriving too hastily at a conclusion, for John Fane, brother of the testator, mentions in his will "Thomas Fissher my sister's son."

[2] In his will he mentions all the children here given and two bastards, Raufe Vane and Robert Vane. These two are the only wills I have examined relating to this pedigree, and both show the testators to have been large landed proprietors.

[3] This Walter Roberts was of Glassonburye, in Cranbrooke, and signed his own pedigree, which appears in the same Visitation book as his brother-in-law's. He had issue by Katherine, a d. Elizabeth, mar. to George Coulpeper, and by Frances, his second wife, d. of John Maynard, of London, about eleven other children. His will registered in P.C.C. (35 Arundel), was annulled 1587 (41 Spencer).

Considerable importance is attached to all these points, the outcome of which is summed up in the paragraph already quoted in condemnation of the recorded descent. Let us consider them *seriatim* on the evidence produced, and we shall probably find that the "negative evidence" in favour of the earlier descent being *bogus* is so negative that it amounts to *nil*. On the first argument depends the judgment readers of the article in question may pronounce on the value of the writer's conclusions drawn from evidence examined, the second shows that Collins is quoted instead of the source from which the information contained in his Peerage was acquired, and the third suggests that the pedigrees of the family contained in the 1574 and 1592 Visitations of Kent have not been properly studied. As to the first point it is clear that the possibility of Henry a Vane having married a second time was not thought of, or that Isabel Persall could have been his first wife in spite of her name not occurring in her husband's will. Although questioning the accuracy of the Visitation in giving this Henry a Vane a wife Isabel, Mr. Fane very generously assigns a large family to Margaret, without offering any evidence that she was so blessed. Perhaps the will may indicate that she had issue, but until it is proved that she was mother of John Vane, the record, I submit, stands good. The second plea advanced against the accuracy of the Visitations also breaks down, for it appears that the references in Collins' Peerage have not been properly understood[1] or examined, but this is beside the question, as the only Visitation pedigree referred to is that of 1592,[2] wherein this Henry Vane is given but three sons, not eight, namely, 1. Henry; 2. Humfrey; 3. John, of Tunbridge, who married a daughter of . . . Darknoll.[3] In his will we are told he mentions only John; Richard; Thomas; and Robert, and that therefore it is doubtful if he had any others! Robert in Mr. Fane's table is given a possible son Humfrey,[4] but this is unlikely, as I think I can show later that Robert was in all probability of Iden, near Rye, in Sussex, and he does not mention such a son.

Having now dealt with the two arguments put forward by Mr. Fane in proof that the records of the College of Arms are "constantly incorrect," let us turn our attention to his chief contention, viz., that the Vanes never set up any plea as to gentle descent until the match between Sir Thomas Vane and Mary Nevile. A statement is made that it was in the year in which Sir Thomas Vane was about to marry Mary Nevile that his family first appears on record. The insinuation following this statement amounts to nothing less than a charge of conspiracy between the Heralds of that period and Sir Thomas Vane "to produce a pedigree matching in antiquity that of the lady whom he was about to marry." If the reader will refer back to the copy of the 1574 pedigree, here printed, he will notice that the marriage with Mary Nevile was a *fait accompli*, but that her christian name was apparently unknown to the Heralds, she being registered as "doughter to the lord of Bourgauenny," not even daughter and heir,

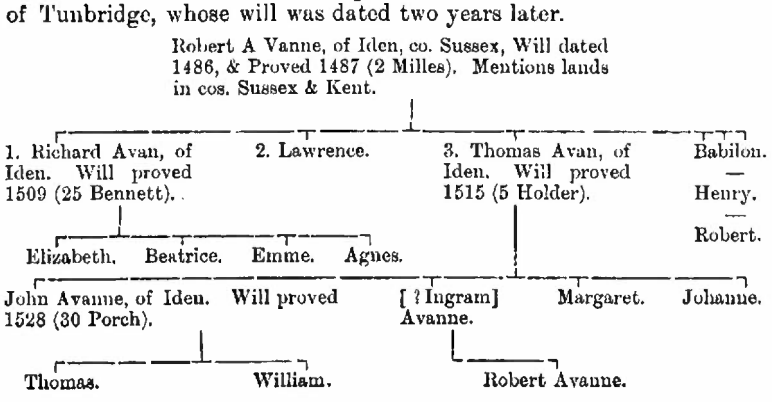
[1] Having referred to Collins' Peerage (1812 edition) it seems that St. George's MS. must have been his authority for the eight sons of Henry Vane.

[2] G. 12, Coll. of Arms.

[3] Mr. Fane queries this in his table, possibly because Hasted gives her as Darrell, although he shows that Darknoll or Darkinghole was more probable.

[4] Collins says that Thomas was the father of Humfrey, and perhaps he was.

yet on the other hand full particulars are given of the marriage and issue of Sir Thomas' younger brother. In Vincent's Collection there is a pedigree identical with the one in question with this exception, that it must have been drawn up before the Nevile match took place. This is clearly the case as, although the marriage appears on the face of it, it is undoubtedly an addition by another and later hand, and is not in keeping with the rest of the descent. Here then we get the following facts:—That a pedigree of the family existed before the marriage with Mary Nevile, that the 1574 pedigree was drawn after this marriage, not when it was about to take place, and that Mary Nevile appears without a name, although we are told that it was on account of this marriage that the Vanes first appear as a gentle family. There is moreover a distinct indication that the visitee (if we may be allowed the word) was Thomas Vane, the younger, rather than Sir Thomas, husband of Mary Nevile. Thomas, the younger, is also better represented than his elder brother in the later Visitation of 1592 wherein he appears as of Burston, "nowe the leife tenante of Dover Castell," while Sir Thomas' description remains as in the 1574 Visitation, merely Sir Thomas Vane, Knight. With such evidence before us it is difficult to understand why Mr. Fane should think that the Nevile match was the sole cause of a pedigree being recorded for the Vane family, more especially as the wills, which he quotes, prove them to have been holding for generations before much landed property, and to have married into the best houses in the county of Kent. But it is, as he says, the first eleven generations and the Welsh descent which he believes to "be no longer capable of support," a belief he no doubt held before starting his investigation. Had, however, his object been to establish the record, a far more satisfactory result would have been attained, as I hope to be able to show, although owing to insufficient time my search has necessarily been of a very contracted nature. On examining some of the wills in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury relating to the name, which have evidently not been seen by Mr. Fane, I have been able to put together the following pedigree, tentative to a certain extent, which is interesting in two ways, firstly because the surname does not become Vane or Fane, but remains A Vanne or Avan, and secondly that the Robert A Vanne who heads it might possibly with a little more research be proved to be brother of John a Vane of Tunbridge, whose will was dated two years later.



The object of giving this pedigree is to point out that within five and twenty miles of Tunbridge there resided a family bearing an undoubtedly Welsh surname,[1] as did also, in my opinion, the Tunbridge a Vanes, of which family the Avans or Avannes, of Iden, were probably a branch. In Mr. Challenor Smith's excellent Calendar of Wills the only other references to the name, besides those referred to in the foregoing pedigree, are Edmund Avan, of Llantwyd (1552), and Thomas Avan, of Cardiff (1555), both Welshmen.

It might, in spite of this proof of the name being certainly Welsh, be urged that the Visitation pedigree calls the earliest ancestor Howel ap Vane, not Avan, but here again I can fortunately produce an instance of such a surname. In 20 Edward I. Richard, son of Richard Abvane, obtained from Richard Abvane one salt work in Nantwich.[2] The Heralds appear to have used this form of the surname in the one instance only, Howel ap Vane, and it is now certain that as late as the fifteenth century they called themselves "a Vane," although not so given in the Visitation. They had it is also proved dropped, so far as the Tunbridge family are concerned, the prefix "a" at the date of the 1574 Visitation of Kent, and were therefore recorded as Vane. That "ap" constantly become "a," numerous instances can be found, and referring again to the Calendar of P.C.C. Wills the following occur, David a Griffith (1469), Elinor A Parry (1547), Hugh a Powell (1561), Griffithe a Morgan (1552), Thomas A Morgan (1517), and others, all being Welsh names. It should also be noted that the variation in the spelling of the name from "a Vane" to "a Fane," to my mind distinctly indicates their Welsh origin, and that in the fifteenth century they had not then lost their native accent.

In concluding this paper, which has run to a greater length than was intended, I beg to state that I have no personal interest in this matter, and have merely endeavoured to show that Mr. Fane's article cannot rank as an exposure of a genealogical fraud,[3] but that the Visitation pedigree stands as good as it did before its authenticity was brought into question. For all the information gleaned from the College of Arms I am indebted to Mr. Scott-Gatty, York Herald, who has very kindly given me extracts from the records and collections preserved in that institution.

KEITH W. MURRAY.

---

[1] See *inter alia* "The Genealogies of Morgan and Glamorgan."

[2] "Abstracts of Records in the Exchequer at Chester." Yonge's Collection, College of Arms.

[3] In a letter, under the heading, "An Armorial Club," published by the *Morning Post* about 11th January last, "One who Knows" mentioned Mr. Fane's article as an instance of this, remarking that he had "destroyed by irrefragable evidence the pedigree with which the Fanes and Vanes were kindly provided by the heralds," &c.