OUR ENGLISH HAPSBURGS: A GREAT DELUSION.

Romantic in its story, unique in its splendour, the descent of the Feildings, Earls of Denbigh, is without a rival in the English Peerage. Their Earldom, comparatively ancient (1622) though it be, is, as it were, but a creation of yesterday by the side of that dignity of Count of Hapsburg, which they have held for centuries in the male line as members of the proudest and one of the mightiest of the reigning houses of Europe. For it is no mere question of pedigree that is involved in their illustrious descent: the Earls, according to Burke’s Peerage, are Counts of Hapsburg, Laufenburg and Rheinfelden; an eagle of Austria bears their arms, which are surmounted by the cap of a Count of the Empire; and the name of Rudolph, which the heads of the house have borne now for two generations, keeps before our eyes a descent immortalised by the pen of Gibbon.

Nor is it only in Burke’s Peerage that this descent is fully recognized. In Dugdale’s Warwickshire and in his Baronage it is accepted as an undoubted fact. It has been recognised, one may say, by the English Crown in the patent of creation for the Barony of St. Liz. (1664): it is said to have been always recognized by the Emperors of Austria themselves, and is at least, as I am credibly informed, admitted by the reigning sovereign. Indeed, I have seen it stated, on what ought to be good authority, that an Earl of Denbigh has been treated by the Imperial Ambassador at Rome “in all respects as a member of the Imperial House,” and “as if he was one of the Grand Dukes.”

There is no lack of documentary evidence in support of the family claims. In addition to the documents given by Dugdale, many others will be found in the elaborate history of the family, composed for its head in 1670 by the Rev. Nathaniel Wanley, and printed in what is perhaps the best known of our county histories, Nichols’ Leicestershire.

The story, as I have said, is somewhat romantic. Geoffrey, Count of Hapsburg, Laufenburg and Rheinfelden (d. 1271), head of the younger line of Hapsburg, is said to have been reduced to comparative poverty by his cousin Rudolph (afterwards the first Hapsburg Emperor) and to have sent his son and namesake Geoffrey to England, temp. Hen. III. This younger Geoffrey married Maud de Colville over here, took the name of Feilding (“Felden”), and had issue a son and heir Geoffrey, who, by his wife Agnes de Napton, was the direct ancestor of the Earls of Denbigh. Geoffrey, the father, returning to Germany, was refused his inheritance for having married Maud de Colville without his family’s permission; and Geoffrey his son, likewise

1 So, in Mr. Shirley’s well-known “Noble and Gentlemen of England” we read:—“The princely extraction of this noble family is well-known; its ancestor Galfridus, or Geoffrey, came into England in the twelfth year of the reign of Henry III, and received large possessions from that monarch. The name is derived from Rinfelden in Germany, where, and at Lauffenburg were the patrimonial possessions of the House of Hapsburg.”

2 Vol. 4, Part I, pp. 273-290. It is there stated that there was another similar history of the family executed “before the year 1658,” which being sent to London by command of George II, for his inspection, “unfortunately perished by fire.”
disinherited, eventually (1309) obtained from Count Rudolph, the uncle who had supplanted him, a sum of 7,000 mares in compensation for his claim on Rheinfelden. The deeds relating to this transaction are carefully preserved by the family.

I have, for some time, been interested in this unique story, because, unless it is wholly false, it must be wholly true, in which case it is difficult to exaggerate the splendour of the claim it involves. A certain John Vincent, of whom we shall hear again, spoke of Fielding's "original from that great German family of Hapsburg, that hath produced so many emperors, kings, and great nobility, in many countries of Christendome," and the worthy Wauley urged their right "to claim alliance with the gods, meaning crowned kings."

But now comes the strange point that first raised my suspicion. I found that although the family had come here, we are told, under Henry III., their earliest assumption of the German dignities seems to have been under Charles II. (1675-1685). As to the German descent it first appears in print, so far as I can find, in Dugdale's Warwickshire (1656). In short, as was observed in the Quarterly Review, it was only after their lucky rise, through marriage with Buckingham's sister, that, "in due course, the family revealed a fact which they had hitherto kept to themselves, namely that they were not of English origin, but were descended, in the male line, from the mighty house of Hapsburg." Let us turn for proof of this assertion to four sources of information: (1) the family monuments, (2) a glass window put up by the family at their seat, (3) the family pedigrees, (4) the family patents.

On the family monuments and brasses, of which several are recorded, we find neither mention of the Hapsburg descent, nor use of the Hapsburg arms. To the family window of painted glass I attach considerable importance. It may be remembered that the famous imposture by which the Cambridgeshire Stuarts were derived from the ancient denomination of Hapsburg. Let us extend our search to four sources of information: (1) the family monuments, (2) a glass window put up by the family at their seat, (3) the family pedigrees, (4) the family patents.

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Cam Busilus comes Deubigh a celeberrima et antiquissima prosapia comitum de Hapsburg in Germania, per Gafriidum quoniam comitum de Hapsburg orindus, etc., etc.1

Having thus made good my point that in England, this splendid descent was not revealed till about the middle of the seventeenth century, I shall now show that on the German side the alleged descent has not been recognised by historical or antiquarian authorities, nor even by the House of Austria itself, as alleged, in the past.

I select for this purpose three typical authorities from the seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries. The first of these is Francis Guillimann, whose “Habsburgien,” dedicated to the then Emperor Rudolf, was published in 1609. I have quoted from the revised edition of 1696. The title runs:—

Francisci Guillimanni Hapsburgici
sive de antiqua et vera origine domus Austriac.

Ad Rudolphum II
Hapsburgi-Austriacum Imperatorem semper Augustum (Editio nova, a plurimis mendis purgata).

Ratisbonae . . . 1696.

The subject was taken up where Guillimann left it by a writer of unimpeachable, because official authority. I allude to the great work of Herrgot, the Imperial Historiographer, based on original documents throughout. It was executed for and dedicated to the Emperor Charles.


[Dedication]
Augusto Cesari Carolo Hapsburgensi D. Leopoldi F. patrie patri optimo maximo.

Guillimann devotes his seventh book to the Counts of Hapsburg of the Lauffenburg line, and, combining his work with that of Herrgot, the pedigree runs as follows:—

Rudolf (“the Taciturn”), Count of Hapsburg.

John, Count of Hapsburg, Gaston, Count of Hapsburg and Lord of Lauffenburg, and Count of Rapperschwil, d. 1314.

The scene of our story, it is needful to explain, is on the south or Swiss bank of the Rhine from Basle on the west to Constance on the east. Ascending the river eastwards from Basle, we first pass the town of Rheinfelden—of which more anon—then Säckingen, the site of an Abbey, with which the Hapsburgs were connected, and lastly Laufenburg, the “castle of the rapids,” the picturesque and ancestral home of our Counts.

Their line was founded by Rudolf, “the Taciturn” (d. 1249), from whose elder brother descended the Hapsburg Emperors of Austria. With Gotfrid, his son and heir, our story begins. This Gottfried was Lord of Laufenburg, which he held of the Abbey of Säckingen. In one document he occurs as “Comes de Lauffenburg” (1258); in all others as “dominus Lauffenfur,” or Count of Hapsburg only. Guillimann assigns him Elizabeth Ochsenstein as a wife: Herrgot says the fact rests on Guillimann’s authority alone. By the latter he is assigned two sons, Gottfried (the Feildings’ alleged ancestor), who, dying shortly after his father, was buried at Wettingen in the same grave, and Rudolf,—both of them left in ward to their uncle, Bishop Rudolf.1 Herrgot ignores Gotfrid altogether (p. 236)—probably from his dying too young to be mentioned in any documents. That, in any case, he cannot long have survived his father is shewn by an important deed of 1274, printed by Herrgot,2 from the archives of Wettingen,3 which runs: “per legitimam tutoriam aut tutoribus Rudolfi domicelli nostri, filii videlecto bone memorie Comitatis Gotfridi.”

Herrgot lays special stress on the fact that this Rudolf alone continued the line:—

“totam previam lineam Laufenburgae—Hapsburgiae, absque controversia, Rudolpho ejus [Gotfridi] ilio, de quo hic agimus, esse adscribendum.”

Rudolf remained in ward till 1288,4 and we have accordingly a deed, of 5 June 1287, printed by Herrgot “ex Archivo Wettinensi,”5 in which the Bishop, his uncle and namesake, styles himself—

R. dei gratia Constantiensis episcopus, tutor pupillae R[udolfi] Comitii de Hapsburg.

and refers "predicto R[udolf] Comiti nostro nepoti." This long minority, Herrgot observes, greatly improved the family estate.

I now pass to my third authority, representing the results of the latest German research on the subject (1879). This is the article on the house of “Hapsburg-Laufenburg” in the Alhgenene Deutche Biographic (Vol. x, p. 284); which is based on the monographs of Münch in Aragonia, the local historical organ, supplementing Herrgot’s work. The pedigree there given is as follows:—

1 Xor fuit Elizabeta Ochsensteinia. Ex quia filii Gotfridius, qui paulli post patrem excessit, eodem tumulo insitus est, et Rudolfus: uterque sub tutelâ Rudolfi prepositi et post episcopi, patrii,” p. 149.
2 p. 447.
3 The great Abbey of Wettingen, the burying-place of the family, is situated on the line from Basle to Zurich, considerably south of the Rhine.
4 Allgenene Deutche Biographic.
5 DEXL, p. 599.
Rudolf, the Tactum of Laufenburg, d. 6 July 1249.

Gotfrid of Laufenburg, d. 1271.

Rudolf of Laufenburg (and afterwards of Rap.—Elizabeth, heiress of Rapperschweil, perschweil, jure suzerain), b. 15 July 1276, in widow of Ludwig von Homberg, ward to his uncle's till 1288.

It is here positively stated that Rudolf was the only son ("der name H[apsburg] [Laufenburg] blieb jetzt dem einzigen, am 15 July 1270 geborenen, Söhne Graf Gottfried I, Rudolf III.") The Fieldings' alleged ancestor is wholly ignored: and Rheinfelden is not included in the possessions assigned to the house. The date of Rudolf's birth, which this article gives us, explains his long minority from 1271 to 1288. Had the original concoctor of the pedigree known of these dates, he would have hesitated to make Rudolf's brother come to England under Henry III (1216-72).

Now, bearing in mind the true pedigree, as given by the German authorities, let us see how the original concoctor of the Fieldings' spurious pedigree set to work. He had to affix their undoubted ancestor and founder of their house, Gotfrid Feilding, husband of the Nupton heiress, who must have lived under Edward II and Edward III. For this purpose he boldly pitched upon Gotfried, the son of Count Gotfried, who died according to Guilmann, just after his father. Probably, as I have said, he was unaware that Goitrif had been an infant at his father's death (1271) and that his brother, as we now know, was only born in 1270. Wanley had read, it is true, in Becellinus—

"Gotfridus secundus obit in juventute;" but he got over this difficulty by holding that this "juventute, in the gradations of the year's, may be extended to the period of forty years"! This enabled him to assign to Gotfried a career of which, on the German side, there is no trace. Bringing him to England, in his father's lifetime, at some unspecified date in the reign of Henry III, (1216-72), he made him there marry Matilda de Colville and have children. Then, at a date equally unspecified, he made him return to Germany, to satisfy the authorities who say that he was buried at Wettinng. A difficulty faced him, of course, in the fact that in all the English documents the Christian name is "Gaffridus," and in all the German ones "Gotfridus." The two names might occasionally be confused, but such unanimity as this cannot be explained away. He got over it, however, by simply converting every "Gotfridus" of the House of Hapsburg into "Gaffridus."

But the chief obstacle, of course, in his way was the utter absence of any evidence for his story, combined with the utter ignoring of it by every German authority. Now I shall not profess to state each step in the growth and development of the legend. I can only take the alleged proofs as they stand. First then, in an evil hour for himself, the concoctor endeavoured thus to explain the name of Feilding:—

"Memorandum quod Gafridus Comes Hapsburgieus propter oppressiones sibi

1 See pedigree supra.
This extract may serve as a sample of these ridiculous documents, of which the dog-Latin is at times exquisitely funny. But their concoctor might at least have avoided introducing into those of 1307 the clause "regnante domino Adolphe Imperatore," considering that the Emperor Adolph had died in 1298—nine years before.

The hand of the forger stands revealed.

After this it is useless to waste time over the deeds of 1309, of which the first has the seal, alas! "broken off from the label." This reminds us that the Abbess of Sieckingen had, we are told, reasons of her own for not affixing her seal to the first of these deeds, so that her proctor used his own by her orders ("ex ordine suo"). So with the two deeds of 1365, of the first of which we read that "the bishop's seal was, by the motions of several journeys broken off, but exactly copied out before." The last of these documents has, indeed, the seal of "Sir George Hirschorn, knight," still "entire," but this proves to be only a fancy rebus on his name, which anyone could invent. It is singular that an English deed (2 Ed. III) of considerable importance for the descent "had the seal of the eagle affixed to it, but by accident broke off" (p. 284). Another English deed (28 Ed. III) was "so defaced as not thought fit to be made use of amongst other evidences whose originals remain so clear and entire," especially since the seal, which had the impression of a lion rampant, in its passage from London into Warwickshire, was unfortunately thrown into the water with the sumpter-horse, wherein it was (as also by the motion of the horse) broken off and moulder to nothing; the type of which seal was taken long before, and remains yet in the Earl of Denbigh's Book of Evidences. How provoking these seals were! There was a deed of 3 Ric. II which "had affixed to it the seal of an eagle," which is what we want, but—"by often removals broken off, though before entered into the Earl of Denbigh's Book of Evidences" (p. 285). How preposterous it was to enter these seals, and how invaluable are the entries now!

But to return to the German deeds of "1365," which are respectively dated "tertio die mensis Martii" and "tertio Calend. Martii"—rather an awkward combination (p. 286). I must explain at the outset that though they are composed in the same queer Latin as the others, they ought to be in old German. Herrgott prints in his great work, some seventy charters for the period 1360—1390; they relate to the same parties as these two documents, the Duke of Austria, Bishop of Basle, Counts of Hapsburg, etc., etc., and, without one exception, they are all in old German. But doubtless old German was more than the forger could attempt. The story these deeds tell is really rather a clever one. They relate to "William Fielding, Est., of Lutterworth," whom they transform into "Williamus de Hapsburg, natus Anglus vocatus antiquus in Anglia Feleden, ex antiqua prosapia comitum et principum de Hapsburg in Germania oriumus." According to them, "post multas devastationes ab Angliscis commissas in Alsatia et alias partibus Germaniae," this William "in illo exercitu Anglorum," was taken prisoner, "fortiter dimieus," near the Rhine, by the Bishop of Basle's men. His alleged kinsman, Duke Leopold of Austria, heard that he was undergoing greater hardships "quoniam convenire poterit dignitate (sic) Germanice gentis, vel natalis ipsius Willelmis, qui ab antiquis comitibus de Hapsburg originem suam deduxit." He inter­vened therefore to help him in his distress ("in tempore distressae sui"), and procured his liberation at the hands of the Bishop. Now, what, it may be asked, could an English army be doing at this time in Alsace? Well, a celebrated leader of the time, Enguerrand de Coucy, Earl of Bedford and Knight of the Garter, son-in-law of Edward III, maternal grandson of Duke Leopold of Austria, and son of the proudest Baron in Europe, raised an army to enforce his claims, through his mother, on Austria, in which was comprised a picked force of 6,000 Englishmen. Hence this army was known as the "English" bands, and the scene of its defeat between Basle and Lucerne is still known as "the English Barrow." Moreover, it actually did march to the banks of the Rhine, and—through Alsace—into Switzerland. But, alas, all this took place, not in 1365, but in 1375, and the ingenious forger has clearly confused it with the raid of Cervole's French freebooters in 1365! This is sad, for had he only made his document quite accurate, it would have gone far to support the Hapsburg claim.

Passing to the English deeds and documents, I select as the simplest, their mention, among the family dignities, of Rheinfelden. The best known, probably, of these evidences is that letter of attorney of 1316 (9 Ed. II), in which Geoffrey Fielding (the real ancestor, as I term him) styles his grandfather "Comes de Hapsburg et Dominus in Lauenburg et Rinfielding in Germania." For, Dugdale having selected it for insertion in his Warwickshire and his Barony, it found its way into Collins' Peerage, etc., etc. The attempt to make the name of the place approximate to that of the family will, of course, be observed. The same form recurs in a deed assigned to Geoffrey, his alleged father (the one who came to England temp. Hen. III).1 There are several other of these documents in which the name is found; and in two of them at least the style runs, not "dominus," but "Comes de Hapsburg, Lufftingen et Rinfielding"—which is that now used by the family. If it can be shown that the Hapsburgs of Lauenburg were neither Lords nor Counts of Rheinfelden, and did not so style themselves, these documents are, obviously, forgeries. I turn, therefore, to the German authorities for information on the subject.

In his chapter "de dominio et burggraviatu Rhinfeldensi," Herrgott, who elsewhere tersely says: "in nostris monumentis nullus occurrat Comes Rhinfeldensis," discusses the early history of Rheinfelden, and shows that the town, at an early period, belonged directly to the Emperor. An imperial charter of 1225 guaranteed this position, and promised that the town should not be severed from the imperial domain.2 Accordingly in June 1243 we find it administered under Ulric de Liebenberg "Saeki Imperii Ministerialis et Burggravius in Rinfieldin."3

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1 Nichols, 277.
2 Lib. I, cap. xi.
3 Vol ii, p. 291.

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1 No doubt 1
2 "in exercitu Anglorum," in the other deed
again we find the Emperor Rudolf granting liberties to "omnes nostros de Rinefelden (31 July 1276)." It would, therefore, he observes, be waste of time to discuss the supposition that the Laufenburg Counts had any connection with Rheinfelden. And indeed in his vast collection of charters relating to the family, there is not one to be found in which they occur as Lords of it, or claim any rights over it. Guilliman had written no less positively:

De Hapsburgi Comitibus qui ad avitum prater Lauffenburg dominium nihil tituli addiderunt ... Hapsburgi comitum nomen retinuerunt, neque ad id adjunctum alium, quan ex Lauffenbergo Oppulo rhemi denominationem.

Lastly, the Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (1870), enumerating the possessions of these Hapsburg Counts, wholly omits Rheinfelden, and gives Lauffenburg as their residence, till their marriage with the heiress of the family, there is not one to be found in which the deeds are all dated from Rheinfelden, an obvious attempt to introduce the name which has merely increased the evidence against them.

But how, it may be asked, did the daring concoctor come to make Rheinfelden the keystone of his story? This raises the difficult question whether Rheinfelden was merely introduced to patch together a connection between Feilding and Hapsburg, or was itself the origin of the whole story by the tempting termination Rheinfelden. In either case he had clearly got hold of some foreign work which assigned Rheinfelden, in error, to the Laufenburg Hapsburgs. Exactly such a work is found in the "Basilicon" of Elias Reusnerus, of which the first edition was published in 1592, and which is actually referred to throughout by Wanley.

Now this writer gives us (p. 26) the following pedigree:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUE.</th>
<th>FALSE.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John.</td>
<td>Gotfried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudolf.</td>
<td>Gotfried.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. 1314.</td>
<td>d. 1314.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But, indeed, even Wanley tacitly rejects this erroneous pedigree, and points out that Reusnerus had confused Gotfried [d. 1271], who fought against Berne, with his son. Yet it is to such untrustworthy writers as we are referred throughout, and when appeal is made to the Annales Murenses for confirmation, we find they do not include Rheinfelden among the family possessions.

We may therefore safely reject every Feilding deed or document which Rheinfelden occurs; and difficult—almost impossible—though it be to believe that all these evidences were forged to prove the pedigree, the facts leave us no alternative to this astounding conclusion.

I now pass from the pedigree to the arms.

Strainless efforts were made by those who were responsible for the Hapsburg descent to connect the arms of Feilding with those of Hapsburg. The former are "Arg. on a fess Az. three lozenges Or," the latter, "Or a lion rampant Gu. (now "ductilly crowned Az."). The attempt to prove the user of the latter having virtually failed, another line was adopted. The arms of Austria—which are quite distinct from those of Hapsburg and are now borne, separate, by their side on the Emperor's shield—were pressed into the service. These are Gu. a fess Arg. It is needful to remember that the Laufenburg Hapsburgs had nothing to do with Austria, and of course (as their seals prove), did not use its arms. Undaunted, however, the bold concoctor produced a document "Extract' ex antiquis historiis et evidenciis comitum de Hapsburg," of which the handwriting cannot be of lessor antiquity than the latter end of King Henry the Sixth, or the beginning of King Edward the Fourth of England. This precious document narrates that:

"Gottfridus comes de Hapsburg filius Rodolphi comitis, cum ambitu in uxore Margaretam viuam et heredem Austri, in signum amoris obsequi]i sepe in hatibus equinibus et in sigilla uelare solitus est, trahit cum tribus cum suis armis ornamentum, postpositis armis suis gentilissimi, dedicat leone."

Then it goes on to say how he sent his son Geoffrey, "tunc ex tumultus patrimonio in comitatu Rinefeldensi," to England, temp. Hen. III. A variant (in English) of this document is quoted by Nichols (p. 251) "from a MS. written about the middle of the seventeenth century"—a significant date. Wanley follows it by some sapient remarks, with which should be compared those he makes on p. 286. As to the palm tree crest now used by the family, he opines (p. 275) that it may refer to a tournament "in the time of Frederick the Second," at which their ancestor was "said to carry away the palm"!

I do not undertake to identify positively the original culprit (or culprits) in this colossal imposture. According, indeed to Dugdale, the

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1 p. 269.
2 His general reference at the end is to "Heningius, Reusnerus, Albicius, Bucelinus, and all the German writers on this subject as well ancient as modern." (Nichols, 290).
3 Rudolf, of course, was not Emperor till many years after the Count's death.
4 Nichols, 275.
5 Nichols, 276.
belief is of great antiquity; but where the whole evidence is so tainted
with forgery, one cannot be blamed for looking on every document with
suspicion. I cannot at present find that the claim was advanced even
during for the first time, as it seems, the palm true crest; it was he who
obtained the St. Liz Patent, in 1664, containing a formal recognition of
the claim; it was he who put up, at his family seat, a window, introduc-
ding for the first time, as it seems, the palm true crest; it was he who
responded, shall find, with Ashmole (1670) about the Hapsburg
claim; it was he (I am told) who subscribed to rebuilding the College of
Arms, and thus secured the entry in the book of "benefactors" of his
Hapsburg descent; and it was he who employed John Vincent, that
"ucdy, scody" man, as I have heard him described, in connection
with it. For an entry by Vincent, in Lord Denbigh's Book of
Evidences, concerning a chimney-piece he had seen at Lutterworth in
1665, "having some relation to the renowned family of Hapsburg,
from whence the right eminent family of Fieldings thereabouts (most
truly and clearly deriving their descent) do very frequently use a Lyon
rampant crowned in their scales."

Now this clue is worth following up, for John was the son of Augustine
Vincent and inherited his heraldic collections. According to Nimco,
"John Vincent was . . . a good genealogist, herald, and antiquary; but so ill an
economist and so fond of liquor that he frequently pawned some of his father's
literary labours to pay tavern expenses." This character may be derived from a remark by Anthony a
Wood, in a letter of 14 Oct., 1655, on the Sheldon MSS. (now among the treasures of the
College of Arms):—

"John Vincent, the sometime owner of them had pawned several of them in
alehouses before he died." 1

A further statement of Anthony a Wood serves to clinch the
connection:—

"You must know that John Vincent was a bounteous companion and a great company
keeper with noblemen, especially with Basil Earl of Denbigh, and being always
inquisitive and happy in a good manner might learn these things." 2

1 Aut, p. 195. This title represented his claim to descend from St. Liz, Earl of
Northampton, through the Seytons (who were alleged to be "alias St. Liz."). As C E C, points out, under Denbigh, he held already a Barony of earlier date (1620),
which renders strange his desire for this one. But besides gratifying his evident
craving for ancient descent, it gave him (as a friend of mine has pointed out to me) the
opportunity of introducing the Hapsburg claim into the Patent.
2 He also introduced an eagle crest. Dugdale asserts (Warwickshire i, 87) that
they had used "for their crest sometime an Eagle, and at other a Palm Tree, though
of later times altered." But the old glass window and the Visitation Pedigrees show
only the true crest, a mutcharty with a fructed bough.
3 History of the College of Arms.
4 Nicolaus, Mem. of Augusta, Vincent, p. 89.
5 Harl. MS. 1056, fo. 44 (Nicolas, p. 94).

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Have we then in John Vincent the clever forger, who—as Meschini
in Sant' Ivaro forged the documents for Prince Monteverchii—supplied
the too ambitious Earl with the evidences he required. We cannot say,
as yet, for certain; but if Marlowe died in a tavern brawl, there is
nothing, perhaps, derogatory in the thought that the Hapsburg
evidences may have been concocted to pay for pot of ale.

Now that we have so closely identified the second Earl with the
Hapsburg claim, we can approach the very remarkable letter he wrote to
Ashmole, 26 June, 1670:—

"... The other day, ransacking among my papers, I found three letters from
Prince Thomas of Savoy; one of them I send you inclosed to be restored at our
next meetings, wherein he stiles me his own. This putt me in mind of the
curious serche Duke Vittorio Amadeo, the eldest Prince of that family, made after
my armes and descent both in my private travells and when I was the late Kings
amb of glorious memory with his highnesse, who asking me which were the eristen
names of my ancestors, I replied Jeffrey, John, Everard, Basil, and he presently
declared by my armes, surname, and these christian names, I must descend from the
house of Hapsburg, with whom, especially the Eorles Geoffry and Everard, his
ancestors had bene engaged against in the wars and att other times in treaties
of correspondence, upon wee occasion, jowdy to the dignity of a viscount in England,
his treated me ever in his letters with the stile of his cousin, an honor not given to
any, as I was toth, under the degree of a duke and peer of France. That Prince's
letters I cannot yet finde, but I am certain they are amongst my papers. Upon
the same account Monsieur Bernegger of Strauburg, a grnat historian and antiquary of
Germay, gave me those lights whom before were not so cleerely discovered to mee,
nor indeed ware my studies and Intentions att that time taken upp with notions
of this kinde. For that reason did the city of Basill treat me with great honor and
respect in my private travells, and my brother-in-law, Duke Hamilton, being entered
into Germany with a great army (1631) to second the King of Swedes attempts and
designs, the Emperor, then Ferdinand the Second, att Ratisbone thought my honor a
sufficent trye to separate me from all other Interests but his owne if I would have
accepted of those great advantageous offers he made mee," etc., etc.

It is not pleasant to be obliged to say what one thinks of this letter. In
the first place, the names of the writer's ancestors were Geoffrey (one),
John (one), Everard (two), Basil (two) and William (five). It is odd that he
should have omitted the chief one, which happens not to suit his theory.
More serious, however, is the statement that the Prince "declared by
my armes, surname, and those christian names, I must descend from the
house of Hapsburg." The arms of Fielding are totally distinct, we have
seen, from those of Hapsburg: the surname of "Feilding" cannot
possibly have suggested that of Hapsburg. As to the christian names,
there was nothing in "Basil" to suggest the Hapsburgs, while
geoffry, John, and Everard were common names enough. It is thus
absolutely certain that the writer must here have been romancing. We
must therefore doubt what he tells us about "the city of Basil" (the
spelling suggests that he connected its name with his own); nor can we
believe that the Emperor's offers were connected with his alleged
Hapsburg descent, when we find it so completely ignored in Herrig's
great work. And, for my part, I doubt "Duke Vittorio," in the
seventeenth century, recollecting and taking so keen an interest in the

1 Fourth Report on Historical MSS, i, 262.
2 Visitation of 1603, and the glass windows.
Hapsburg cadets of the thirteenth. The letter is, throughout, that of a
man trying to make out a case for the descent on which he has set his heart.

But when we come to "Monsieur Bernegger," I must confess that it
looks to me as if we may have in him the ingenious antiquary who
supplied (or gave the "local colour" for) what I term the "German"
deeds. The name of "Stein," for instance, savours of a local knowledge
which even the "inquisitive" Vincent is scarcely likely to have
acquired. And the story told in the deeds of "1365" might well have
occurred to a Strasburg man. Still, they are rather poor imitations, and
"a great historian and antiquary" would, perhaps, have done better.

It will have been seen that two questions are raised by this paper.
That the Hapsburg descent is an absurd fiction has been abundantly
demonstrated, but its actual author and the date of its origin cannot be
so surely decided. Everything points to Basil, second Earl of Denbigh
(1643-1675); but if all the documents were concocted for him, it is
difficult to see how Dugdale could speak of those known to him1 as
"authentique evidences" in the middle of the seventeenth century. Either
his honesty or his critical power is thereby gravely impugned. If on
the other hand some of these "evidences" were, as alleged, of earlier
date, they could not have been concocted till the error about Rhein­
felden found its way into England about the beginning of the seventeenth
or end of the sixteenth century. Thus in no case should they have
seemed in Dugdale's days "authentique." Perhaps the great Herald
looked with partial eyes on documents produced by a Peer of the Realm,
who was also a Warwickshire man.

As to the recognition, whatever it may be, that this claim has now
obtained abroad, it is sufficiently explained by the natural belief that a
descent recognised by the English Crown and certified by the most
famous of all our officers of arms, could not be a sheer invention, and
must therefore be true.2 The evidence of the deeds proves the descent,
and no one could suppose that a noble family would rely for its
pedigree on spurious documents. The strange thing is that this
pretended descent should be coveted by such a family as that of
Feilding. For whether the antiquity of their Earldom be considered, or
that of their position as county gentry, they must rank high among
what in England is deemed ancienne noblesse. It is, however, only right
to add that the family do but inherit this claim from their ancestors,
and, though it has been, no doubt, accentuated by the introduction of
the name Rudolph, they are wholly guiltless of its original concoction,
and could scarcely, indeed, be expected to abandon it, till it was, as
now, disproved.

J. H. Round.

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1 Wanley seems to have had access in 1670 to many more than Dugdale.
2 In Vol. xxv. of "Johannes von Müller samtlich Werke, Herausgeben von
Johann Georg Müller" (Tubingen, 1817), we find it recognised on Dugdale's
authority only: "Wenn Dugdale's Briefe . . . wen diese Schriften ihre Richtigkeit
haben."