

Concerning Gerard de Visme, Member of the British Factory in Lisbon

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Monteiro, maintaining the original grammar of the article.

By Miss Meta E. Williams

The parents of Mr. Gerard de Visme were both Huguenots. De Vismes seems to have been rather a Huguenot name. It is often found, variously spelt, in the registers of the Huguenot congregations published by the Huguenot Society. The names of Daniel (1685) and of Louis (1707) appear in a list of elders and deacons belonging to the Walloon and Huguenot church in the Crypt at Canterbury; many more are in the registers of the French church in Threadneedle St. London, of persons in various walks of life.

Philip Count de Vismes, a fugitive from Picardy, and Marianne, daughter of Piquet, Marquis de Majanes, last of the Protestant branch of her family, were married July 16th, 1716. They belonged to the Threadneedle St. congregation and their children were christened there. Burke's "Genealogical History of the Landed Gentry or Commoners of England, Scotland and Ireland", published in 1838, when survivors of the third generation of the family in England were already aged; and the fourth generation in their heyday were entering the names of their children in parish registers in the last years of William IV and the first of Victoria, makes it possible, from information evidently supplied at first hand, to recognise who was who - cousins, grandchildren, or no relations - among the names in Vols. 13, 16 and 23 of the Threadneedle St. Register, Gerard was the fifth son. His elder brothers, Philip and Andrew seem to have found a footing in the City; Louis went into the

Church; Stephen got an appointment in India: and Gerard went, when he was about twenty, to Lisbon, leaving England still in the throes of the “45”, and arriving in 1746, for he said himself in 1786 that he had been in Lisbon 40 years. (Walford’s “British Factory in Lisbon”, p. 79). He can have seen little of his family during those years. His younger brother Leo, went to the West Indies; William stayed in England; and Benjamin followed Stephen to India. His sister, Amelia, 14 years old when he left home, married Baron John Emanuel de Rondeli of Berne.

Another Huguenot family belonging to the same congregation, whose pedigree is given by Burke in connection with the de Vismes, were the children and grandchildren of Jean d’Auriol, Baron de Toutens in Lower Languedoc. The names of the Chevaliers Agilbert and Elisée d’Auriol and of Peter d’Auriol come into Mr. Gerard’s biography. He had been two or three years at Lisbon when Miss Henrietta Auriol, with whom he must often have played, daughter of Peter Auriol, a City merchant, dwelling in Coleman St. London, married in 1749, the Rev. Robert Hay Drummond, Chaplain to George II, Bishop of St. Asaph, son of the 8th Earl of Kinnoull, (Complete Peerage: 7th Earl, D. N. B.) who took the additional name of Drummond in 1739, his brother having succeeded as 9th Earl, and he himself having succeeded, as second son, to two Perthshire estates, which the first Viscount Strathallan, himself a younger son, alienated from his own estates to make a provision for the second sons of the Earls of Kinnoull, his daughter, Elizabeth Drummond, having married the 7th Earl, the Bishop’s grandfather.

The families of Drummond and of Hay, deriving their honours from our Stuart kings, were many of them avowed Jacobites, like the 4th Viscount Strathallan, who fought at Sheriffmuir and fell at Culloden; and the 5th Earl of Kinnoull who took the side of Charles I, and in exile was known as Viscount Dupplin. His brother and heir, a minor, was brought back to England and restored by Queen Anne, with the proviso that in the event of his death without heirs, his cousin, George Hay of Balhousie, created Viscount Dupplin by William III., should succeed; and in 1709, his son Thomas succeeded as 7th Earl.

In 1751, when Benjamin de Vismes was fighting as a volunteer under Clive in India, and so distinguishing himself that he rose to the rank of Captain, Jacques d'Auriol, the Mr. James Auriol of the Factory, came out to Lisbon, but left after the earthquake. About the time of his return to England, William de Vismes married Elizabeth, daughter of the Chevalier Elisée d'Auriol. Children of Guillaume de Vismes and Elizabeth Auriol are entered in the Threadneedle St. registers, but not all of them, apparently, survived.

In 1763, the Rev. Louis de Vismes was appointed Secretary to the Embassy to Russia. In 1766, Leo de Visme was killed on his way home by a fall from his berth in rough weather; in 1770, Stephen died at Canton, leaving his fortune to his brother William who had two sons, Elisée William and James; and in 1776, the Rev. Louis de Vismes, after a distinguished diplomatic career, having been envoy to the court of Bavaria, complimented by Frederick the Great with permission to use the Prussian eagle as his crest, and sent as envoy extraordinary to Sweden, died at Stockholm and was buried there.

In the same year Dr. Hay Drummond, Bishop of Salisbury in 1761 and Archbishop of York in the same year, died leaving two sons; Thomas who succeeded his uncle Thomas as 10th Earl of Kinnoull, and Edward Auriol Hay Drummond, Prebend of York by his father's gift, chaplain to George III and Rector of Hadley, in Suffolk.

The last ten years of Mr. de Vismes' stay in Lisbon were the terrible years of the French Revolution which must have made every Huguenot household thankful that the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes had driven their parents out of France.

Mr. de Vismes returned to England in 1792. It is pleasant to think he had relatives to come home to. There was the brother whom he had left a lad of eighteen, now "William de Vismes, Esq., of Beckenham, Kent"; which meant no more than that he lived there. And his nephews, the eldest an officer in the Army, being called to active service almost immediately when revolutionary France declared war on England in

1793; not the only soldier of Huguenot descent in that army. He served during the ensuing two campaigns. The second son, a lawyer, had married some time previously Elizabeth Bearcroft, only daughter of Edward Bearcroft, K. C., M. P., Chief Justice for the county of Chester, whose name in 1791 was in all the chapbooks as the judge who had tried a notorious highwayman. Mrs. de Vismes was heiress through her mother, of Okeley-Clifford; and through her aunt, of Okeley-Grandison, two parts of Okle, in the parish of Newent, 10 miles from Gloucester, which had been purchased in Cromwell's time, in the year 1650, by William Rogers, and divided by his last descendant, Edward Rogers, between his daughter, Mrs Bearcroft, and her sister, Mrs. Jones. There is a tablet to the memory of Edward Rogers in the sanctuary of Newent Church.

Mr. and Mrs. James de Vismes eventually lived at Newcourt House (now Newent Court), with a large family growing up around them. Both Mr. Gerard's elder brothers had married in England, and Mr. Philip's only daughter had married N. Goldschmitts, Esq., who took the name of de Vismes. Andrew married a Miss Webb whose father was M. P. for Taunton. There were, besides, all Mrs. William de Vismes' Auriol relations, and the friendship between the cousins is very evident, for Mr. James de Vismes' third daughter, Anne, married into the Auriol family and his youngest daughter, Elizabeth, married the Rev. Edward Auriol Hay Drummond.

Burke says Mr. Gerard de Vismes was buried at Wimbledon, but gives no date. Dates and names he does not give had clearly not been given him.

In 1802, Elisée William de Vismes, brevet Colonel in the Coldstream Guards, married when he was forty-four, Mrs. Jane Halls, widow of a Colchester doctor. They had two sons, William and Henry.

Mr. James de Vismes is mentioned twice in Fosbrooke's "Abstracts of Records and Manuscripts respecting the County of Gloucester", published in 1807. On p. 216, he says that Mr. de Vismes,

a considerable proprietor, was asked for information as to the descent of an adjoining manor after it ceased to belong to Gloucester Abbey; to which he replied that he could give no satisfactory answer, not knowing in whom it was then vested: an answer which seems to have given the required information. On p. 245, it is stated that “Mrs. Jones died in 1806 when James de Vismes, Esq. succeeded as heir at law”. He was thus the one member of his family who was “seated” in an English county and really belonged to the Landed Gentry. Hence the arms shown in the plates accompanying Rietstab - Roland's “Armorial Général” are entered correctly as in Gloucestershire; also, of course, in Picardy.

In 1810, Mr. Gerard de Vismes' daughter Emily married the Hon. Henry Murray, C. B., Lt. 15th Light Dragoons, 5th son of David, 2nd Earl of Mansfield, afterwards Gen. Sir Henry Murray, K. C. B. (Lodge, Peerage and Baronetage), but had no children. (See also Burke op. cit.).

Mr. de Vismes lost his wife in 1818, to whose memory there is a tablet in Newent church. There are no arms there, and no names or arms at Beckenham.

Rietstab ignores the landless head of the de Vismes family; but Burke's account starts with his own contemporary, “Elisée William de Vismes, Esq. of Exmouth in the County of Devon commonly called the Count de Vismes, Chief of the name and Representative of the Family in England and France”. When the Count became “of Exmouth” is not stated; but that “Devismes” were at a dance in Ewen's Rooms on January 31st 1823, transpires in an amusing rhyming report of the fashionable society assembled on that occasion, full of intimate touches, showing that it was composed as a joke by one of themselves, and giving 45 names of the family parties who arrived “on their feet”, in sedans or in coaches; now a document of value for local history, fortunately included in “Memorials of Exmouth” collected by the Rev. William Webb, curate of Littleham-cum-Exmouth, from parish records, newspapers, etc., etc., and first published in 1872.

William and Henry de Vismes, then eighteen and fifteen years of age, may well have been at the dance. William married Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. William Palmer, D. D. Rector of Yarcombe, Somerset, and had two sons, Theodore William and Agilbert. Henry, who was in the army, married Caroline Sarah Sophia daughter of Capt. the Hon. Alexander Jones, R. N. son of Viscount Ranelegh. His son was named Henry Auriol Douglas, and in the parish registers of Withycombe Raleigh we find, "1836, Sophia Jane Mary daughter of Henry and Caroline Sarah Sophia, Count and Countess de Vismes"; signed "French Count, Fred. Trevor, Curate". Another daughter, Elizabeth Jane was not born in Exmouth, it seems. Both children were named for their grandmother.

James de Vismes seems to have given Mr. John Burke the particulars he has published and given them in writing, for Okle is unfortunately spelt "Ohill", and the coat of arms bears a crescent for a second son. There is no crescent on the arms of the Count on his table-tomb which is the most conspicuous of its kind in the churchyard of St. John's-in-the-Wilderness, Withycombe, because of the three coats displayed upon it.

They represent territorial claims rather than family relationships-L.R. Ponthieu, St. Valéry, Vismes: Ponthieu, claiming to have been sovereign counts of the province in the days of Charlemagne; St. Valéry, only part of their original domains when the Dukes of Burgundy were overlords; and the castle and land of Vismes, their ancestral home. He died in 1840 and the tomb bears the name of "E. William, Count de Vismes". The parish register records the burial of "Elisha de Vismes, Nov. 4. aged 83".

Slater's Directory for 1852-3 mentions "De Vismes, Countess, Jane, the Parade, Exmouth", a row of tall Georgian houses on one side of a road which a century before had been a creek in which people bathed at high tide from their gardens. The parish register records under Burials, 1856, "Jane de Vismes, the Parade, Exmouth, in Withycombe, Feb. 1. aged 88". Below the name of her husband on the tombstone is

inscribed, “Also of the Countess de Vismes”, the date and age and the first verse of the Magnificat. The “Gentleman’s Magazine” for that year has an obituary notice – “At Exmouth, aged 88, la Comtesse de Vismes, widow of Colonel Count de Vismes of the Coldstream Guards”.

Exmouth is the only place in England where the de Vismes’ coats of arms are displayed. They are significant of more than family pride - of the prosperity awaiting many a Huguenot family whose parents or grandparents, deliberately choosing exile for their faith, were able to bring away enough to begin the world again with. Very different the lot of these young people with their jobs to do and their entrée into good society, from that of the emigré dancing master, a pathetic figure characteristic of the period.

No name representing de Vismes is now in the 1940 London Directory, but Auriol is there, connected with engineering works and a rowing club.

To trace the ramifications of all these family histories since 1837 would be outside Lisbon’s interests; but as long as the stone inscribed “British Factory Hospital, erected by Gerard de Visme Esquire, MDCCXCIII” remains legible under one of the windows, someone will want to know more about the builder of St. George’s Parsonage.

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