

MACFARLANE.

Source: The Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments, Volume II (of 2) by Sir John Scott Keltie

Of the clan Macfarlane, Mr Skene gives the best account, and we shall therefore take the liberty of availing ourselves of his researches. According to him, with the exception of the clan Donnachie, the clan Parlan or Pharlan is the only one, the descent of which from the ancient earls of the district where their possessions were situated, may be established by the authority of a charter. It appears, indeed, that the ancestor of this clan was Gilchrist, the brother of Maldowen or Malduin, the third Earl of Lennox. This is proved by a charter of Maldowen, still extant, by which he gives to his brother Gilchrist a grant "de terris de superiori Arrochar de Luss;" and these lands, which continued in possession of the clan until the death of the last chief, have at all times constituted their principal inheritance.

But although the descent of the clan from the Earls of Lennox be thus established, the origin of their ancestors is by no means so easily settled. Of all the native earls of Scotland, those of this district alone have had a foreign origin assigned to them, though, apparently, without any sufficient reason. The first Earl of Lennox who appears on record is Aluin comes de Levenox, who lived in the early part of the 13th century; and there is some reason to believe that from this Aluin the later Earls of Lennox were descended. It is, no doubt, impossible to determine now who this Aluin really was; but, in the absence of direct authority, we gather from tradition that the heads of the family of Lennox, before being raised to the peerage, were hereditary seneschals of Strathearn, and bailies of the Abthantry of Dull, in Athole. Aluin was succeeded by a son of the same name, who is frequently mentioned in the chartularies of Lennox and Paisley, and who died before the year 1225. In Donald, the sixth earl, the male branch of the family became extinct. Margaret, the daughter of Donald, married Walter de Fassalane, the heir male of the family; but this alliance failed to accomplish the objects intended by it, or, in other words, to preserve the honours and power of the house of Lennox. Their son Duncan, the eighth earl, had no male issue; and his eldest daughter Isabella, having married Sir Murdoch Stuart, the eldest son of the Regent, he and his family became involved in the ruin which overwhelmed the unfortunate house of Albany. At the death of Isabella, in 1460, the earldom was claimed by three families; but that of Stewart of Darnley eventually overcame all opposition, and acquired the title and estates of Lennox. Their accession took place in the year 1488; upon which the clans that had been formerly united with the earls of the old stock separated themselves, and became independent.

Of these clans the principal was that of the Macfarlanes, the descendants, as has already been stated, of Gilchrist, a younger brother of Maldowen, Earl of Lennox. In the Lennox charters, several of which he appears to have subscribed as a witness, this Gilchrist is generally designated as frater comitis, or brother of the earl. His son Duncan also obtained a charter of his lands from the Earl of Lennox, and appears in the Ragman's roll under the title of "Duncan Macgilchrist de Levenaghies." From a grandson of this Duncan, who was called in Gaelic Parlan, or Bartholomew, the clan appears to have taken the surname of Macfarlane; indeed the connection of Parlan both with Duncan and with Gilchrist is clearly established by a charter granted to Malcolm Macfarlane, the son of Parlan, confirming to him the lands of Arrochar and others; and hence Malcolm may be considered as the real founder of the clan. He was succeeded by his son Duncan, who obtained from the Earl of Lennox a charter of the lands of Arrochar[174] as ample in its provisions as any that had been granted to his predecessors; and married a daughter of Sir Colin Campbell of Lochow, as appears from a charter of confirmation granted in his favour by Duncan, Earl of Lennox. Not long after his death, however, the ancient line of the Earls of Lennox became extinct; and the Macfarlanes having claimed the earldom as heirs male, offered a strenuous opposition to the superior pretensions of the feudal heirs. Their resistance, however, proved alike unsuccessful and disastrous. The family of the chief perished in defence of what they believed to be their just rights; the clan also suffered severely, and of those who survived the struggle, the greater part took refuge in remote parts of the country. Their destruction, indeed, would have been inevitable, but for the opportune support given by a gentleman of the clan to the Darnley family. This was Andrew Macfarlane, who, having married the daughter of John Stewart, Lord Darnley and Earl of Lennox, to whom his assistance had been of great moment at a time of difficulty, saved the rest of the clan, and recovered the greater part of their hereditary possessions. The

fortunate individual in question, however, though the good genius of the race, does not appear to have possessed any other title to the chiefship than what he derived from his position, and the circumstance of his being the only person in a condition to afford them protection; in fact, the clan refused him the title of chief, which they appear to have considered as incommunicable, except in the right line; and his son, Sir John Macfarlane, accordingly contented himself with assuming the secondary or subordinate designation of captain of the clan.

From this time, the Macfarlanes appear to have on all occasions supported the Earls of Lennox of the Stewart race, and to have also followed their banner in the field. For several generations, however, their history as a clan is almost an entire blank; indeed, they appear to have merged into mere retainers of the powerful family, under whose protection they enjoyed undisturbed possession of their hereditary domains. But in the sixteenth century Duncan Macfarlane of Macfarlane appears as a steady supporter of Matthew, Earl of Lennox. At the head of three hundred men of his own name, he joined Lennox and Glencairn in 1544, and was present with his followers at the battle of Glasgow-Muir, where he shared the defeat of the party he supported. He was also involved in the forfeiture which followed; but having powerful friends, his property was, through their intercession, restored, and he obtained a remission under the privy seal. The loss of this battle forced Lennox to retire to England; whence, having married a niece of Henry VIII., he soon afterwards returned with a considerable force which the English monarch had placed under his command. The chief of Macfarlane durst not venture to join Lennox in person, being probably restrained by the terror of another forfeiture; but, acting on the usual Scottish policy of that time, he sent his relative, Walter Macfarlane of Tarbet, with four hundred men, to reinforce his friend and patron; and this body, according to Holinshed, did most excellent service, acting at once as light troops and as guides to the main body. Duncan, however, did not always conduct himself with equal caution; for he is said to have fallen in the fatal battle of Pinkie, in 1547, on which occasion also a great number of his clan perished.

Andrew, the son of Duncan, as bold, active, and adventurous as his sire, engaged in the civil wars of the period, and, what is more remarkable, took a prominent part on the side of the Regent Murray; thus acting in opposition to almost all the other Highland chiefs, who were warmly attached to the cause of the queen. He was present at the battle of Langside with a body of his followers, and there "stood the Regent's part in great stead;" for, in the hottest of the fight, he came up with three hundred of his friends and countrymen, and falling fiercely on the flank of the queen's army, threw them into irretrievable disorder, and thus mainly contributed to decide the fortune of the day. The clan boast of having taken at this battle three of Queen Mary's standards, which, they say, were preserved for a long time in the family. Macfarlane's reward was not such as afforded any great cause for admiring the munificence of the Regent; but that his vanity at least might be conciliated, Murray bestowed upon him the crest of a [175] demi-savage proper, holding in his dexter hand a sheaf of arrows, and pointing with his sinister to an imperial crown, or, with the motto, This I'll defend. Of the son of this chief nothing is known; but his grandson, Walter Macfarlane, returning to the natural feelings of a Highlander, proved himself as sturdy a champion of the royal party as his grandfather had been an uncompromising opponent and enemy. During Cromwell's time, he was twice besieged in his own house, and his castle of Inveruglas was afterwards burned down by the English. But nothing could shake his fidelity to his party. Though his personal losses in adhering to the royal cause were of a much more substantial kind than his grandfather's reward in opposing it, yet his zeal was not cooled by adversity, nor his ardour abated by the vengeance which it drew down on his head.

Although a small clan, the Macfarlanes were as turbulent and predatory in their way as their neighbours the Macgregors. By the Act of the Estates of 1587 they were declared to be one of the clans for whom the chief was made responsible; by another act passed in 1594, they were denounced as being in the habit of committing theft, robbery, and oppression; and in July 1624 many of the clan were tried and convicted of theft and robbery. Some of them were punished, some pardoned; while others were removed to the highlands of Aberdeenshire, and to Strathaven in Banffshire, where they assumed the names of Stewart, M'Caudy, Greesock, M'James, and M'Innes.

Of one eminent member of the clan, the following notice is taken by Mr Skene in his work on the Highlands of Scotland. He says, "It is impossible to conclude this sketch of the history of the Macfarlanes without alluding to the

eminent antiquary, Walter Macfarlane of that ilk, who is as celebrated among historians as the indefatigable collector of the ancient records of the country, as his ancestors had been among the other Highland chiefs for their prowess in the field. The family itself, however, is now nearly extinct, after having held their original lands for a period of six hundred years."

Of the lairds of Macfarlane there have been no fewer than twenty-three. The last of them went to North America in the early part of the 18th century. A branch of the family settled in Ireland in the reign of James VII., and the headship of the clan is claimed by its representative, Macfarlane of Hunstown House, in the county of Dublin. The descendants of the ancient chiefs cannot now be traced, and the lands once possessed by them have passed into other hands.

Under the head of Garmoran, Mr Skene, following the genealogists, includes two western clans, viz., those of Campbell and Macleod. We shall, however, depart from Mr Skene's order, and notice these two important clans here, while treating of the clans of the western coasts and isles. Mr Skene,[173] on very shadowy grounds, endeavours to make out that there must have been an ancient earldom of Garmoran, situated between north and south Argyle, and including, besides the districts of Knoydart, Morar, Arisaig, and Moydart (forming a late lordship of Garmoran), the districts of Glenelg, Ardnamurchan, and Morvern. He allows, however, that "at no period embraced by the records do we discover Garmoran as an efficient earldom." As to this, Mr E. W. Robertson[174] remarks that "the same objection may be raised against the earldom of Garmoran which is urged against the earldom of the Merns, the total silence of history respecting it."