



Clan MacEwen

The MacEwens of Otter

Up to the thirteenth century these Scots were divided into a few great tribes, corresponding to the ancient maormorships or earldoms. Skene, in his "Table of the Descent of the Highland Clans," divides the Gallgael into five great clans, from whom sprung nine smaller clans. The clan system of later times had not appeared before this date. From the Siol Gillevray, the second of the great clans, he gives the Clans Neill, Lachlan, and Ewen: Chiefs MacNeill, MacLachlan, and MacEwen. He shows the Clan Lamond to have sprung from Siol Eachern, although elsewhere it would appear that Ferchard and Ewen, the ancestors of the Lamonds and MacEwens, were brothers. The genealogies given by Skene are taken from the Irish MSS. and Mac Firbis. He considers the later portion of the pedigrees, as far back as the common ancestor from whom the clan takes its name, to be tolerably well vouched for, and it may be held to be authentic.

Referring to the MacLachlans, MacEwens, and Lamonds, he says, "this group brings us nearer historical times. They are sprung from Aodha Alain, termed Buirche, called by Keltie De Dalan. This Aodha Alain, or De Dalan, was the son of Anradan, and grandson of Aodha Allamuin (Hugh Allaman), the then head of the great family of O'Neils, kings of Ireland, descended from Niall Glundubh, and the fabulous King Conn of the one hundred battles." Niall Glundubh lived between 850 and 900.

Aodha Alain, whose death is recorded in 1047, had three sons: Gillachrist, Neill, and Dunslebhe. Gillachrist had a son, Lachlan, who was the ancestor of the MacLachlans; Neill was the ancestor of the MacNeills. Dunslebhe had two sons, Ferchard, ancestor of the Lamonds, and Ewen, ancestor of the MacEwens. The four were kindred tribes; but if Ferchard and Ewen were brothers, the Lamonds and MacEwens were originally more closely allied to each other than they were to the MacLachlans and MacNeills. "These clans were in possession, in the twelfth century, of the greater part of the district of Cowal, from Toward Point to Strachur. The Lamonds were separated from the MacEwens by the river Kilfinnan, and the MacEwens from the MacLachlans by the stream which divides the parishes of Kilfinnan and Strath Lachlan. The MacNeills took possession of the islands of Barra and Gigha." [Keltie, History of the Highland Clans, Vol. ii.]

The MacEwens possessed a tract of country twenty-five miles square, and could probably bring out 200 fighting men. "On the conquest of Argyll by Alexander II., 1222, they suffered severely, and were involved in the ruin which overtook all the adherents of Somerled, except the MacNeills, who consented to hold their lands of the Crown, and the MacLachlans, who gained their former consequence by means of marriage with the heiress of the Lamonds." [Keltie, History of the Highland Clans, Vol. ii.] But, although the MacEwens suffered severely at this time, a remnant survived under their own chief at Otter, on the shores of Loch Fyne, where the last chief died two-and-a-half centuries afterwards.

MacEwen I. of Otter, the earliest chief of the clan of whom there is any mention, flourished about 1200. He was succeeded by Severan II. of Otter, who was probably the chief of 1222. The names of the third and fourth chiefs are lost. Gillespie V. of Otter assumed the chiefship about 1315. From this date there were four chiefs; Ewen VI., John VII., Walter VIII., and Sufnee or Swene, the IX. and last of the Otter chiefs. So late as 1750 it is recorded in the "Old Statistical Account of the Parish of Kilfinnan":- "On a rocky point on Loch Fyne there stood in 1700 the ruins of Castle MacEwen (Caisteal MhicEoghain), the stronghold of the earlier lords of the Otter." On the same authority, quoted by Skene, this MacEwen is described as the chief of the clan and proprietor of the northern division of the parish of Otter, and in the MS. of 1450, which contains the genealogy of Clann Eoghain na h-Oitrich, or Clan Ewen, the MacEwens are derived from Anradan, the common ancestor of the MacLachlans and the MacNeills.

In 1431-32 Swene MacEwen, IX. of Otter, granted a charter of certain lands of Otter to Duncan, son of Alexander Campbell. In 1432 he resigned the barony of Otter to James I., but received it anew from the king with remainder to Celestine Campbell, son and heir of Duncan Campbell of Lochow. After Swene's death, King James, in 1493, confirmed the grant to Archibald, Earl of Argyll, as heir to his father, Colin. In 1513 the barony of Otter was confirmed to Earl Colin by James V. In 1526 it was resigned by Earl Colin, and granted by James V. to Archibald, his son and heir apparent. In 1575 another Archibald Campbell appears in a charter as "of the Otter"; and in the Act of 1587 a Campbell is entered as "The Laird of Otter." So that after the middle of the fifteenth century the barony and estates of Otter passed and gave title to a branch of the Campbells, and the MacEwens became more than ever "children of the mist."

In consequence of their desperate condition the remnant sought new alliances, as a necessity of the times. Some remained in their own neighbourhood and joined the Campbells. In 1602 proof is allowed to Colquhoun of Luss to show that a number of MacGregors, MacLachlans, MacEwens, and MacNeills were "men" of the Earl of Argyll, and that the Earl was answerable for certain depredations committed by them and specified in the complaint. Others joined MacDougal Campbell of Craignish in Lorne. Some of the latter are said to have settled in Lochaber. Besides those who joined the Campbells, some, no doubt, allied themselves to other western clans, for the name was common at one time in the Western Highlands and Islands, especially in Skye. Other colonies were formed in the Lennox country, in Dumbar-tonshire and in Galloway, while the name is common in Lochaber in connection with the Camerons. This sept was known locally as the "Sliochd-Eoghain". The Muckly family--said to be descended from the Lorne-Macdougal branch--and other families, and many bearing the name still in Argyll and the Isles, are descendants of the old clansmen. [As an instance of the complete dispersion of the clan, Mr. H.W. Ewen writes that his family have been settled in South Lincolnshire since 1500.]

