

THE MACKENZIE GENEALOGY

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST THE

COLIN FITZGERALD

ORIGINS

by

Alan McKenzie FSA(Scot)

Commissioner for the Clan Mackenzie in Canada

Lieutenant to Cabarfeidh

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The Case for and Against the Colin Fitzgerald Origins.**

When we start to talk about the ticklish subject of ancestry we get

into great arguments about the origins of different clans. This certainly applies to the Mackenzies. You may have read books or articles that claim the Mackenzies descend from one Colin Fitzgerald, an Irishman no less! Other expert sources tell you that this is nonsense, a piece of spurious ancestor invention. So what can we believe? Who is to be trusted? What is the evidence? I shall attempt to put forward some of the facts, traditions and legends so that you may independently decide what, if anything, you wish to believe.

A perfectly good place to start is a little book written in 1669. It is entitled, *The Genealogie of the Mackenzies, Preceeding the Year 1661*. This book was written by “a Person of Qualitie”, believed to be the first Earl of Cromartie. William Fraser in his volumes, *The Earls of Cromartie*, says the author is well known to have been Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat, afterwards created Earl of Cromartie. Where extracts from such ancient sources are used I shall use modern English and punctuation, where appropriate, to aid ease of understanding.

Here then is an extract of Tarbat's Genealogy:

“The family of the Geraldines was transplanted from Florence to Bretaine in two brethren of that name, who, accompanying William the Conqueror from France to the conquest of England in 1066, were by him rewarded, among other chiefs, by a share in the purchase.

They settled in the west of England, where they lived in the duty of peaceable obedience till Glory called them with Strongbow to Ireland in assistance of Dermond, King of Leinster, in which war they

attained to such repute by the valour of Maurice Fitz-Gerald, who was the next in power to Pembroke, that he and others of his relations were eyed by the King as fit to attempt, or at least to sufficient to begin a conquest for him of that isle. Nor did they fail his expectation. That family, and that only, at first acquiring and ever retaining what they conquered there.

The records of England and Ireland are stuffed with the Geraldines' actions for their prince and country and their sufferings unjustly by courtiers' malice as often noticed. How often does Ophaly retain, as at first his predecessors gained Ireland, and as often do the state ministers, who were but hearers of their glorious actions, triumph over them by pretences of legal power.

Yet the fate of the Geraldines was too strong for their enemies' malice, and they were never cast down by them, but that their rise was in a greater glory.

The greatest stroke that ever reached them, was that given by Sir Richard Bochell alias Capell, as Holinshead notes. He slew John Fitz-Thomas, then chief of the Geraldines, (and in his Irish Chronicle called Lord John), together with Maurice, his eldest son, a.d. 1261.

His other two sons, **Colin** and Galen, fled to Scotland, where they were graciously received by King Alexander, and in the next year, 1262, they valourously assisted at the notable defeat given to the

Danes at (the battle of) Largs. This is brought down to us, not only by unquestioned and constant tradition, but in a fragment of the records of Icolmkil that **is preserved by Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat**, where mention is made of the most eminent actors in that battle. They are named with the Stewart, the Cumyn, Walter Stewart, Earl of Carrick and March, the thane of Argyll, Robert de Lowden, James de Striveling, Walter Cumyn, Thomas Maltiver:

“Peregrinus et Hybernus nobilis ex familia **Geraldinorum**, qui proximo anno ab Hybernia pulsus, apud Regem benigne acceptus, hucusque in curia permansit, et in praefato proelio strenue pugnavit.”

(viz; among those who fought at the battle of Largs, was a distinguished Irish stranger of the family of the Geraldines, who, having been driven from Ireland, was kindly received by the king, and had hitherto remained at the court.)

From this Battle of Largs, Walter Stewart was sent with forces to reduce the Isles then associated with the Norwegians. To retain them in obedience, he built a Fort in Kintail, which took its name from its intended use, and was called the Danting Isle, fitly situated to attack any who stirred in a great part of the Isles and in it they placed **Colin Fitzgerald** with a garrison. This, as it is transferred by tradition, so the said fragment asserts the same with the account of that expedition made to the Isles, speaking of those who accompanied Walter Stewart, amongst

others names this Colin, with this note -

“de quo supra in proelio ad Larges, qui postea se fortiter contra Insulanos gessit, et ibi inter eos in praesidium relictus” (viz; “the same Colin who fought at Largs afterwards fought bravely against the Islanders and was left among them with a garrison”)

Being left in Kintail, tradition says he married the daughter of McMahan, heritor of the half of Kintail. This McMahan, which is ineptly anglicized as Matheson, is descended from the ancient Fitz-Ursili or Ursini of Ireland, and are of the Roman lineage. The other half of Kintail at this time belonged to O'Beolan, whose chief, called Ferquhar was created Earl of Ross, and his lands of Kintail were given by the King to **Colin Fitz-Gerald**. This tradition carries enough of probability to found historical creditability - but I find no charter of these lands propoiting any such grounds. For the first charter of Kintail is given by this King Alexander to this Colin in 1266. It being the first, I shall relate its full tenor:

“Alexander Dei gracia Rex Scottorum, omnibus probis Hominibus Tocius terre sue Clericis et Laicis, Salutem, Sciant Presentes et futuri, nos pro fideli servitio nobis navat. per **Colinum Hybernum**, tam in bello quam in pace, ideo dedisse et hac Presenti Carta nostra Concessisse dicto Colino et ejus successoribus Totas terras de Kintaile Tenend, de nobis et successoribus nostris in Liberam Baroniam cum guardia Redden. servitium forensecum et fidelitatem. Test. Archibaldo Episcop. Moravien.

Waltero Stewart, Henrico de Balcock Camerar.
Arnold de Campan. Tho. Hostiar. vicecomite de
Inverness. Apud Kincardine IX die Jan. Anno Regni
Nostri XVI.”

(Translation: “Alexander, by the grace of God, King
of Scots, to all good men of his whole land,
churchmen and laymen, greeting. Know all men,
present and to come, that, for the faithful service
rendered to me, both in war and in peace, by Colin
the Irishman, I have given, and, by this my present
charter, have granted to the said Colin and his
successors, the whole lands of Kintail, to be held of
us and our successors in free barony, with ward.
Rendering forinsec service, and fidelity. Witnesses—
Andrew bishop of Moray, Walter Stewart, Henry of
Baliol, chamberlain, Arnold of Campan, Thomas
Dorward, sheriff of Inverness. At Kincardine, the 9th
day of January, in the sixteenth year of the reign of
our lord the king.”)

This Kincardin is that probably on Dee, for about this
time it is reported that the King, hunting in the forest
of Mar, a hart pursued him, and with probability
would have hurt him, if **Colin Fitz-Gerald** had not
killed it in its approach with an arrow. From this
event the King allowed a stag's head to be his coat of
armour supported by two greyhounds - which all
descending of him have ever since carried.

This Colin had a son by McMahan's daughter, whom
he named Kenneth after Kenneth Matheson his
father-in-law. Colin was killed in Lochalsh by the
McMahons, envying his succession to their old

heritage, but the garrison, consisting mostly of McRaes and McLennans, did so violently defend their young master's right that they retained his possessions for him.”

So what do we make of this history claiming the first Mackenzie was a Colin Fitzgerald? There are a number of attractive aspects of this history. Firstly, the Geraldine family was very powerful, being closely allied to William the Conqueror and also Strongbow, the nickname of Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke (1130-1176). Strongbow was an Anglo-Norman lord who conquered Ireland for the English. To claim relationship with these Geraldines would have added much to the status of the Mackenzies in years past when these things were important to one's prestige and power.

Secondly, we rely not only on the power of tradition, but a fragment of a record from Icolmkill, the Isle of Iona, where all of the ancient Scottish Celtic kings and chiefs were buried. Tarbat tells us that this important piece of evidence was in the safe hands of Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat! We will talk more about Sir George later, he was to become Lord Tarbat and finally the 1st Earl of Cromartie and is ancestor to our present chief. This Icolmkill fragment refers to *Familia Geraldinorum*, or, the family of the Geraldines.

The traditions continue with Colin being granted possession of the Fort in Kintail, which of course refers to Eilean Donan Castle, the ancient Mackenzie stronghold held by the clan until the Battle of Glenshiel in 1719, when it was finally destroyed by the English. The present castle is a modern reconstruction of that early fortress. So far this fits nicely with clan traditions and history, as does the close association with the Mathesons, a powerful Clan in those days.

Further “proof” is added with the full recital of the charter of the

lands of Kintail to *Colinum Hybernum*, presumably Colin of Ireland. And then the narrative explains the reasons for the granting of the stags head to the Mackenzie chief, which remains in the coat of arms of our present chief. Another constant tradition which is evidenced by the historical coat of arms of the early Mackenzie chiefs. And this Colin even has a son, Kenneth, from whom the name Mackenzie emanates. The association with Eilean Donan castle, the charter of lands in Kintail, and the subsequent rise to power of the Mackenzie clan, otherwise previously unknown to history, leads to a strong feeling that this is a very believable genealogy.

So why is there a problem? Why can we not rely upon this “person of quality” who wrote this appealing narrative way back in the middle of the seventeenth century?

Who started the argument I cannot say. Certainly there were two prominent historians in the nineteenth century who had a lot to say on the subject of Colin Fitz-Gerald and his association with the Mackenzie clan. The first was Alexander Mackenzie, a prolific writer of Clan histories, (including the Mackenzies), and many other books on Highland matters as well as being editor of the Celtic Magazine. The other opponent of the Geraldine ancestry was William F. Skene, FSA(Scot), a highly respected historian. He wrote *The Highlanders of Scotland* published in 1837. Skene, like Alexander Mackenzie, did not like the Geraldine connection because it was in contradiction of what is sometimes referred to as the 1450 manuscript, or MS 1450 (or MS 1467, because of the date written on it.) This ancient manuscript details the history of a number of clans including the Mackenzies and since it was written some 200 years prior to the Tarbat effort it has the benefit of greater age and tradition behind it. Skene had the following to say on the subject of the Mackenzie genealogy:

“The Mackenzies have long boasted of their descent from the great Norman family of Fitzgerald in Ireland, and in support of this origin they produce a fragment of the records of Icolmkill, and a charter by Alexander III to Colin Fitzgerald, the supposed progenitor of the family, of the lands of Kintail. At first sight these documents might appear conclusive, but, independently of the somewhat suspicious circumstance, that while these papers have been most freely and generally quoted, **no one has ever yet declared that he has seen the originals**, the fragment of the Icolmkill record merely says, that among the actors in the battle of Largs, fought in 1262, was (here follows the Latin text stated earlier), giving not a hint of his having settled in the Highlands, or of his having become the progenitor of any Scottish family whatever; while as to the supposed charter of Alexander III, it is equally inconclusive, as it merely grants the lands of Kintail *Colino Hiberno*, the word *Hibernus* having at that time come into general use as denoting the Highlanders.....: but inconclusive as it is, this charter cannot be admitted at all, **as it bears the most palpable marks of having been a forgery of later times, and one by no means happy in its execution.**

How such a tradition of the origin of the Mackenzies ever could have arisen, it is difficult to say; but the fact of their native and Gaelic descent is completely set at rest by the manuscript of 1450, which has already so often been the means of detecting the falsehood of the foreign origins of other clans. In that

MS, the antiquity of which is perhaps as great, and its authenticity certainly much greater than the fragments of the Icolmkill records, the Mackenzies are brought from a certain Gilleon-og, or Colin the younger, a son of “Gilleon na h'airde,” the ancestor of the Rosses.

The descendants of *Gilleon na h'airde* we have already identified with the ancient tribe of Ross; and it follows therefore, that the Mackenzies must always have formed an integral part of that tribe.”

So speaks the great Skene. Clearly the 1450 manuscript is, to him, the key to the solution. Added to which we have a strange case of forgery and implications of ancestor faking!

The other nineteenth century unbeliever, Alexander Mackenzie, goes into great detail picking his way through the 1450 manuscript, which he considers the final word in the ancestry issue, while tearing to pieces any possibility of the Geraldine descent. A construction of the likely family tree of the Mackenzies, based on the 1450 manuscript, combined with Mackenzie Clan traditions and linking them to the old earls of Ross is included as an appendix to this article. There is no sign of any Colin in the 1450 manuscript, though interestingly enough Skene considers Gilleon as a translation of Colin. The family tree in the appendix is generally accepted by historians today as the most likely Mackenzie genealogy, and is used by the present Earl of Cromartie in his book, *A Highland History*. But we have not quite finished with our investigations!

Alexander Mackenzie takes up the point of the fragment of the Icolmkill record, which he translates as follows; “Colin, an Irish stranger and nobleman, of the family of the Geraldines who, in the

previous year, had been driven from Ireland, and had been well received by the King, remained up to this time at Court, and fought bravely in the aforesaid battle.” Mackenzie states that this is no proof at all! All this does is say that Colin, an Irishman was present at Largs. Good point, it hardly seems the stuff to convince anyone of your family tree! Mackenzie goes on to say that Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat, later first Earl of Cromartie, was the “inventor of the Fitzgerald theory”. And if the same man was the *persone of qualitie* who wrote *The Genealogie of the Mackenzies*, then the plot thickens.

We should, however be mindful that as an historian, Alexander Mackenzie was often careless in his facts. He must have been under great time pressure in the attempt to publish his numerous output of books and articles. This was confirmed by Monica Clough, the knowledgeable historian on matters relating to the Mackenzie clan. Even the late Roderick Grant Francis Mackenzie, the Earl of Cromartie and Mackenzie Chief referred to Mackenzie in a Tulach Ard magazine as “that so-called historian”!

Alexander Mackenzie did nevertheless make a couple of important points against the Fitzgerald theory. The first was the following quotation from a Dr Carruthers, whom he referred to as an independent and impartial writer:

“The Chivalrous and romantic origin of the Clan Mackenzie, though vouched for by certain charters and local histories, is now believed to be fabulous. It seems to have been first advanced in the 17th century, when there was an absurd desire and ambition in Scotland to fabricate or magnify all ancient and lordly pedigrees. Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat, the Lord Advocate, and Sir George

Mackenzie, the first Earl of Cromartie, were ready to swear to the descent of the Scots nation from Gathelus, son of Cecrops, King of Athens, and Scota his wife, daughter of Pharaoh, King of Egypt; and, of course, they were no less eager to claim a lofty and illustrious lineage for their own clan. But authentic history is silent as to the two wandering Irish Knights, and the reputed charter (the elder one being palpably erroneous) cannot now be found. For two centuries after the reigns of the Alexanders, the district of Kintail formed part of the lordship of the Isles, and was held by the Earls of Ross. The Mackenzies, however, can be easily traced to their wild mountainous and picturesque country - *Ceann-da-Shaill*- the Head of the two Seas.”

The second blow against the Geraldines seems more persuasive:

“There is one other fact which alone would be almost conclusive against the Fitzgerald theory. Not a single man of the name Colin is found, either among the chiefs or members of the clan from their first appearance in history until we come to Colin “Cam” Mackenzie, XI of Kintail, who succeeded in June 1568 - a period of three hundred years after the alleged date of the reputed charter to Colin Fitzgerald.”

Mackenzie goes on to say that Colin “Cam” Mackenzie's mother was the niece of Colin, 3rd Earl of Argyll, and it was from this source he was given the name Colin. It was certainly the common practice up to relatively modern times to name sons with an eye on their pedigree and the honouring of ancestors. That no Colin was

around in the Mackenzie ranks for such a long period of time is certainly strong evidence against Colin Fitzgerald.

Let us now have a look at the opening paragraphs of a book entitled, *Some MacKenzie Pedigrees*, written by a notable 20th century historian, Duncan Warrand. He has a few well chosen words on the Mackenzie pedigree.

“It is not too much to say that the histories of the Clan Mackenzie, histories compiled for the most part in the dangerous seventeenth century, are wholly unreliable, at all events prior to 1475. The late Sheriff Macphail, whose knowledge of and sympathy with the Highlands have been amply recognised, was clearly of this opinion. “In particular.” he wrote, “it may be pointed out that there is nothing to justify the alleged Geraldine origin of the Mackenzies, and also that **there is no record evidence for the existence of any of their alleged chiefs prior to Kenneth-abhlair**, who rose to a position of some importance towards the end of the fifteenth century on the fall of John, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross”. (1475).

The absence of record evidence in these early times may not in itself be conclusive proof of a fabulous genealogy, but it is at least highly suspicious, the more so that the early charters, once cited in histories, not only do not now exist, but, if they did, are almost certainly spurious. Even possession of Eilean Donan Castle, prior to the latter part of the fifteenth century, must be a matter of conjecture. Sheriff Macphail was of the opinion that Kenneth-abhlair was a native, not of Kintail, but of Easter Ross,

and a Gaelic manuscript, cited in the article upon Seaforth in *The Scots Peerage*, traces the origin of the clan to the Aird, in the neighbourhood of Beauly, a district intimately associated with the Frasers of Lovat.”

On this basis, therefore, it seems we cannot rely on any history of the Mackenzies prior to the end of the fifteenth century. This is because there is no written evidence to speak of and reliance has to be placed upon legend and clan traditions handed down from generation to generation. There only remains the 1450 manuscript, to which we must now turn our attention. This manuscript is referred to in a most interesting article published in 1981 in an Inverness Field Club book entitled, *The Middle-Ages in the Highlands*. The article in question is by David Sellar and entitled, *Highland Family Origins - Pedigree Making and Pedigree Faking*. Here are some extracts from this very detailed and appropriate article.

“The most important single source for the origins of the later highland clans is the collection of pedigrees preserved in the manuscript now generally known, from its supposed date of composition, as *MS 1467*. *MS 1467* gives the earliest and in many cases the only surviving account, within a purely Gaelic cultural context, of the descent of many families. Unfortunately, it is a difficult and suspect guide, rendered the more so by the form in which it has been twice edited. The manuscript itself bears every sign, where some measure of comparison with other sources is possible, of having been copied carelessly and in haste. In addition, nineteenth century scholars, finding parts of it difficult to read, stained the manuscript with chemical, which may have assisted

them, but has certainly not helped later generations. *MS 1467* was edited by W.F.Skene in 1839 in *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*. The transcriptions given there are unreliable and sometimes ludicrous; yet these are the transcriptions relied on by Skene in his *Highlanders of Scotland*. To confuse matters further, the MS is referred to in *Collectanea* not as "*MS 1467*" but as "*MS 1450*". This has led not a few subsequent clan historians to believe that two manuscripts exist, sometimes in conflict."

Sellar is correct. I, for one, had believed that there were two manuscripts and even referred to them in a Newsletter, though I was confused by them. No wonder since there was only one manuscript! Later in the same article Sellar touches upon the Geraldine controversy with an interesting comment:

"Families of undoubted Celtic descent began to claim Norman ancestors. The best known example of this trend is the manipulation of the Mackenzie pedigree, exposed by Skene and others long ago. According to *MS 1467* the Mackenzies, together with the Mathesons and the Clan Gillanders, claim a common descent from one Gilleoin of the Aird, who is descended in turn from Cormac, son of Airbertach.....In the revised account of the Mackenzie origins - probably attributable to that **arch-fabricator, the first Earl of Cromartie** - Gilleoin is transformed into Colin Fitzgerald, a younger member of the great Anglo-Irish house of the Geraldines. Colin arrives in Scotland, assists Alexander III at the battle of Largs, and is made to marry the daughter of one Kenneth Matheson. By

this supposed marriage one link at least was preserved with older Gaelic tradition - the kinship of the Mackenzies and the Mathesons - and one clue left as to how the pedigree had been fabricated.”

Now hold on there! The Earl of Cromartie is an ancestor of our present Mackenzie clan chief - what's all this about an arch-fabricator? Sellar does not elaborate, though he explains why the clans might have been motivated to play with their pedigree:

“The quality of a family's pedigree - and very often that meant its length - reflected, supported and sometimes even explained its position in society. The keeping of the family pedigree was a function of a member of the learned professional classes, the *seanchaidh*, whose "work was to hand down to posterity the valorous actions, conquests, battles, skirmishes, marriages and relations of the predecessors by repeating and singing the same at births, baptisms, marriages, feasts and funerals....." In Gaelic society, a pedigree was a political statement, and not infrequently an exercise in political propaganda. Because antiquity was at a premium, forgery and manipulation, some of it very skilful, became commonplace.”

Ah! Now this perhaps starts to make some sense since Sir George Mackenzie did not become Viscount Tarbat, Lord Macleod and Castlehaven and later, 1st Earl of Cromartie just because he had a fine personality, which he did. George was a very ambitious, capable and politically astute gentleman who was very distinguished in his time becoming Lord-Justice-General and Clerk-Register of Scotland. He was also a noted scholar and many of his letters contain Latin

phrases. One early letter to a friend was written entirely in Latin. He was a man who was used to having his own way. He was active in putting Spence and Carstairs to the torture of the boot and thumbscrew after Argyll's rebellion. He moved in high circles and became a favourite at the court of Queen Anne. Through her he became Secretary of State for Scotland and Earl of Cromartie. Few people have ever doubted George's scholarly and political ability, but it was believed by some that he got to the top through careful scheming and politicking and by other helpful means. For instance, Carstairs states that "he habitually falsified the minutes of Parliament, and recorded in its name decisions and orders never really made." That is a particularly serious accusation which hinges upon our ability to believe that the documents in his possession were not forgeries. His reputation for changing sides so often led Lockhart of Carnwath to comment "some do compare him to an eel!" His Latin ability could certainly have been useful in putting together the necessary documents to prove Colin Fitzgerald's existence.

In this respect a most interesting comment is made by William Fraser in *The Earls of Cromartie*. Referring to Skene's comment that no one has ever seen the original charter and it is a forgery of later times, Fraser replies:

"Mr Skene appears to have been unaware that the charter is given 'ad longum' by Lord Cromartie in his *History of the Mackenzies*. He later goes on to say that "the editor of the *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* prints the charter from a copy of the seventeenth century, said to be in the handwriting of the first Earl of Cromartie."

This charter seems to tie very closely to the first Earl!

Modern clan books disavow the Geraldine theory, presumably following the devastating comments of Skene and Alexander Mackenzie. The doubts expressed about the 1st Earl of Cromartie and how he managed to get hold of the controversial charter encourages us to follow Skene's opinion that the Geraldine connection is fabulous.

That really might have be the end of this subject except for a find at Castle Leod. Down in the "Mackenzie Room" in the lower level of the castle is a large table on which visitors can see a number of detailed genealogical tables, listing hundreds of Mackenzies who descend from the earliest known Mackenzie chief. The huge charts are known as the Findon Tables after Lewis Mark Mackenzie of Findon who prepared them. His death at an early age frustrated his aim to write a history of the clan, and it was his brother, Major James D. Mackenzie of Findon, who collected the work of his late brother and published them in 1879. The Findon tables start with Colin Fitzgerald! There is no apology for this, Findon is categoric in his belief in the Geraldine connection. He is also aware of the detractors such as Skene and Alexander Mackenzie and even refers to them in his manuscript. The photocopy of Findon's manuscript was lying, faded on top of the table where the genealogical tables lay. I made a copy of this fascinating book since for the first time since the Mackenzie Genealogy of 1669 that we see a strong justification for the Fitzgerald origin.

Why should we accept Findon's version? Does he have better evidence? Well, for a start, Lewis Mackenzie worked for many years on his tables. He spoke to many of his name and had the advantage of possessing or referring to copies of most of the manuscripts of Mackenzie history existing. He worked for long periods at his researches in the British Museum, in the Register House and Advocates' Library in Edinburgh. In other words this massive work

was concentrated solely on Mackenzie genealogy by an educated and thoughtful genealogist over a very long period of time. It is doubtful whether any other Mackenzie genealogy can compare with this for studious detail, and that includes Alexander Mackenzie's own huge work, *History of the MacKenzies*, published in the late nineteenth century.

Here then are Findon's incisive comments about the Geraldine controversy:

“I have deemed it necessary to commence with the name of the first recorded ancestor of the sept, Colin or Cailean; for whether this individual be called thus, or *Calinus Hibernus* (that is, Colin Fitzgerald), there seems no greater doubt of his actual existence than of that of his immediate successor, whatever be the derivation of this Colin.

In a land where such a medley of blood existed as in the Highlands, where races Pictish and Celtic, Irish and Teutonic, Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman, settled and intermarried, it is vain to seek an autochthonous origin; and if, guided by what has been correctly phrased “the enduring character of Highland tradition,” we incline to adopt the generally received derivation from Ireland (from which country indeed proceeded the whole nation of the Scots, and with which constant intercommunion prevailed), the charge of a **want of patriotism**, in ascribing any particular immigration from Ireland, is difficult to understand.

Nor is it correct to allege that the foreign deviation

was an invention of the seventeenth century, for the writer of the McRa MS, (who died in 1704) speaks of this tradition of the Mackenzies being “descended of the Geraulds” as already an ancient one, and commonly accepted, at the end of the sixteenth century.

The Fitzgerald derivation is given in the MS of Dr George Mackenzie (the writer and historian of 1708, who was nephew to Kenneth, third Earl of Seaforth), at once the most voluminous and the most exact and valuable of all the Clan histories; and also by the Duke of Leinster in his history of the Earls of Kildare; it is as follows: [See next page]

It will be observed that Colin Fitzgerald is now Gerald “Callan” Fitzgerald and is further described as the “first of Kintail”. The Earl of Cromartie, the previous chief of the Mackenzie Clan, also lists Colin of Kintail, but shows him as a descendant of “Kenneth, first Chief of Kintail”.

Findon has by no means finished in his justification of his Colin Fitzgerald ancestry. He was well aware of the various disputes raging and he addresses these in a forthright and academic manner:

“Recent scepticism has, however, been busy with the name of our hero, Colin, and the particular charter in his favour quoted by Lord Tarbat, afterwards first Earl of Cromartie, and others, has been condemned as a forgery on account of a discrepancy thought to be found by the compilers of the *Origines Parochiales Scotiae* between the names and dates of one of the witnesses. The fact of the ancient record of

Iona (Icolmkill) also having ever existed is doubted, although Tarbat, an authority on subjects of antiquity, quotes it and the charter as having seen them; and Crawford (a careful antiquary also) writes: "The original charter of the lands of Kintail by King Alexander III, to this 'Colino Hybernio', **is in the hands** of the Earl of Seaforth." Again, Dr George Mackenzie, the author, writing about 1708 to his relative, William, fifth Earl of Seaforth, says, regarding the charter of 1266, "Which charter is still in your possession."

It were reasonable to expect that if the charter in question were forged, those who invented it should have worded it in a manner more strictly applicable to Colin Fitzgerald than as it appears. Its very ambiguity is in its favour. The fact of Andrew, Bishop of Moray's death occurring in 1242 is not proof enough of his name being forged as witness, since the scribe may possibly have entered the name of that prelate by mistake for that of Archibald, his successor - signatures in those days being effected by means of crosses, and such errors sometimes happening.

Certain it is, that from early times the tradition has existed of one Colin, of the family of Gerald, who, coming from Ireland, obtained the lands of Kintail, and was ancestor of the clan Kenneth; while old local Kintail story told of the rescue of the king at the hunting-party at Linesse, on the Croe river of Kintail, and of the consequent adoption of the *Cabar Feidh* crest; they related his marriage in Lochalsh, close by,

and by the murder of his first-born son at the place still pointed out as *Glaic Chailean*; and this was the commonly accepted genesis of the race, at the end of the sixteenth

THE FITZGERALD ORIGINS

1057. OTHO or OTHER, deriving from the Gherardini, or Geraldini family of Florence, an honorary Baron of England, 1057 (Dugdale)

|
1078. WALTER, Ist Constable of Windsor Castle ("Domesday Book," quoted in "Annals of Windsor," vol.i)

|
1094-1116. GERALD FITZ-WALTER, m. Nesta, d. Rhys, Prince of S.Wales (the mother of Robert of Gloucester by King Henry I.)

|
d.1177. MAURICE FITZ-GERALD, m. Alice, d. Arnulph de Montgomery (who led the Norman centre at Hastings), made Baron of Offaly by Strongbow, 1176.

1.
|
GERALD, I. Baron Offaly, Ancestor of the Earls of Kildare and Dukes of Leinster. d. 1205

Great,

Morrie,

Naas.

2.
|
WILLIAM, II. Baron of Naas, m. Alicia, sister of Strongbow.
|
d. 1213. THOMAS "the

m. Ellinor, d. Sir Wm.

in Munster, III. Baron of

1. _____ 2. _____
_____ 3.

JOHN FITZGERALD	MAURICE FITZGERALD	GERALD
killed at the	postea Earl of Desmond.	“CALLAN”
Battle of Callan,		
FITZGERALD, 1262		
Progenitor of the		
MacKenzies I. of Kintail.		
		d. 1278.

century, so it continued in credit till recent times.

And in place of this long-accepted origin, what do its opponents offer us? Just this - that in an ancient parchment found in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, in 1833, upon which a date of 1467 is traced, among some crude lists of families thereon deciphered, there appears in one list of a *Clann Cainig*, and also in one of a *Clann Anrias*, or Ross, the name *Gilleoine na h'airde*, or Gilleoine of the Aird; from which it is argued that the Mackenzies and the Rosses had this individual, and not Colin, for a common ancestor.

It should be noted, however, that in one case, from Gilleoine to Murdoch MacKenneth (who died 1375), eight generations are given; while from the same man to Paul MacTire (date 1366), no less than **thirteen** are detailed, which latter should point to a Gilleoine some five generations further off. Nor does it enhance the credit of these Gaelic MS. pedigrees to find one of them tracing the family of a Campbell in sixty-four generations up to Adam of Paradise!"

This is pretty punishing stuff from Mackenzie of Findon. He has clearly done his homework to the point of expertise, and in the process clears the much-abused name of the first Earl of Cromartie, whom he regards as "an authority on subjects of antiquity". He now moves in for a series of knockout blows:

"A few more words respecting the much-vaunted MS of the Advocates' Library. A highly analytical writer, the author of a dissertation on *The Clan Battle at*

Perth in 1396 (published London, 1874), rejects the authority of this document in these words:

‘The MS of 1450 is a record supposed to have been compiled by one Maclauchlan, of the genealogies of most of the Highland clans, which it carries back to various early periods. In the first place, the very facts of its giving genealogies to **most** of the clans, and of its carrying back some of these genealogies to a period considerably anterior to the year 1000, almost amount to proofs of its unworthiness. Its discoverer (in 1833), Mr Skene, admits indeed that it is not to be relied on before A.D. 1000, but there is no good reason for believing it to be entirely correct one, or even two or three hundred years later. The genealogies of the *Seannachies* are fully as much entitled to belief as those of the supposed Maclauchlan - perhaps more so, for the reason that they are generally confined to a single clan; and if their testimony is rejected, why should that of Maclauchlan be admitted? Again, the genealogies which the MS gives of the various clans often differ very considerably from those held by the clans themselves, some of which are of as great antiquity, and therefore entitled to as great regard as the MS itself. It seems evident, on the whole, that Mr Skene has attached too much weight to this MS of 1450; and that, whatever its value as a specimen of ancient calligraphy,

it is of small value as a record of genealogy.'

Dr Browne remarks (*History of the Highlands, 1848*),
'Whatever weight may be given to the MS of 1450
(or 1467) when supported by collateral evidence, it is
not alone sufficient authority to warrant anything
beyond a mere conjectural inference.'

Findon continues with his onslaught and concludes that oral traditions are the most reliable guide since Highland families recited the genealogies for many generations at burials, baptisms and marriages and thus endured ever-freshened traditions.

Although Findon has many other things to say beyond the limited scope of this article, it is appropriate to give him the last word on one of Alexander Mackenzie's criticisms - that no other Colins appeared for 300 years in the Mackenzie clan. This is what Findon has to say on that point:

“As a proof of the non-existence of the first Colin, it is cited that none of his successors bore this name till the days of Colin Cam Mackenzie, XI of Kintail, circa 1550; but we ought not to ignore the old Kintail tradition of the killing of Cailean, eldest son of the first Colin, ostensibly because he was not named after his mother's father, Kenneth McMahan, as had been promised - a murder, the memory of which was perpetuated in Lochalsh by the locality of Glaic Chailean - a sad warning against the name, and one likely to be efficacious for many later years. Dr George Mackenzie gives the following origin of the name: That a battle took place in 1262 at **Callan** in Ireland, between the family of Fitzgerald of Desmond

and the mountaineers, at which one of the sons of Thomas Fitzgerald was killed, and the other, Gerald, was called, from his valour at this fight, Gerald "Callan", anglicised **Colin**, and in Gaelic, Cailean. Hence the singularity of the name, which would not, in such a case, be repeated."

A final summation should be left, appropriately, to the late chief of the Clan Mackenzie, the Rt.Hon. Roderick Grant Francis Mackenzie, the Earl of Cromartie. He addresses this issue in his book, *A Highland History*, published in 1979:

"The Clan histories and tradition state that the Mackenzie Chief of this period was Colin and there are two theories as to his identity, either of which may be right. Sir George Mackenzie, Viscount Tarbat who wrote a Clan History in the 17th century maintains that Colin was a younger son of the great Celto-Norman Geraldine family in Ireland and married an heiress daughter of MacMathan (Matheson) Chief of the Clan and its septs in the west, closely connected with Applecross and Clan Anrias, and that through this lady he came into possession of Kintail and the Chiefship of the clan or sept in that district.

The other theory is that Colin was by birth a Mackenzie, and a very attractive legend tells us about him. Colin was born during the reign of Alexander II (1214-49) and his father, the Chief of Clan Kenneth, desired to imbue his only son with supernatural powers, so in order to accomplish this gave him his first drink from the skull of a Raven, and when the boy grew up he discovered that he could understand

the language of the birds. One day a flock of starlings settled on the roof of the Chief's `dun' on Eilean Donan, and made so much noise that they annoyed the old man who told his son to go and find out what all the disturbance was about. On his return the young man reported that the conversation among the starlings was to the effect that one day the Chief would find himself in the position of servitor to his own son, while still residing in his own castle. This and perhaps the youth's uppishness rankled with the old man, so that shortly afterwards Colin took himself off to France where his powers greatly impressed the King, whose court he rid of a plague of sparrows. For this service he was presented with a fully equipped galley in which he visited many lands, including one in which he gained merit by ridding the court of a plague of rats, through the medium of a cat which always accompanied him on board.

Now whether Colin was a Geraldine or Mackenzie born, his possible foreign experiences and the strategic position of his territory made him useful to Alexanders II and III in their struggle with the Norsemen, so that he was told to re-build and modernize Eilean Donan Castle as a strong point against their raids. It is while hunting with the former monarch in the Royal Forest of Mar that he was able to save the royal life which was endangered by a wounded stag, the King having been unhorsed, for which service Alexander granted him the `Cabar Feidh' (stag's head) for his coat of arms, a device borne ever afterwards by his descendants.

At the battle of Largs Colin played a distinguished part; tradition stating that he was with the Royal Army, which resulted in succeeding generations of Chiefs claiming the right to form part of the King's bodyguard, a right exercised for the last time on Flodden Field. As a reward for his services Colin was granted a charter for the lands of Kintail, which lands were always held direct from the King, unlike certain later Mackenzie possessions held under charter from the Earls of Ross, a fact proved by a charter renewing the original grant, to '*Murdo filius Kennethi de Kintail*' given by David II in 1362."

So ends the case for and against Colin Fitzgerald. This argument does not extend to the next generation, Colin's son, Kenneth of Kintail, who generally seems to be accepted by everyone. Of course, we can never know for certain. We are dealing in an age where there are no written records to substantiate our beliefs, other than charters of lands and some obscure references by the Roman Catholic church in Rome. We should probably accept that there was a certain Colin who fathered Kenneth of Kintail and leave it at that!

I should, however, on a final closing note, like to put this long-standing dispute into some sort of perspective. From the apparent date of Colin's appearance around 1262, we are talking about a period of time of 727 years to the present day. If we suppose that, on average, each child of his father was born when the father was aged 28, then we are going back in time 26 generations. One generation produces two parents, two generations four grandparents, three generations eight great great grandparents, and so on doubling with each generation. If we go back 26 generations then we each of us pick up 67,108,864 ancestors living around the year 1262. Of course, there were not that many people in all of Europe in 1262 and the

explanation is that many of these ancestors are ancestors many times over through their descendants marrying other descendants ad nauseum.

The point is, the dispute over the mysterious Colin becomes less vital when we realise how insignificant to the Mackenzie bloodlines is one ancestor out of sixty seven million!