

They Came From Tیره

by
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CHAPTER FOUR THE CAMPBELL TAKEOVER

The Campbells Target the Macleans

The Campbells, not satisfied by their acquisition of the MacDonald properties in Kintyre and Islay turned their attention to the rich holdings of the Macleans during the last half of the 17th century. The struggle centered on the lands of the Maclean chief, Maclean of Duart, and was waged more in the courts of law than on the battlefield, but the Macleans were overmatched in each arena and the contest proved to be an unequal one. The Campbell chiefs were unique in the Highland scene in that they were as adept as courtiers as they were as clan leaders. By the latter part of the 17th century their influence was so great that few, including the king, wished to oppose them on any but the most crucial issues. The Macleans, on the other hand, were no longer the power they once had been. Their losses during the long years of warfare with the MacDonalds combined with those of the Civil Wars had left them with fewer men of fighting age, and they had never developed the political skills of their enemy.

The Campbell assault on the Macleans was relentless and fought on every field imaginable. The Campbells did not shrink from any weapon that came to hand, including bribery, theft, and perjury, and used their power shamelessly to injure the Macleans in every possible manner. The Campbell campaign against the Macleans was only interrupted for two relatively short intervals in 1661 and again in 1685, when the Campbells were out of power and the lands of their chief forfeited. In the first instance the Marquis of Argyll was tried, condemned, and hanged for his many misdeeds, not the least of which was his leading role in the Civil Wars against the monarchy.¹ This was only a temporary setback for the Campbells, however, as his successor was soon restored to power. Later, he, too, had his estates forfeited for his part in Monmouth's Rebellion of 1685. It was not long, however, before William and Mary needed the Campbells to help them consolidate their position in the north of Britain. This brought them back into the good graces of the government, and put them in a position to do even more harm to the Macleans, who had unwisely embraced the cause of the exiled James II.

While the accession of William and Mary to the throne doomed the Macleans, they had narrowly escaped disaster earlier in the reign of Charles II. In 1672 the dispute between the Earl of Argyll and Maclean of Duart had been referred to the king, who ordered a panel of his ministers to investigate the matter and "give Maclean justice". Lauderdale, who was a favorite of the king, was a creature of Argyll, however, and craftily concealed the full extent of the claim against Duart, which now had been fraudulently enlarged to £120,000. The Maclean chief was deceived into believing his debts could be retired in a few short years, if he signed over the rents from his estates to Argyll, and foolishly agreed to this course of action. Two years later Sir Allan Maclean of Duart died at the age of 28 years, never realizing how badly he had been duped. The battle to defend the Maclean interests now fell to Maclean of Brolas and Maclean of Torloisk, guardians of the new chief, John, who was but four years old. Realizing that only desperate measures could rescue the estate of the chief, the guardians offered to resign a portion of it to Argyll in exchange for a clear title to the remainder. At the same time they made it clear that, if their offer was not accepted, they would resist by force any

¹ Another charge in his trial was the massacre of the Lamonts at Dunoon in 1646.

effort to take over the lands of Maclean of Duart. Argyll at first agreed to this proposal, but by using one pretext or another he delayed so long that it was evident he sought no fair solution to this dispute. Brolas and Torloisk then countered by stopping all payments of rent to Argyll and prepared for battle. This played into the hands of the Campbell chief, who was anxious for this turn of events. Armed with letters of Letters of Fire and Sword against the Macleans, which he demanded and obtained from the government, he answered by invading Mull with 1800 of his clansmen and 500 government troops. The Macleans could not withstand such a large force, and were compelled to surrender their castles of Aros and Duart and see their homeland again occupied by their enemy. The more fortunate of the inhabitants of Mull were able to seek refuge in the mountains, but their homes were plundered and then put to the torch, while their cattle were mutilated.

Although Mull was now under the Campbell heel, Brolas and Torloisk worked diligently to forge alliances with sympathetic clans. They were successful in obtaining a pledge of 1000 men from the MacDonalDs and others, and no doubt knew that the men of Tiree would rise to their call. It did not take Argyll long to learn of this counterplot, and he soon raised 2200 men and sent them into the Western Isles to defend his interests. A hurricane scattered this army while it was still at sea, and his armada was fortunate to regain the mainland. This show of force on the part of the Campbells was enough, however, to cow the allies of the Macleans and no host of any size was mustered to challenge the enemy.

In February of 1676 Brolas and Torloisk appeared before a three man committee appointed by the king to investigate once again the controversy between the Macleans and the Campbells. Charges and counter-charges were hurled as in the past, but it appeared that the Campbell influence at court would delay any action and insure their triumph in the end. As the dispute lingered in the courts the frustrated Macleans retaliated against the Campbells by raiding their lands and the properties of those who had submitted to them. This failed to accomplish much, but it satisfied for the moment the need for vengeance. It is probable that men of Tiree were recruited for such tasks, since Hugh Maclean, late bailie of the island, was among those denounced by the government for his part in the harassment of the Campbells. During this time Argyll continued his aggressions against the Macleans, invading Coll in July of 1679 and capturing Breacachadh Castle, the stronghold of Maclean of Coll.

In 1680 the long awaited ruling of the king gave Tiree to Argyll in full compensation for his claims against Maclean of Duart. This turn of events must have stunned the islanders, although such a resolution of the conflict had been discussed for years. This solution to the conflict was as good or better than Brolas and Torloisk could have expected, and was along the lines proposed by them six years before. Since Argyll had expected to swallow up the entire estate of the Maclean chief, it was in a way a victory for the Macleans, if not for the people of Tiree. It is doubtful if Argyll ever took full possession of Tiree at this time, however, as he unwisely supported the rebellion of the Duke of Monmouth against James II. In 1682, at the time of the forfeiture of the Campbell chief, Tiree was restored to Maclean of Duart, and the Campbell threat was lifted from the territory of the Macleans for the first time in many years. The beheading of the Earl of Argyll took place in 1685, and caused no little rejoicing among all Maclean clansmen, including those of Tiree.

The cessation of hostilities between the Macleans and Campbells did not last long. The two adversaries were again pitted against one another in the battle for the crown between William and Mary and James II. The Campbells, true to form, again adhered to the Protestant champion, while the Macleans loyally, if blindly, stood by the Stuart king. Three hundred Macleans under the command of Maclean of Lochbuie successfully beat off an attack of government troops at Knockbrech in Badenoch while on their way to join Dundee. They were later joined by an additional force of 200 men under Sir John Maclean, the Maclean chief, in time to fight at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689. This victory at Killiecrankie was the high water mark of this campaign, but Dundee's death sealed the fate of the Stuart cause. The Macleans were present in the later battles of Dunkeld and Cromdale, but did not cover themselves in glory in either. It seems likely that some men of Tiree accompanied this Maclean army, but no details of their participation are known.

The Coming of the Campbells

After the collapse of the cause of James II, Archibald Campbell, tenth Earl of Argyll, sought and received a commission from King William to subdue the Macleans. He invaded Mull once again, this time with 2500 troops, and Sir John Maclean, now deserted by his allies, was compelled to give up Duart Castle and leave Mull to his enemies. The chief of Clan Maclean took refuge in Cairnburgh Castle in the Treshnish Isles, where he remained until March 31, 1692. On that date he officially surrendered both Duart and Cairnburgh Castles at the express order of King James and went into exile. This marked the end of the organized resistance of the Macleans to the Campbells in their home territory. The Earl of Argyll was greatly rewarded for his support of William and Mary with all the lands of Maclean of Duart, consisting of property in Mull, Tiree, Coll, Jura, Morven, and Islay. The only lands remaining to the clan were those owned by Maclean chieftains, who held their property direct from the crown and not of their chief. Many of them were also dispossessed of their holdings at this same time, however, for their support of James II. After this Campbell success Maclean of Coll still retained the midsection of his island, although the two ends that had been the property of Maclean of Duart was acquired by the Campbells. Maclean of Coll now became the closest link that the people of Tiree had with their ancient masters, and he and other such chieftains continued to have a significant influence in the island.

The acquisition of the lands of Maclean of Duart was the culmination of a highly successful policy of expansion on the part of the Campbells during 16th and 17th centuries. The lands that they had gained from the MacDonalDs and Macleans were worth 2½ times as much as the core of their estates in central Argyll, and as such represented a land grab of enormous proportions. The former Maclean possessions were put under the control of six powerful Campbell tacksmen, all firmly dedicated to advancing the interests of the clan. The island of Tiree and the two ends of Coll were granted in tack to Campbell of Ardkinglas. Ardkinglas sent a score of more of his kinsmen and friends to act as sub-tacksmen in his new lands, and gave them the unenviable task of claiming Tiree. Armed resistance on Tiree was limited to a few hard-liners, who had barricaded themselves in the old Maclean fortress of Islesburgh on Loch an Eilean in 1678. The Campbells placed them under siege, and after a short period were able to force a surrender. The Campbell colonists must have found their situation on Tiree difficult at best. The inhabitants of the island, long loyal to the Macleans, viewed them as enemies, and it is known that they were the victims of such ugly forms of violence as arson and cattle-maiming. The turmoil that the island underwent during the transition from Maclean to Campbell rule must have been extensive, although details are lacking. Some accommodation with the new regime must have been reached, after the initial phase of resistance, but it would have only come grudgingly. There had been too much bloodshed between these two clans for it to have been otherwise, and feuds die hard in the Highlands and Islands. In fact this hostility toward the Campbells remained a feature of island life for more than one hundred years.²

After the Campbells had gained control of Tiree, the island probably returned to the life it had known in the past. The islanders had to deal with an entirely new group of officials, but the farming and herding activities of Tiree would not have varied much from past centuries. The tranquillity of Tiree was broken in January of 1715, when James, the son of James II and known as the Chevalier de St. George, proclaimed his right to the crown as James III. The Macleans at first attempted to remain outside any attempt by the Jacobites to put the Stuart pretender upon the throne. The Campbells, however, still fearful of the Macleans, attempted to bully them into remaining loyal to the Hanoverian king, but only succeeded in making it impossible for them to support the government. Sir John Maclean, however, did not need much to be goaded into rebellion, and when the Earl of Mar proclaimed James, King of Great Britain, in Aboyne in September of 1715, he joined an insurrection that was growing in popularity throughout Scotland and much of England. Nearly all the principal northern chiefs were drawn into this movement, which was by no means only a Highland affair. Sir John Maclean was able to raise a regiment of 800 men from his former lands, which was no mean feat since they were now nominally under Campbell control. The Campbells attempted to deny them

² This hostility towards the Campbells was a fact of life in all the former lands of the Macleans. As late as 1730 the factor of the Duke of Argyll in Morven had to be accompanied by a sizeable force when he attempted to collect the rents.

passage and keep them from joining Mar, but only succeeded in delaying them, as the Macleans broke out by going through Glenmore. On their way they made an assault upon Fort William in which they were joined by some MacDonalds. They were able to overrun two of the outworks, but were forced to give up the attempt at taking the fort, as they had no cannon. The Macleans joined the main body of the army of the Earl of Mar at Achterader a few days before the Battle of Sheriffmuir.

At the Battle of Sheriffmuir Mar's army met a government force commanded by the Earl of Argyll, the Campbell chief. The Jacobites, who greatly outnumbered the government force, would have had a resounding victory with any leader other than the Earl of Mar, who, by his incompetence, turned this engagement into a defeat. The Highlanders had acquitted themselves well on the battlefield and Sir John Maclean and many of the Highlanders would have continued the struggle, but they were abandoned by most of the Lowlanders. Faced with a government force, now growing in strength, and weakened by desertions, the dispirited Jacobites marched to Aberdeen and there disbanded in February of 1716. Sir John Maclean could have joined the Stuart pretender on his ship and gone with him into exile, but he chose to remain in Scotland. He left his clansmen at Keith, but was later captured by government forces and lodged at Achnacarry Castle. After escaping from his captivity he caught a serious cold, which, greatly aggravated by exposure, developed into 'consumption'. He found refuge in Gordon Castle, and died there in March of 1716 at the age of forty-five.

The people of Tiree, ever loyal to the chief of the Macleans, although he no longer had any hold on them, rose to his call to arms in 1715. The rebels of Tiree forced Colin Campbell, the bailie of Tiree, to give up the rent money in his possession. They evidently did little other harm to this Campbell official, because he later made his way to Inverary to join the government militia. The only support the bailie received from the islanders came from his servants and a few others, totaling no more than half a dozen, who also joined the militia with him. About 22% of the able-bodied men of the island made their way to Mull joined the Maclean muster, and fought at the Battle of Sheriffmuir.

After Sheriffmuir, with the government in complete control, Colin Campbell and Archibald Campbell of Barnacarry were directed to disarm all rebels and those suspected of abetting the rebellion on Tiree. Of the 434 adult males on Tiree, 95 confessed to having taken part in the insurrection and gave up their guns, swords, pistols, and dirks.³

Although another attempt was made in 1719 to unseat the Hanoverian monarch and place the Stuart pretender upon the throne, the Macleans this time wisely remained quiet. James Campbell, the Sheriff-Deputy of Argyll contacted Maclean of Brolas, the leading man of the clan during the minority of the chief, advising him to not involve himself or the Macleans in this new trouble. Brolas was told that he and other leaders had gotten off easily, after rebelling in 1715, which was the truth, but that any new involvement would not be looked upon so kindly.

An event of major importance to Tiree occurred in 1737, when the entire Argyll Estate underwent a major reorganization. In that year Tiree was divided into thirteen or fourteen smaller tacks. The revolutionary step was taken of offering these and other tacks of the estate on open bid to the highest bidder. Thus notice was served that such tacks were hereafter to be considered on their economic merit, rather than on any possible military contribution as had been the case for the past centuries. Some of these new tacks went to Campbell supporters on Tiree, some went to absentee lairds of the Campbell name residing on Mull, and some even went to former Maclean tacksmen now considered safe from a political viewpoint. Almost half of these new tacks on Tiree, however, were not leased to any one individual, but were let to those prepared to operate as joint-tenants. This radical departure from the old Highland custom eliminated the middleman in the form of the tacksmen, and made the joint-tenants direct tenants of the Duke of Argyll.

The Duke of Argyll believed that this sweeping reform would 'relieve the tyranny of the tacksmen from the small tenant' and would be popular with the common people of his estate. They, however, were suspicious with this break in tradition, and grumbled about what it would really mean to them. The tacksmen, of course, resented being removed from their time-honored place in Highland society, which meant they had to find an entirely new way of life. The long term result was that many of their caste eventually emigrated, often leading some of their former tenants overseas. The loss of

³ See Appendix II for evidence of the extent of support for the Jacobite cause.

these natural leaders was cruelly felt in the coming decades, when the region was attempting to adjust to economic forces few understood.

The reorganization of 1737 was not completely successful in its original form from the standpoint of the Duke. Some of the tacks ended up in unfriendly hands, which was undesirable in view of the stormy political climate in the 1740s. In others bids had been made that were beyond the capabilities of the lease-holders. Thus the additional revenue hoped to be gained under this system was not always obtained. After these experiences the Duke of Argyll went to a system of negotiated leases, which allowed him to choose those individuals and joint-tenants more reliable from both a political and economic standpoint.

The inhabitants of Tiree did not play much of a role in the 'Forty-Five', when Bonnie Prince Charlie attempted to reclaim the throne for the Stuarts. Some Maclean clansmen did answer the fiery cross that was carried once again through Mull and Morven and went on to fight and die at Culloden under Maclean of Drimnin. Only four of the men of Tiree are known to have been among them, however. Although the vast majority of the islanders still thought of the Macleans as their hereditary leaders and had no sympathy with the Campbell policy of support of the Hanoverians, there were two major factors at work against their involvement in this new insurrection. The first was geographical in nature. Tiree was more isolated from the mainland than Mull, and it was difficult to move any sizeable body of men, surrounded as it was by Campbell territory. The second, and probably the more important factor, was the unwillingness of Maclean of Coll to answer the call to arms of the dispossessed Maclean chief. While Maclean of Coll had every sympathy for the Jacobite cause and the plight of his chief, he believed that this uprising was doomed to failure and counseled against it. Since this Maclean chieftain had gained much influence on Tiree in the absence of Maclean of Duart, his advice kept the island much quieter than it would have been otherwise. This did not mean that the people of Tiree felt any more kindly towards the Campbells and the government in Edinburgh. When the Chamberlain of the Duke of Argyll, arrived in 1745 to recruit soldiers for the government, he had to retreat before a menacing crowd of islanders. The ringleaders of this mob were arrested after the Jacobite cause collapsed and jailed for a time at Inverary. Upon returning to Tiree they were excluded from holding any land and congregated at the Scarinish farm, which was the only property on Tiree not owned by Argyll. They caused so much trouble with their open defiance and petty conspiracies that Argyll was compelled to buy this property and displace them.

After the Jacobite defeat at Culloden a French brig came into Gott Bay to find a pilot to guide them to Mallaig, where they had been directed to pick up Bonnie Prince Charlie. An armed French party siezed a Neil MacFadyen, who pointed out Donald Maclean of Ruaig as one familiar with the Scottish west coast. The two agreed to go with the French, after they were assured that they would be returned to Tiree. After taking aboard the Prince the French sailed past Coll on their way south, but obviously had no intention of stopping at Tiree. Seeing this Maclean and MacFadyen took a tender from the ship, and, although under some gunfire, they successfully made their way to Coll and subsequently Tiree. Arriving home they were informed they faced arrest. Donald Maclean hid in a cave in Vaul for nine months, until ill health compelled him to give himself up. He was forced to serve in a Highland Regiment for two years, despite the fact that an amnesty had been declared.

The Macleans continued to receive the support of Tiree, even after it was apparent that they would never regain control of the island. During the war years of 1756-1763 Sir Allan Maclean of Brolas, a captain of the Montgomery Highlanders, probably had little difficulty in recruiting men from Tiree for service with him. In 1771 the Chamberlain of Tiree, in writing to the Duke of Argyll, described many of the small tenants as being "*disaffected of the family*", meaning the Campbells "*and much incited by their chieftains and Maclean gentry.*" Although some of this feeling was to dissipate under the generous policies of the fifth Duke, it continued to frustrate his attempts to help his tenants for much of his life. As late as 1884, when evidence was placed before the Crofters' Commission regarding the grievances of the people of Tiree, reference was made to the strong attachment among them to the Macleans, who had lost the island to the Campbells almost two hundred years before.