

## III.

NOTES ON THE CHURCH OF ST FYNDOCA AND ITS MONUMENTS, ON THE ISLAND OF INISHAIL, LOCH AWE. BY WILLIAM DOUGLAS.

In 1793 the Rev. Dr Joseph Macintyre's account of the parish of Glenorchay and Inishail appeared in vol. viii. of the old *Statistical Account of Scotland*, and the information he gives regarding Inishail has been quoted as gospel in nearly every account of the island that has since then been published. He says: "Inishail, once the site of a small nunnery of the Cistercian order; and where, in a ruinous chapel of that religious house, public worship was alternately performed till the year 1736." On another page he again refers to this nunnery, and says: "The remains of a small monastery with its chapel are still to be seen. Concerning this religious house, there is little on record, and tradition conveys but small information. It was a house of nuns, memorable for the sanctity of their lives and the purity of their manners. At the Reformation, when the innocent were involved equally with the guilty in the sufferings of the times, this house was suppressed and the temporalities granted to Hay, the Abbot of Inchaffrey; who, abjuring his former tenets of religion, embraced the cause of the reformers."

The statement that there was at one time a nunnery on Inishail must, I fear, be treated as a romance, for none of the early documents that have recently come to light refer to the religious house on Inishail in other terms than the church of *St Fyndoca*, the chapel of *St Fyndoca*, or the parish church on Inishail. The existing ruins of this church are shown in the accompanying photograph (fig. 1).

Mr T. S. Muir, who visited it in 1858, says: "From the few broken details here and there left it would appear to have been a First-Pointed building" of some 51 feet in length.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiological Notes*, p. 79.

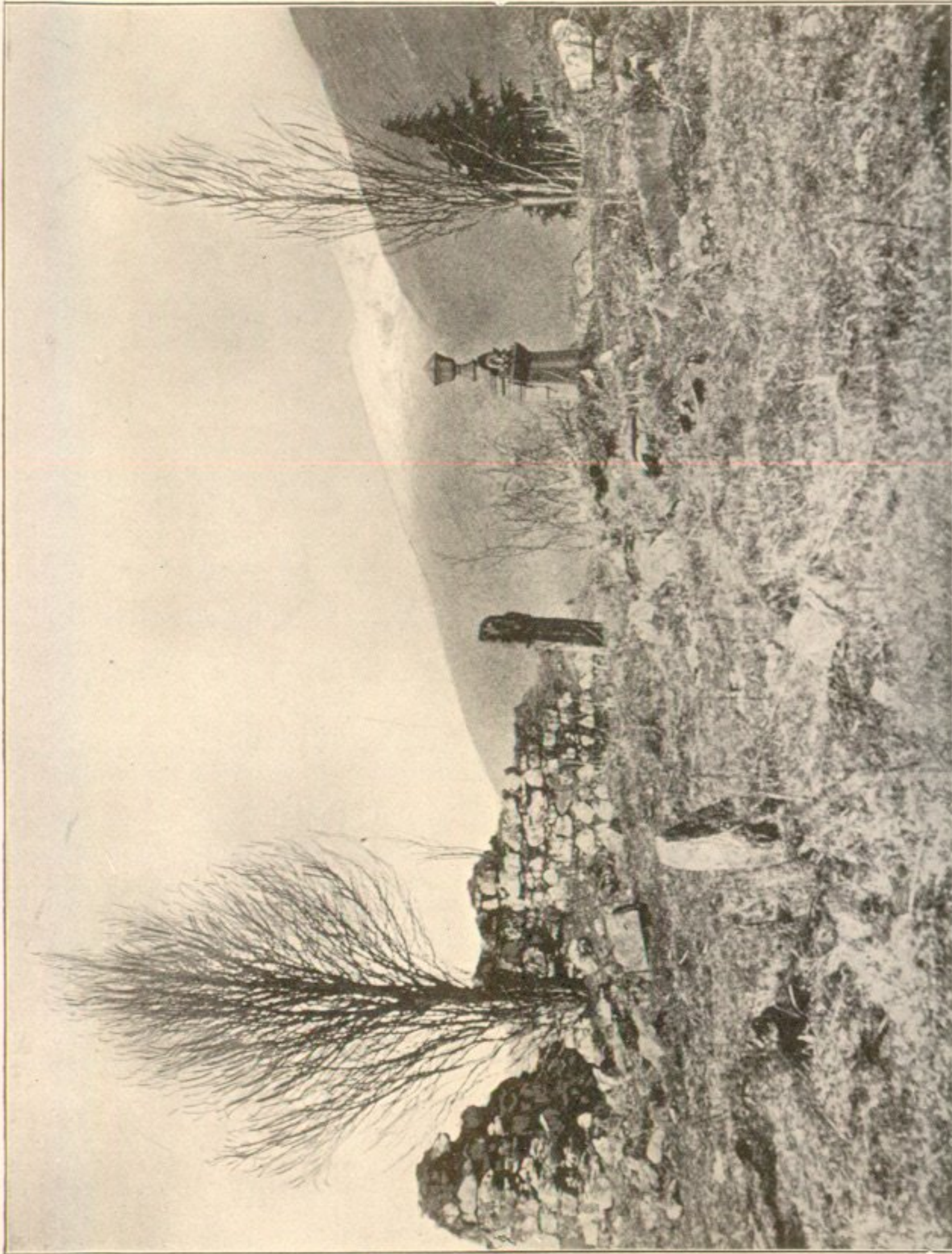


Fig. 1. View of the Ruins of the Church on Inishail.

A few outcrops of what may be the foundation walls of a still more ancient building are to be seen here and there among the moss-covered tombstones of the churchyard, but it would take more time and labour than a casual visitor could give to make anything of them now.

The burial-ground may at one time have contained more tombstones than are there now, for it is frequently stated that Glenorchy churchyard contains many ancient gravestones which have been brought from Inishail. The earliest reference for this statement known to me is in Stoddart's *Remarks on Local Scenery*, published in 1801, vol. i. p. 273.

There are, however, still many interesting stones in Inishail churchyard, and as one wanders among them one cannot help wondering how long they have lain there and whose memory they are intended to perpetuate. Alas! all record has vanished. "There are no inscriptions, perhaps there never were," says a writer<sup>1</sup> in 1833; "the fame of their name, it might be thought, would never die within the shadow of Cruachan."

An earlier writer,<sup>2</sup> by some eleven years, mentions that "the isle was the principal burying-place of many of the most considerable neighbouring families; among the tombstones are many shaped in the ancient form, like the lid of a coffin, and ornamented with carvings of fret-work, running figures, flowers, and the forms of warriors and two-handed swords. Among the chief families buried in Inishail, were the MacNaughtons of Fraoch Elan and the Campbells of Inbherau. I could not discover the spot appropriated to the former, nor any evidence of the gravestones which must have covered their tombs. The place of the Campbells, however, is yet pointed out. It lies on the south side of the chapel, and its site is marked by a large flat stone, ornamented with the arms of the family in high relief. The shield is supported by two warriors, and surmounted by a diadem,

<sup>1</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1833, vol. 31, p. 989.

<sup>2</sup> *Bridal of Caolchairn*, 1822, p. 266.

the signification and exact form of which it is difficult to decide ; but the style of the carving and costume of the figures do not appear to be later than the middle of the fifteenth century.”

With regard to this stone of the Campbells (fig. 2) we are told in a book published in 1889<sup>1</sup> that it is “ now deplorably defaced, a few years back it was easy to make out the long plumes depending from the conical helmets of the two men-at-arms supporting the shield. The plumes descended to, and lower than, the shoulders. When last seen this was much obliterated by the action of the weather. The owner of this island, the Duke of Argyll, has sanctioned steps being taken for the better preservation of this grave and other tombstones here found, and these are being carried out under the eyes of H.R.H. the Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne.”

Hamerton,<sup>2</sup> when he saw this stone in 1852, describes it thus :—

“ . . . On one beside the church  
 Are seven figures—Jesus on the cross,  
 Two women, and four knights in suits of mail ;  
 Almost grotesque, for they have monstrous heads,  
 As though the sculptor had a comic turn ;  
 Yet are they full of life and character.  
 The nuns are swinging censers to the cross :  
 The knights stand by to guard it. On the stone  
 Between the figures, worn by frequent rains,  
 There is a shield, whose charge might well be borne  
 By one whose very hearse had crossed the waves,—  
 An ancient galley, high at prow and stern,  
 With one stout mast between them, short and strong,  
 The ancient bearing of the House of Lorn.  
 There is a harp, too, and a battle axe ;  
 And what I thought a standard, which a knight  
 Rears proudly.”

If this is an accurate description of the stone in 1852, a portion must have since disappeared. On comparing it with the accompanying

<sup>1</sup> *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*, by Lord Archibald Campbell, London, 1889, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Isles of Loch Awe*, by Philip Gilbert Hamerton, 1859, p. 32.



Fig. 2. Sculptured Slab with Campbell Arms.

photograph taken by Mr Ian Alston in 1895 we see there is no second figure of a nun ; perhaps it may have been where the stone is cracked. On each side of the crack are marks which might indicate the dress of a nun. The fourth warrior is still on the stone, more to the left of the one with the spear—unfortunately the camera has not included this figure. The figures, it is thought, are symbolic of the Holy Eucharist, the chalice being extended to receive the blood of our Lord.

I do not like to disturb existing ideas, but I think from the nature of the figures and of their position across the stone that I am justified in putting the question, Was this ever a tombstone ? Dr Anderson suggests it has all the appearance of a frieze or long panel from the wall of a building.

The fine old tombstones shown in fig. 3 are lying between the chapel and the south-east corner of the churchyard wall. I could learn nothing of their history. As the carving is fast disappearing under the action of the weather, the reproduction of this photograph taken in 1895 is an interesting record of their state at that date.

At an exhibition in George Street, Edinburgh, in 1871, of Unda's (T. S. Muir) "Rubbings from Monumental Slabs and Brasses," two from Inishail, which are, no doubt, from those that are figured here, were shown and described in the catalogue thus :—

"(27) A fine but considerably defaced specimen, overspread with four large circles filled with wavy and geometric tracery ; on their left is either the blade of a large sword, a pastoral staff, or the shaft of a cross."

"(28) Slab of tapering form, bearing a cross composed of intersecting circles, on a shaft covered with a row of winding ornaments. While perfect, the whole ornamentation must have been particularly beautiful."

These rubbings do not appear to be among those bequeathed to the Society of Scottish Antiquaries by Mr Muir's trustees.

What great chieftain's resting-place is marked by that grim old



Fig. 3. Sculptured Slabs at Inishail.



Fig. 4. Sculptured Cross in the Ruined Church at Inishail.



cross (fig. 4) standing in the centre of the ruined chapel? It is figured and prosaically described in J. Romilly Allen's *Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (1903), p. 404, thus:—

“An erect cross-slab of blue slate, 5 ft. 3 in. in height, 1 ft. 3 in. in breadth, and 4–5 in. in thickness. The slab is sculptured on two faces thus (from which a reduced reproduction is given here):—

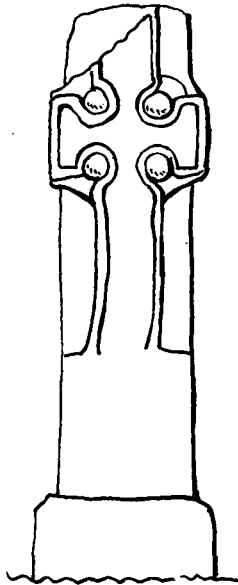


Fig. 5. Front.

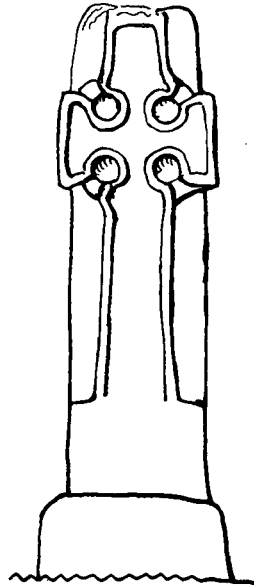


Fig. 5. Back.

“*Front.*—A cross of shape No. 96*a*, with a double outline slightly raised above the surface of the slab, and circular hollows at the intersections. The arms of the cross project slightly beyond the sides of the slab, and the shaft reaches to within about a foot of the bottom of the slab, where the slightly sunk panels on either side of the shaft finish off. A circle connecting the arms with the shaft and summit is faintly indicated.

“*Back.*—A cross of similar shape, but slightly longer in the shaft, and with the circle connecting the arms better defined.

“This cross-slab has not been previously described or illustrated.”

It does not appear to have been very long in its present erect position in the centre of the ruined chapel, for in 1858 when Mr T. S. Muir<sup>1</sup> visited Inishail he refers to a cross, no doubt the same, 6 feet in length, lying prostrate in the open burying-ground among several carved slabs of the usual Argyllshire pattern.

Besides these stones there are others which deserve mention. One, in the open graveyard, and quite near the “Campbell Stone,” has a fine engraving of a sword on it, and there are two others inside the chapel walls which are highly ornamented.

Inishail is not without authentic historical records, for we find in the *Origines Parochiales Scotiæ* and other books many references to ancient charters and documents relating to it, from which the following are a few abbreviated selections:—

“1257. Ath, son of Malcolm Macnaughtan, makes known that out of charity, with the assent of Sir Gilbert, knight, his brother, and for the weal of their souls and the souls of their ancestors and heirs, he has given to the abbot and canons of Inchaffray the Church of St Findoca,<sup>2</sup> of Inchalt (Inishail), in the diocese of Argyll, with all its just pertinents, with tithes, oblations, common pasture, and other easements pertaining to the church, together with all the rights he has in the same church. To be held in free and perpetual alms, as freely as any church in Scotland is held by the gift of any nobleman, 29 June 1257.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1375 John of Prestwyeh for a certain sum of money paid to him

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiological Notes*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Very little is known of St Fyndoca, whose date is 13th October, and who is associated with St Fincana, and no life is given in the Breviary of Aberdeen (Forbes, *Kalendar of Scottish Saints*, p. 352).

<sup>3</sup> Charters of the Abbey of Inchaffray, *Scot. His. Soc.*, p. 209. The Latin text of the original charter, which is preserved at Dupplin with granter's seal in white wax entire, is given on p. 75.

beforehand sold to Colin Cambale, son of the lord of Lochaw, half the island of Insalte (Inishail), with other lands, Terwhedych, Selechan, and Dalyen, which Duncan M'Nachtane had died vest and seised (Argyll Charters).<sup>1</sup>

“In 1529 Archibald, Earl of Argyle, for the honour of God, of the Virgin Mary, of Saint Fyndoc, and of all the saints, granted to Duncan Makcaus, with remainder in succession to his brothers Ewen and Alexander, and to his own heirs whomsoever, the lands of Barindryane in the lordship of Lochaw of the old entent of twenty shillings, to be held of the Earl in heritage and charitable alms, on condition that the grantees and their heirs should at their own expense becomingly maintain the chapel of Saint Fyndoc, founded in the island of Inchald (Inishail), and cause one mass to be celebrated there every week for the weal of the souls of King James V., of his predecessors and successors, of the Earl's deceased father Colin, and mother Jonet, Earl and Countess of Ergyle, of himself, his predecessors and his successors, and of all the faithful dead. In 1556 the grant was confirmed by Queen Mary (*Reg. Mag. Sig.*, lib. xxxi. No. 285).”<sup>2</sup>

“About the year 1575 the church of Inchald was one of four, of which the teinds and dues of the bishop's quarter were granted to Gawin Hammiltoun by James, bishop of Argyle, as security for a yearly pension of £40 from the fruits of the bishoprick (*Reg. Sec. Sig.*, xliii. fol. 41).”<sup>3</sup>

“In 1618 James, lord of Madertie, commendator of Inchaffray, leased to Patrick M'Artor of Torvadiche for nineteen years the teind sheaves and other teinds called ‘the brokis frutis,’ and rents both great and small of the parish church and parish of Inchald, the parsonage and vicarage thereof, so far as the fruits of the church were part of the abbey of Inchaffray and of its patrimony, the grantee paying £12 Scots yearly to the commendator, and to the minister the dues assigned to him by the commissioners of parliament, with the ex-

<sup>1</sup> *O.P.S.*, ii. p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 827.

ception of the teinds of Barbreklochow (*Liber Insule Missarum*, pp. 137-8)."<sup>1</sup>

"In 1630 the teinds of Inchecheall leased to Patrick M'Kairtour of Tullierodiche were valued at £238, 6s. 8d. yearly (*Liber Insule Missarum*, p. 116)."<sup>2</sup>

"In 1736 service was discontinued in the 'ruinous chapel' on the island of Inishail, and a church more commodious for the parish was built on the south side of the loch opposite Inishail."<sup>3</sup>

The church referred to as being erected in 1736 is still standing on the south side of the loch near Innistrynich House, and about a mile north of Cladich post office. It is a quaint, low-roofed little building of bare exterior, and inside reminds one of a Quaker meeting-house.

There is a reference to this little church in Miss Christina Brooks Stewart's *Loiterer in Argyllshire* (1848), which is not without interest. She says: "After traversing a wide heathy moor, we approached an humble-looking one-storeyed house, apparently under repair, but judge of my amazement to find on inquiry that this was Cladich church! I thought of the words of the Psalmist, 'Shall I dwell in a cedared house while the ark of the Lord is between curtains?' " Although the good lady is a little wide in her biblical quotation (see 2 Sam. vii. 2) we much appreciate the sentiment that gave rise to it.

Service is conducted in this little church every alternate Sunday by the minister of the parish of Glenorchy and Inishail,<sup>4</sup> who, in March 1912, preached in the forenoon in Glenorchy church, in the afternoon in Inishail church, and in the evening in St Conan's chapel, Lochawe.

I have to thank the Editor of the Scottish Mountaineering Club for the loan of the illustrations, which appeared, with a more extended notice of the island, in their *Journal* for June, 1912.

<sup>1</sup> *O.P.S.*, ii. p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Old Stat. Acc.*, viii. p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> In 1618 the parish of Inishail was united to Glenorchy, and having been disjoined from it in 1650 was again united by Act Rescissory in 1662.—*Old Stat. Acc.*, viii. p. 335.