

SITHEAN NA RAPAICHE, MORVERN.

BY T. R. GILLIES.

"I back this view from the highest hill in the parish for extent and varied beauty against any view in Europe. It is the Righi of Argyllshire. . . . I know not where to find a more magnificent outlook over God's fair earth".

"Reminiscences of a Highland Parish", by NORMAN
MACLEOD, D.D.

EVEN making some allowance for the enthusiasm of a West Highlander where his own country is concerned, and the partiality of Norman MacLeod for the surroundings of his boyhood's home at Fiunary, the above strong testimony might reasonably induce the tourist to find his way to the top of the ridge that lies between the Sound of Mull and Loch Sunart. The Morvern district, however, though passed by streams of tourists every season, is hardly ever visited. Visitors are not greatly encouraged in this deer-foresting region, and, with the exception of the cliffs and cascades near the ruins of the old Castle of Ardtornish (*Ard Thor n' Eass*, "The high cliff of waterfalls"), the appearance of Morvern as viewed from the Sound of Mull is not specially interesting. But inland the scenery and the outlook in all directions are very striking and attractive, and the culminating attraction is certainly the view from the summit of the ridge referred to—Sithean na Rapaiche (1806)—better known to Morvern folks as "Shian". The parish of Morvern forms a peninsula, and there is no doubt that at one period the part to the westward of the line of Loch Aline, Loch Arienas, and Loch Durinemast, which now drain into the Sound of Mull, and Loch Teacuis, which is an arm of Loch Sunart, was an island, and that these lochs represent what is left of an arm of the sea. The ancient beach line with fossils of many sea shells can still be distinctly traced here and there. The prevailing rock of the region of which Shian is the highest

point is trap, the mountains being mostly tabular in shape, and the precipitous sides exhibiting regular trap columns. To the south of Shian there is a curious piece of rock, of which we give an illustration. The vein of which it forms a part can be traced from the shore into the rising ground leading up towards Shian. One portion of it, about three feet in thickness, sixty feet long, and rising to a height of about thirty feet, stands by itself above the level of the ground. An old legend makes it out to be part of a bridge that a famous witch of that quarter proposed to build across the Sound of Mull. It was to be a bridge of two arches, with a centre pier on the island in the middle of the Sound. A large cairn near it was supposed to be material that she was collecting for the job. She was carrying the stones in a creel commensurate in size with the magnitude of her undertaking, but when she reached the place now called Cairn-na-Caillich ("The Old Wife's Cairn") the bottom of the creel came out, and the stones fell where they now lie, and she gave up the bridge business in disgust. The rock is now better known as "The Wishing Rock", and a less ancient superstition is that anyone scrambling through the hole in it will have a wish fulfilled.

Shian may be ascended from this side as well as from Loch Sunart, but the ascent along the ridge from near Loch Aline is more gradual, and gives a better opportunity of viewing the near surroundings on the west and north. In selecting this route we had the additional attraction of securing the company of the doctor who is responsible for the physical well-being of the twenty miles or so of which the parish consists. He determined that we should see not only Shian, but Beinn Bhan and Aonach Beag and Aonach Mor, as stepping-stones to the high altar of Shian, and to prepare our minds for its supreme impressions. Relying on Bartholomew, who has placed the name of Aonach Mor somewhat too westward, we skirted its summit, leaving the doctor to surmount it alone. He would have none of Bartholomew, and certainly scored by reducing us to the dilemma that Aonach Mor was where he said it was, or that the witch of Mull must have carried off the Shian to build another bridge across the Sound.

The route by Acha Fors and Beinn Bhan gives some fine views into the valley of Loch Aline and the river Aline and on the other side of the valley westward to Glais Bheinn and the well-named "Table of Lorne", which shows its flat top between two neighbouring round summits. To the northward, across the lower part of Loch Arienas, the openings of Glen Geal and Glen Dubh stretch up in the direction of the top of Loch Sunart, and as we move onwards towards Aonach Beag, we can look down on the upper part of Loch Arienas and the precipitous cliffs overhanging the ruined clachan, of which now only a few patches of stone are left. The rocks here are in fairly regular columns, and go almost sheer down for seven or eight hundred feet. A bird's eye view of Loch Arienas and of the houses at Durinemast, with the smaller loch of the same name beyond it, and a fine sweep of the upper part of Loch Teacuis, can be had from here, though not visible from the top of Shian. Keeping along a little to the north of the top of what we were afterwards compelled to admit was Aonach Mor, we soon saw the upward sweep of the top of Shian right in front, and though on the way up we needlessly expended what little breath we had to spare in arguing from the map that it was Aonach Mor, the grand outlook westwards and in every direction—except that of Aonach Mor—settled the conviction in the most sceptical mind that it *was* Shian, and that it deserved every word of praise that Norman MacLeod gives it in the description from which we have quoted. The first thing that strikes one is the extent of the view. Southward the twenty miles of the Sound of Mull winding along between Morvern and Mull forms a magnificent foreground—with specimens of almost every variety of shipping moving up and down. On the other side are the white houses of Salen and Aros, and further west Calve Island, imperfectly hiding Tobermory. Over the isthmus from Salen appears Loch na Keal (Loch na "Gee-oul" is as near as the doctor could bring our Lowland tongues to the Gaelic pronunciation), opening out past the islands of Eorsa and Inch Kenneth towards Iona and the open Atlantic. A little further north Tiree and Coll break the horizon of the sea,

and, still further north, Muck and Eigg, and Rum, with its high-coned mountains, to the left of which the island Canna peeps out. Further north it is somewhat cloudy, and Skye is, as usual, in a mist. The coast of Sleat and the Sound are visible, and in a bright interval the doctor announces a brief glimpse of the Coolins. Nearer, however, the view is bright enough. Across the mouth of Loch Sunart the hills of Ardnamurchan are prominent, and Ben Hiant raises its crest against the sky. The shores of Kilhoan Bay form a verdant contrast to the rocky hills behind, and the north shore of Loch Sunart further west also furnishes a green fringe between sea and mountain. The islands of Oronsay and Carna—the one grass-grown and the other rocky and bare—with several smaller rocky islands, guard the entrance to Loch Teacuis, and behind these Loch Sunart winds away between the mountains and out of sight. To the north-east Ben Resipol is a conspicuous landmark, and further north a perfect wilderness of mountains in Moidart and Morar and Knoydart, with glimpses of lochs here and there, furnish a land view quite as striking in its way as the sea view. The view inland is cloudy in the direction of Ben Nevis and Glencoe, and the *soi-disant* Aonach Mor (which means "The Big One") asserts its right to the name at least by shutting out a good slice of the view in that direction. Further round, however, and following the line of the east end of the Sound of Mull, where the ebbing tide is sweeping out with the force of a mighty river past Ardtornish and Duart Point to the Firth of Lorne, Oban is visible through between Lismore and Kerrera, and beyond it Ben Cruachan and the grey "Shepherds of Etive Glen", and a sea of hills in the district of Lorne. Further round the mountains of Mull fill up the view, and complete the circle of the outlook from Shian. Going back we kept a more southerly course, giving a fine view of the rocky ravines at the top of the Savory Burn and of two picturesque mountain lochs, and arrived at Loch Aline after a rough tramp of about nine hours.