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IN COR ARDER.

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SHOULD the day turn out wet—as that mantle of mist on Meall an t-Snaime would seem to indicate—you who are to accompany me to Cor Arder will think none the less of it on that account; for those giddy slopes and turretted heights and tremendous precipices upon which we are to gaze, are never, methinks, seen to better advantage than when spiritualised by the mystic drapery of the clouds. And yet, my good friend! I do confess that I have beheld the corrie shimmering in the noon-tide sun of mid-summer, when the raven's croak or the bleating of a lamb sounded loud through the great concave that was hushed in more than Sabbath stillness—the rills of falling water, pure and sparkling, and usually full of noisy merriment, having now sunk their voices to one low multitudinous tone of solemn harmony that stole imperceptibly on the ear, and anon seemed to die away into the bosom of the hills; and there, reclining to rest on a heathery knoll, with the blue sky overhead and the mighty Bens around, I fell into a drowsy muse of contemplative joy in nature and universal human happiness, and so passed eftsoons into the sweetest sleep allowed to mortal man.

An agreeable experience this, and impossible in soaking damp and under drenching rain. Therefore, whether Cor Arder really afford more pleasure to the beholder in vaporous gloom or brilliant light, may be left to be decided by every

man for himself, according to his individual taste and various mood.

On leaving the farm house of Aberarder on Loch Laggan, and taking our upward way, it will be convenient to skirt the high bank of the burn which pours out of the corrie in many a foaming linn, and is known as Allt Choir Ardair—*i.e.* the Burn of Cor Arder. Oddly enough, however, the corrie had previously taken its name from the burn—*Arder* meaning High Water, being derived from *Ard*, high, and *dur*, water. Hence, Aberarder signifies the confluence of the High Water. And no name could be more truly descriptive. The desultory birches—single or in groves—forming advanced outposts of the forests covering the lower portion of the corrie, are conjunctly called Doire nan Dearcag—*i.e.* the Wood of Berries. Not a few of those trees are in a decaying state, and some so far gone as to be quite unable to maintain, in anything like an erect position, their pale stems with boughs, ghostly-looking in the mutilation of old age. Here and there we may see poor shattered boles littering moist patches of rushy ground, where what are called “Fairy Circles” were believed to be the haunt of the green-kirtled folks who inhabited those conical knolls around, during their hours of midnight merriment. But whatever be the position of those disconsolate trunks and larger detached boughs—all fozy and water-logged—every one of them is sure to be studded with knobs of that firm fungus out of whose coating, coloured like their own bark, shepherds used to make *spunk*—working each piece out until it somewhat resembled smooth chamois leather, and was ready for flint and steel.

Before we enter the Corrie Wood—Coill a' Choire—I must tell you that the hill on our left, around which we shall trace something like a semi-circle, is Bealach a' Ghoir. What crow or cry gave it that name, who can say? While on our right, that ascending series of rocky knaps called Na Cnapanan leads to the Carn Lia (3298), an eminence invisible from our path now bringing us into the jaws of Cor Arder.

“This is the forest primeval,” and all of birch. Nay, not quite all! I think that an enquiring eye would soon discover several scattered alder trees; and, by my sooth! I

know that there are some hazels clothing the steep shaded sides of yonder grassy glade that slopes upwards on the skirt of Bealach a' Ghoir. From childhood has this little glen or gill been imprinted on my mind with all its living green, for there, gliding through the pleasant boscaige, with a thrill of enchantment I first caught sight of deer. For you must know that Cor Arder has been, time out of mind, a favourite haunt of a small herd of these fleet-footed dwellers of the waste, that came and went at their own sweet will,—now here, and anon far away in some other sequestered resort among the corries of Drumalban, where a change of herbage was to be had. But I am sure they liked Cor Arder best, and regarded it as their *duchus* or hereditary seat.

What! nettles here in the wood so far from human habitation, for which they usually reserve themselves with such persistent fidelity, along with rats, mice, dockens, ragwort, and all our other *Lares et Penates* which we take about with us wherever we go! Yes, actually a tuft of nettles! Come nearer, however, and you will see that they are growing on a spot where was the hearth of an old hut whose foundations are still faintly visible; so that those we have here are true to nature after all. Those rough vestiges that may yet be traced of the humble dwelling that once stood here have a particular interest, there being good reason to believe that it afforded shelter to Royalty in distress. It is known that in the end of August, 1746, Prince Charles Edward Stewart passed down through Cor Arder on his way to Ben Alder, where he remained in comparative security enjoying the hospitality of Cluny Macpherson until he received the good news of the arrival of ships sent to carry him back to France, and it is extremely probable that he found shelter and entertainment in this secluded retreat. He was then under the protection of the Macdonalds of Aberarder and Tullochrom,—two brothers who were intimately acquainted with the recesses of Cor Arder all their lives, and who, although they had taken part in the rising, had made their peace with the Government, and were therefore able to be of great service to the Prince in his utmost need. How curious to know that this very footpath, that

we are now following, was once trodden, in anxious vigilance by the royal fugitive and his guides! He, like us, must have made his way over many a hoary old trunk, round many a boulder, and across many a swampy dell and sparkling runnel,—now low down close to the burn, and anon scrambling up some rough bank.

It is well perhaps that you have no rod in your hand, for in that case you might be tempted to cast your line athwart those dark pools overhung by wood, where the fox-glove and the lady-fern grow so luxuriantly in the damp shade,—each pool below its own roaring cascade. Should you do this, it is likely that your patience would be speedily exhausted—and also your hook-book. In other words, you would soon have no line or hooks to cast. At that very pool beside us, surrounded by the great smooth stones, where the water swirls as in a cauldron, I have witnessed sad exhibitions of the petulance of poor human nature amid the mishaps which are sure to attend the angler in Cor Arder. For instance, I have known one come from hither on a certain afternoon long ago, who had fished his upward way by pool and linn and confluence. Without the reward of success in his endeavours, as he plied his rod, he paid everywhere unwilling tribute to rock and heather and tree, and various objects of nature in the wild channel and its banks; so that when we had arrived here, only a single cast of flies remained to him. But lo! here, in a moment he perceived that he was like to have due amends. Scarcely had his flies touched the water when trout came leaping and curveting to the surface; and they were of finer size and colour than he had ever seen on that burn before or since. There was only a moment allowed him for observation and expectation, the next was for mortification and disappointed hope; for only a piece of hookless, gutless line hung limp from the end of his melancholy rod. Therefore, as one having a right to speak, I would bid all anglers beware of Cor Arder Burn—specially in Cor Arder Wood.

But we are now emerging from its ancient solitudes, and our path leads by the foot of those green stone-strewn slopes not without brackens and heather, that fall away abruptly

from the mountain brows in the direction of Meall an t-Snaime and the Carn Lia—*i.e.* the Knot Hummock and the Grey Cairn. Hereabouts, in bygone days, were sheilings, whither the wives and children of the tenantry in the neighbourhood of Loch Laggan resorted at certain seasons of the year with all their various cattle. You may yet see traces of their chalets and folds upon these silent braes, which in early summer and again in autumn were formerly vocal with laughter and song.

Ah! this tiny foundation was, nevertheless, not connected with primitive times and pastoral life. Why, this is all that remains to tell where stood the Bothie of Cor Arder—Bothan Choir Ardair—that my own eyes have seen and my own feet have entered. It was erected, and occupied for a season or so by worthy Dunnach Phadruig and his two sons, who not long afterwards sought a home beyond the St. Lawrence. These men practised the lost art of building the single, or otherwise, the Galloway dike. Part of their work may be seen from here,—that long line of wall that goes up as far as the foot of the precipice below Meall an t-Snaime, dividing the ewe-ground from the wether-ground of Aberarder Farm. In that gleesome rill, sparkling at our feet, Duncan used to bathe his bruised hand, praising its healing virtues. Certain excisemen whom I knew did not bless the Bothie of Cor Arder, which was made the medium of carrying out a practical joke at their expense. A householder on Loch Laggan, in the course of conversation with them, casually dropped some hint as to a bothie in Cor Arder, whereupon the alert officials in over-zeal immediately set out to discover the lurking-place of Illicit Distillation. Hot and tired, they in due course arrived at Dunnach Phadruig's abode, where they became very angry indeed.

Near the crest of that high bank overlooking the burn, a pair of kestrels was wont to breed; and directing your gaze above, you can see the rough brindled acclivities forming the back of Bealach a' Ghoir, around which the Cor Arder Burn takes its horse-shoe-like course.

That sweep of the corrie on our right is called An Crom Leat-

had from *crom*, bent; while right above this extended hook is pleasant Coire Chriochrain with all its craggy minarets.

Straight ahead are the Posts of Cor Arder, now coming full into view. Those soaring cliffs, like the mighty crow-stepped gables of a Cyclopean ruin,—on the whole, frowning and dark, notwithstanding many tiny beltings of green—ascend to a height of 3700 feet above sea level. The lochan at their base is 2200 feet.

It is fortunate that we have arrived at our journey's end, for the wind has suddenly risen, dark gusts are sweeping and whirling across the surface of the tarn, and in a few moments rain will fall in torrents. We must hurriedly cross the burn, and this is very easily done just at the outlet, where the furious blast succeeds ever and anon in driving back the water that had commenced to flow. Let us take shelter without delay under those huge boulders which became detached from the Posts during the Ice Age, or subsequently, and settled down in the humbler position which they now occupy in a higgledy-piggledy fashion. From this retreat, like Elijah in his cave, we may look out upon the rain-storm.

Above our heads is Coire nan Gamhna, into which our old friend Bealach a' Ghoir merges insensibly, while facing us high up on the opposite side of the loch, above the Leacainn Corrach, *i.e.* the steep green slope, like a great Gothic Arch inverted, is the Window of Cor Arder. So elevated is this vast opening, that it is visible far down in the valley of the Spey, presenting a most striking appearance when the westerling sun throws its weird outlines into bold relief.

Never have I been in Cor Arder without seeing the eagles that nest every year on that fearful ledge in the face of the loftiest of the pillars, whence, even now, taking advantage of the subsidence of the storm, they are flying out together on strong wing to sweep upwards, gyrating from the Posts to Coire Chriochrain, and from the Window to Coire nan Gamhna, finally, as is always the case, to disappear abruptly. From the top of that towering pinnacle, where is their abode, and which actually seems at this moment to project and impend over us, I used to hear of only two men who had looked downwards upon the loch,—one of them being the

ancestor of him who shall be nameless. How little did I imagine in those days that I should be in that position myself,—I, who was surely one of the least likely to adventure such a poise.

Well, this is how it came about. Setting out one morning, early in November, 1880, from the farm-house of Moy, and having the company of a near relative—then a lady of some three score—we ascended the steep banks and long stony acclivities, that would bring us most comfortably to the nearest part of the great table land called Am Buidheanach¹—*i.e.* the Yellow Region, of which the cairn of Craig Meugaidh² (3700 feet) marks the culminating elevation. The day at first seemed very promising, considering that the season was so far advanced, but ere we had accomplished more than two-thirds of the ascent, heavy showers of snow set in. Determined, notwithstanding, in our purpose to reach Craig Meugaidh, we persevered in our upward course despite the wintry weather, until we gained the top of Meall Coire Choille-ras, from whence, away to the north on a slightly rising plateau, we could see the cairn and pole erected by the Ordnance Survey men, which marked the goal and object of our ambition. I thought that I was fairly familiar with our environs, for in early life I had been repeatedly over the ground of a summer morning, along with the shepherds. But as the event showed, I ought to have known the ins and outs of it better than I did. Be that as it might, we quickly traversed the desolate expanse before us, having our destination in full view. All the while, though, the air was darkened with driving flakes; and the carpet of moss and mountain grass that lay over the firm slabs was covered with a coating of snow. Hardly had we gained the meagre shelter of the cairn, when the gathering tempest broke upon us in a climax of violence, the wind with a wild whistle tearing across the bare, bleak altitudes around; so that we judged it best to beat a hasty retreat.

¹The name of this elevated plateau is often given as A' Bhuidheanaich, and sometimes Na Buidheannan: the root in every case being *buidhe*, yellow.

²In the Ordnance Survey this name appears as Meaghaidh.

Through the blinding drift we managed to retrace our footsteps in the snow, until, supposing ourselves out of danger of losing our way, and allured by some rocky hummocks that gave hope of shelter, we turned to the left, and eventually sat down upon a bank to rest and refresh ourselves. Suddenly, the wind came whirling up from below—icy cold and full of sound and fury—as though rending its way through a density of snow flakes, which it sent flying in every direction; then beneath our feet, all at once there opened up a veritable bird's-eye view that thrilled us with awe and wonder. Nearly fifteen hundred feet down, we beheld Loch Cor Arder—targe-like—lying at the base of the precipice on whose brow we had been sitting all unawares of our fearful peril.

To-day as I gaze upwards at those dark columns of rock, it is hard even for me to realise that yonder crowning peak should be smoothly connected with the dull, undulating, and featureless mountain ground which so completely deceived us on the occasion I have described. Though low, in comparison, how much safer is our present seat! whence we survey the loch, whose bosom is stirred by the strong wind into various shades of colour, from black to dusky grey.

And now that the rain has ceased, let us betake ourselves round by the foot of the Posts to the opposite shore,—not in order to ascend to the Window of Cor Arder, though, which would be a stiff climb indeed, but to bring you to the huge stone beside the burn, which affords the only view obtainable of a curious *lusus naturae*, never to be forgotten by him who has once beheld it. I refer to the Window of the Posts. *There* it is, high up in an outflanking wing of rock on the extreme right, like an aperture in a dark bank of cloud, giving an unexpected glimpse of the bright sky beyond. Shaped not unlike a toy kite, it appears to be from six to seven ft. in height. But one would require to have the wings of an eagle to know fully the nature and cause of this wild orifice which cannot be discovered from above, and makes one's head giddy to look at from below. A more imaginative age than ours would say that it was the work of some Fingalian giant who stuck his

finger through the rocky wall in order to make a loophole from which, at his pleasure, he might survey Cor Arder, unseen himself the while.

We, however, my gentle companion, may well rest content with what we have seen of it from our own points of view. As it fades from us now, with its lochan of green depths and one solitary bush—often, perchance, in aftertime to “flash upon that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude,” let me sing you a song reminiscent of another day, which this has brought to mind.

Ere noon, we had climbed to the Ptarmigan's Stone,
That crowned the ascent of a hill ;
The sun seemed to shine for Cor Arder alone,
And the sweet summer air was still.

And there did we rest us a while from the heat—
A grey-headed shepherd and I—
In silence surveying the loch at our feet,
And the compassing mountains high.

When, sudden, we heard a far triumphing shriek,
That echoed through regions of light ;
As, leaving their haunt in the ledge of a peak,
Two eagles extended their flight.

We followed their course, while, with lessening size,
They soared over corrie and ben ;
Till, where that dark pinnacle towers to the skies,
At length they passed out of our ken.

“Hark !” whispered the shepherd, and turned to the mere
Whose face had contracted a frown ;
For the rocks intercepted the sunlight clear,
And an eddying breeze went down.

He guided my vision, with out-pointed crook,
To a desolate shore and wild ;
Whence issued, 'mid noise of a turbulent brook,
A sound like the cry of a child.

'Twas an otter that stood on a slab of stone,
With head lifted up to the blue ;
But, whether his voice was of joy or of moan,
The God who created him knew.

Then he crept to the edge, and was lost to sight
 In the water so dull and deep ;
 And the thought of him moving through vaulted night,
 Made me shudder and well-nigh weep.

“ May mine be the lot of yon sovereign bird !—
 To have liberty unconfined,”
 Quoth I to my friend (who spoke never a word),
 In the eagerness of my mind.

“ The eagle may sweep over mountain and sea,
 The otter must lurk by his den ;
 Their diverse conditions it seemeth to me,
 Resemble the fortunes of men.

“ So some are degraded in dungeons of earth,
 Where labours and sorrows be rife ;
 And some are exalted, by favouring birth,
 To bask in the sunshine of life.”

Then answered the shepherd, in tone of rebuke,
 And gazed upon me, as he said,
 With an earnest smile and a far-seeing look—
 “ ’Tis the whim of a childish head ;

“ For each creature that lives has an equal joy
 In fulfilling its nature’s law ;
 And each soul may do glory to God, my boy,
 And have pleasure devoid of flaw.”

We rose to depart, and the dog gave a bound
 (It was Jed—worth his weight in gold) :
 Our hirsels were roused from their summering ground,
 And we gathered them down to the fold.