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The poems of Ossian

in two volumes ; to which are prefixed dissertations on the æra and
poems of Ossian

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The Death of Cuthullin

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a wreath of snow! Her hair spreads wide on his
 face. Their blood is mixing round!
 "Daughter of Colla! thou art low!" said
 Cairbar's hundred bards. "Silence is at the
 blue streams of Selma. Truthil's face have
 failed. When wilt thou rise in thy beauty, first
 of Erin's maids? Thy sleep is long in the tomb.
 The morning distant far. The sun shall not
 come to thy bed and **THE** "Awake, Dar-thula!
 awake, thou first of women! the wind of spring

DEATH OF CUTHULLIN:

leaves. Retire, O son! the daughter of Colla is
 asleep. She will not come forth in her beauty.
 She will not move from the steps of her loved-

P O E M.

Such was the song of the bards, when they
 raised the tomb. I sang over the grave, when
 the king of Ulster came, when he came to
 green Erin, to fight with warrior Cairbar.

^d Truthil was the founder of Dar-thula's family.

THE
DEATH OF CUTHULLIN

A POEM

ARGUMENT.

CUTHULLIN, after the arms of Fingal had expelled Swaran from Ireland, continued to manage the affairs of that kingdom, as the guardian of Cormac, the young king. In the third year of Cuthullin's administration, Torlath, the son of Cantéla, rebelled in Connaught, and advanced to Temora, to dethrone Cormac. Cuthullin marched against him, came up with him at the lake of Lego, and totally defeated his forces. Torlath fell in battle by Cuthullin's hand; but as he too eagerly pressed on the enemy, he was mortally wounded. The affairs of Cormac, though for some time supported by Nathos, as mentioned in the preceding poem, fell into confusion at the death of Cuthullin. Cormac himself was slain by the rebel Cairbar; and the re-establishment of the royal family of Ireland by Fingal, furnishes the subject of the epic poem of Temora.

THE
DEATH OF CUTHULLIN:
A POEM.

“Is the wind on the shield of Fingal? Or is the voice of past times in my hall? Sing on, sweet voice! for thou art pleasant. Thou carriest away my night with joy. Sing on, O Bragéla, daughter of car-borne Sorglan!

“It is the white wave of the rock, and not Cuthullin’s sails. Often do the mists deceive me for the ship of my love! when they rise round some ghost, and spread their grey skirts on the wind. Why dost thou delay thy coming, son of the generous Semo? Four times has autumn returned with its winds, and raised the seas of Togorma,¹ since thou hast been in the

¹ Togorma, i. e. *the island of blue waves*, one of the Hebrides, was subject to Connal, the son of Caithbat, Cuthullin’s friend. He is sometimes called the son of Colgar, from one of that name who was the founder of the family. Connal, a few days before the news of Torlath’s revolt came to Temora, had sailed to Togorma, his native isle; where he was detained by contrary winds during the war in which Cuthullin was killed.

roar of battles, and Bragéla distant far! Hills of the isle of mist! when will ye answer to his hounds? But ye are dark in your clouds. Sad Bragéla calls in vain! Night comes rolling down. The face of ocean fails. The heathcock's head is beneath his wing. The hind sleeps, with the hart of the desert. They shall rise with morning's light, and feed by the mossy stream. But my tears return with the sun. My sighs come on with the night. When wilt thou come in thine arms, O chief of Erin's wars?"

Pleasant is thy voice in Ossian's ear, daughter of car-borne Sorglan! But retire to the hall of shells; to the beam of the burning oak. Attend to the murmur of the sea: it rolls at Dunscai's walls: let sleep descend on thy blue eyes. Let the hero arise in thy dreams!

Cuthullin sits at Lego's lake, at the dark rolling of waters. Night is around the hero. His thousands spread on the heath. A hundred oaks burn in the midst. The feast of shells is smoaking wide. Carril strikes the harp beneath a tree. His grey locks glitter in the beam. The rustling blast of night is near, and lifts his aged hair. His song is of the blue Togorma, and of its chief, Cuthullin's friend! "Why art thou absent, Connal, in the day of the gloomy storm? The chiefs of the south have convened,

against the car-borne Cormac. The winds detain thy sails. Thy blue waters roll around thee. But Cormac is not alone. The son of Semo fights his wars! Semo's son his battles fights! the terror of the stranger! He that is like the vapour of death, slowly borne by sultry winds. The sun reddens in its presence: the people fall around."

Such was the song of Carril, when a son of the foe appeared. He threw down his pointless spear. He spoke the words of Torlath! Torlath, chief of heroes, from Lego's sable surge! He that led his thousands to battle, against car-borne Cormac. Cormac, who was distant far, in Temora's^k echoing halls: he learned to bend the bow of his fathers; and to lift the spear. Nor long didst thou lift the spear, mildly-shining beam of youth! death stands dim behind thee, like the darkened half of the moon, behind its growing light! Cuthullin rose before the bard,^l that came from generous Torlath. He

^k The royal palace of the Irish kings; Team-hrath, according to some of the bards.

^l The bards were the heralds of ancient times; and their persons were sacred on account of their office. In later times they abused that privilege; and as their persons were inviolable, they satirized and lampooned so freely those who were not liked by their patrons, that they became a public nuisance. Screened under the character of heralds, they grossly abused the enemy when he would not accept the terms they offered.

offered him the shell of joy. He honoured the son of songs. "Sweet voice of Lego!" he said, "what are the words of Torlath? Comes he to our feast or battle, the car-borne son of Cántéla?"^m

"He comes to thy battle," replied the bard, "to the sounding strife of spears. When morning is grey on Lego, Torlath will fight on the plain. Wilt thou meet him, in thine arms, king of the isle of mist? Terrible is the spear of Torlath! it is a meteor of night. He lifts it, and the people fall! death sits in the lightning of his sword!" "Do I fear," replied Cuthullin, "the spear of car-borne Torlath? He is brave as a thousand heroes: but my soul delights in war! The sword rests not by the side of Cuthullin, bard of the times of old! Morning shall meet me on the plain, and gleam on the blue arms of Semo's son. But sit thou on the heath, O bard! and let us hear thy voice. Partake of the joyful shell: and hear the songs of Temora!"

"This is no time," replied the bard, "to hear the song of joy: when the mighty are to meet in battle, like the strength of the waves of Lego. Why art thou so dark, Slimora!ⁿ with all thy silent woods? No star trembles on thy

^m Cean-teola', *head of a family.*

ⁿ Slia'mor, *great hill.*

top. No moon-beam on thy side. But the meteors of death are there: the grey watry forms of ghosts. Why art thou dark, Slimora! with thy silent woods?" He retired, in the sound of his song. Carril joined his voice. The music was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul. The ghosts of departed bards heard on Slimora's side. Soft sounds spread along the wood. The silent valleys of night rejoice. So, when he sits in the silence of the day, in the valley of his breeze, the humming of the mountain bee comes to Ossian's ear: the gale drowns it in its course; but the pleasant sound returns again! Slant looks the sun on the field! gradual grows the shade of the hill!

"Raise," said Cuthullin, to his hundred bards, "the song of the noble Fingal: that song which he hears at night, when the dreams of his rest descend: when the bards strike the distant harp, and the faint light gleams on Selma's walls. Or let the grief of Lara rise: the sighs of the mother of Calmar,^o when he

^o Calmar, the son of Matha. His death is related at large in the third book of Fingal. He was the only son of Matha; and the family was extinct in him. The seat of the family was on the banks of the river Lara, in the neighbourhood of Lego, and probably near the place where Cuthullin lay; which circumstance suggested to him the lamentation of Alclétha over her son.

was sought, in vain, on his hills; when she beheld his bow in the hall. Carril, place the shield of Caithbat on that branch. Let the spear of Cuthullin be near; that the sound of my battle may rise, with the grey beam of the east." The hero leaned on his father's shield: the song of Lara rose! The hundred bards were distant far: Carril alone is near the chief. The words of the song were his: the sound of his harp was mournful.

"Alclétha^p with the aged locks! mother of car-borne Calmar! why dost thou look toward the desert, to behold the return of thy son? These are not his heroes, dark on the heath: nor is that the voice of Calmar. It is but the distant grove, Alclétha! but the roar of the mountain-wind!" "Who^q bounds over Lara's stream, sister of the noble Calmar? Does not Alclétha behold his spear? But her eyes are dim! Is it not the son of Matha, daughter of my love?"

"It is but an aged oak, Alclétha!" replied

^p Ald-cla'tha, *decaying beauty*: probably a poetical name given the mother of Calmar, by the bard himself.

^q Alclétha speaks. Calmar had promised to return by a certain day, and his mother and his sister Alona are represented as looking, with impatience, towards that quarter where they expected Calmar should make his first appearance.

the lovely weeping Alona.^r "It is but an oak, Alclétha, bent over Lara's stream. But who comes along the plain? sorrow is in his speed. He lifts high the spear of Calmar. Alclétha, it is covered with blood!" "But it is covered with the blood of foes,^s sister of car-borne Calmar! His spear never returned unstained with blood: nor his bow from the strife of the mighty. The battle is consumed in his presence: he is a flame of death, Alona! Youth^t of the mournful speed! where is the son of Alclétha? Does he return with his fame, in the midst of his echoing shields? Thou art dark and silent! Calmar is then no more! Tell me not, warrior, how he fell. I must not hear of his wound!" "Why dost thou look towards the desert, mother of low-laid Calmar?"

Such was the song of Carril, when Cuthullin lay on his shield. The bards rested on their harps. Sleep fell softly around. The son of Semo was awake alone. His soul was fixed on war. The burning oaks began to decay. Faint red light is spread around. A feeble voice is heard! The ghost of Calmar came! He stalked dimly along the beam. Dark is the wound in

^r Alùine, *exquisitely beautiful*. ^s Alclétha speaks.

^t She addresses herself to Larnir, Calmar's friend, who had returned with the news of his death.

his side. His hair is disordered and loose. Joy sits pale on his face. He seems to invite Cuthullin to his cave.

“Son of the cloudy night!” said the rising chief of Erin. “Why dost thou bend thy dark eyes on me, ghost of the noble Calmar? Wouldst thou frighten me, O Matha’s son! from the battles of Cormac? Thy hand was not feeble in war: neither was thy voice for peace. How art thou changed, chief of Lara! if thou now dost advise to fly! But, Calmar, I never fled. I never feared the ghosts of night. Small is their knowledge, weak their hands; their dwelling is in the wind. But my soul grows in danger, and rejoices in the noise of steel. Retire thou to thy cave. Thou art not Calmar’s ghost. He delighted in battle. His arm was like the thunder of heaven!” He retired in his blast with joy, for he had heard the voice of his praise.

The faint beam of the morning rose. The sound of Caithbat’s buckler spread. Green Erin’s warriors convened, like the roar of many streams. The horn of war is heard over Lego. The mighty Torlath came! “Why dost thou come with thy thousands, Cuthullin?” said the chief of Lego. “I know the strength of thy arm. Thy soul is an unextinguished fire. Why fight we not on the plain, and let our hosts behold our deeds? Let them behold us like roar-

ing waves, that tumble round a rock: the mariners hasten away, and look on their strife with fear."

"Thou risest, like the sun, on my soul," replied the son of Semo. "Thine arm is mighty, O Torlath! and worthy of my wrath. Retire, ye men of Ullin, to Slimora's shady side. Behold the chief of Erin, in the day of his fame. Carril! tell to mighty Connal, if Cuthullin must fall, tell him I accused the winds, which roar on Togorma's waves. Never was he absent in battle, when the strife of my fame arose. Let his sword be before Cormac, like the beam of heaven. Let his counsel sound in Temora, in the day of danger!"

He rushed, in the sound of his arms, like the terrible spirit of Loda,^u when he comes, in the roar of a thousand storms, and scatters battles from his eyes. He sits on a cloud over Lochlin's seas. His mighty hand is on his sword. Winds lift his flaming locks! The waning moon half-lights his dreadful face. His features, blended in darkness, arise to view. So terrible was Cuthullin in the day of his fame. Torlath fell by his hand. Lego's heroes mourned.

^u Loda, in the third book of Fingal, is mentioned as a place of worship in Scandinavia: by the *spirit of Loda*, the poet probably means Odin, the great deity of the northern nations. He is described here with all his terrors.

They gather around the chief, like the clouds of the desert. A thousand swords rose at once; a thousand arrows flew; but he stood like a rock in the midst of a roaring sea. They fell around. He strode in blood. Dark Slimora echoed wide. The sons of Ullin came. The battle spread over Lego. The chief of Erin overcame. He returned over the field with his fame. But pale he returned! The joy of his face was dark. He rolled his eyes in silence. The sword hung, unsheathed, in his hand. His spear bent at every step!

“Carril,” said the chief in secret, “the strength of Cuthullin fails. My days are with the years that are past. No morning of mine shall arise. They shall seek me at Temora, but I shall not be found. Cormac will weep in his hall, and say, “Where is Erin’s chief?” But my name is renowned! my fame in the song of bards. The youth will say in secret, O let me die as Cuthullin died! Renown clothed him like a robe. The light of his fame is great. Draw the arrow from my side. Lay Cuthullin beneath that oak. Place the shield of Caithbat near, that they may behold me amidst the arms of my fathers!”

“And is the son of Semo fallen?” said Carril with a sigh. “Mournful are Tura’s walls. Sorrow dwells at Dunscaï. Thy spouse is left

alone in her youth. The son^x of thy love is alone! He shall come to Bragéla, and ask her why she weeps? He shall lift his eyes to the wall, and see his father's sword. "Whose sword is that?" he will say. The soul of his mother is sad. Who is that, like the hart of the desert, in the murmur of his course? His eyes look wildly round in search of his friend. Connal, son of Colgar, where hast thou been, when the mighty fell? Did the seas of Togorma roll around thee? Was the wind of the south in thy sails? The mighty have fallen in battle, and thou wast not there. Let none tell it in Selma, nor in Morven's woody land. Fingal will be sad, and the sons of the desert mourn!"

By the dark rolling waves of Lego they raised the hero's tomb. Luäth,^y at a distance, lies. The song of bards rose over the dead.

^x Conloch, who was afterwards very famous for his great exploits in Ireland. He was so remarkable for his dexterity in handling the javelin, that when a good marksman is described, it has passed into a proverb, in the north of Scotland, *He is unerring as the arm of Conloch.*

^y It was of old, the custom to bury the favourite dog near the master. This was not peculiar to the ancient Scots, for we find it practised by many other nations in their ages of heroism. There is a stone shewn still at Dunscai in the isle of Sky, to which Cuthullin commonly bound his dog Luath. The stone goes by his name to this day.

“Blest^z be thy soul, son of Semo! Thou wert mighty in battle. Thy strength was like the strength of a stream! thy speed like the eagle’s wing. Thy path in battle was terrible: the steps of death were behind thy sword. Blest be thy soul, son of Semo, car-borne chief of Dunscaï! Thou hast not fallen by the sword of the mighty, neither was thy blood on the spear of the brave. The arrow came, like the sting of death in a blast: nor did the feeble hand, which drew the bow, perceive it. Peace to thy soul, in thy cave, chief of the isle of mist!

“The mighty are dispersed at Temora: there is none in Cormac’s hall. The king mourns in his youth. He does not behold thy return. The sound of thy shield is ceased: his foes are gathering round. Soft be thy rest in thy cave, chief of Erin’s wars! Bragéla will not hope for thy return, or see thy sails in ocean’s foam. Her steps are not on the shore; nor her ear open to the voice of thy rowers. She sits in the hall of shells. She sees the arms of him that is no more. Thine eyes are full of tears, daughter of car-borne Sorglan! Blest be thy soul in death, O chief of shady Tura!”

^z This is the song of the bards over Cuthullin’s tomb. Every stanza closes with some remarkable title of the hero, which was always the custom in funeral elegies.