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The poems of Ossian

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

Macpherson, James

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Temora, Book V.

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TEMORA:
AN EPIC POEM.

BOOK V.

ARGUMENT

TO BOOK V.

THE poet, after a short address to the harp of Cona, describes the arrangement of both armies on either side of the river Lubar. Fingal gives the command to Fillan; but, at the same time, orders Gaul, the son of Morni, who had been wounded in the hand in the preceding battle, to assist him with his counsel. The army of the Fir-bolg is commanded by Foldath. The general onset is described. The great actions of Fillan. He kills Rothmar and Culmin. But when Fillan conquers in one wing, Foldath presses hard on the other. He wounds Dermid, the son of Duthno, and puts the whole wing to flight. Dermid deliberates with himself, and, at last, resolves to put a stop to the progress of Foldath, by engaging him in single combat. When the two chiefs were approaching towards one another, Fillan came suddenly to the relief of Dermid; engaged Foldath, and killed him. The behaviour of Malthos towards the fallen Foldath. Fillan puts the whole army of the Fir-bolg to flight. The book closes with an address to Clatho, the mother of that hero.

TEMORA:
AN EPIC POEM.

BOOK V.

THOU dweller between the shields, that hang,
on high, in Ossian's hall! Descend from thy
place, O harp, and let me hear thy voice! Son
of Alpin, strike the string. Thou must awake
the soul of the bard. The murmur of 'Lora's
stream has rolled the tale away. I stand in the
cloud of years. Few are its openings toward
the past; and when the vision comes, it is but
dim and dark. I hear thee, harp of Selma! my
soul returns, like a breeze, which the sun brings
back to the vale, where dwelt the lazy mist!

Lubar^u is bright before me, in the windings

^t Lora is often mentioned; it was a small and rapid stream in the neighbourhood of Selma. There is no vestige of this name now remaining; though it appears, from a very old song, which the translator has seen, that one of the small rivers on the north-west coast was called Lora some centuries ago.

^u From several passages in the poem we may form a distinct idea of the scene of the action of Temora. At a small

of its vale. On either side, on their hills, rise the tall forms of the kings. Their people are poured around them, bending forward to their words: as if their fathers spoke, descending from the winds. But they themselves are like two rocks in the midst; each with its dark head of pines, when they are seen in the desert, above low-sailing mist. High on their face are streams, which spread their foam on blasts of wind!

Beneath the voice of Cathmor pours Erin, like the sound of flame. Wide they come down to Lubar. Before them is the stride of Foldath. But Cathmor retires to his hill, beneath his

distance from one another rose the hills of Mora and Lora; the first possessed by Fingal, the second by the army of Cathmor. Through the intermediate plain ran the small river Lubar, on the banks of which all the battles were fought, excepting that between Cairbar and Oscar, related in the first book. This last mentioned engagement happened to the north of the hill of Mora, of which Fingal took possession, after the army of Cairbar fell back to that of Cathmor. At some distance, but within sight of Mora, towards the west, Lubar issued from the mountain of Crommal, and, after a short course through the plain of Moi-lena, discharged itself into the sea near the field of battle. Behind the mountain of Crommal ran the small stream of Lavath, on the banks of which Ferad-Artho, the son of Cair-bre, the only person remaining of the race of Conar, lived concealed in a cave, during the usurpation of Cairbar, the son of Borbar-duthul.

bending oak. The tumbling of a stream is near the king. He lifts, at times, his gleaming spear. It is a flame to his people, in the midst of war. Near him stands the daughter of Conmor, leaning on a rock. She did not rejoice at the strife. Her soul delighted not in blood. A *valley spreads green behind the hill, with its three blue streams. The sun is there in silence. The dun mountain-roes come down. On these are turned the eyes of Sulmalla, in her thoughtful mood.

Fingal beholds Cathmor, on high, the son of Borbar-duthul! he beholds the deep-rolling of Erin, on the darkened plain. He strikes that warning boss, which bids the people to obey, when he sends his chiefs before them, to the field of renown. Wide rise their spears to the sun. Their echoing shields reply around. Fear, like a vapour, winds not among the host: for HE, THE KING, is near, the strength of streamy Selma. Gladness brightens the hero. We hear his words with joy.

“ Like the coming forth of winds, is the sound of Selma’s sons! They are mountain wa-

* It was to this valley Sulmalla retired, during the last and decisive battle between Fingal and Cathmor. It is described in the seventh book, where it is called the vale of Lona, and the residence of a Druid.

ters, determined in their course. Hence is Fingal renowned. Hence is his name in other lands. He was not a lonely beam in danger; for your steps were always near! But never was Fingal a dreadful form, in your presence, darkened into wrath. My voice was no thunder to your ears. Mine eyes sent forth no death. When the haughty appeared, I beheld them not. They were forgot at my feasts. Like mists they melted away. A young beam is before you! Few are his paths to war! They are few, but he is valiant. Defend my dark-haired son. Bring Fillan back with joy. Hereafter he may stand alone. His form is like his fathers. His soul is a flame of their fire. Son of car-borne Morni, move behind the youth. Let thy voice reach his ear, from the skirts of war. Not unobserved rolls battle, before thee, breaker of the shields!"

The king strode, at once, away, to Cormul's lofty rock. Intermitting, darts the light from his shield, as slow the king of heroes moves. Sidelong rolls his eye o'er the heath, as forming, advance the lines. Graceful fly his half-grey locks round his kingly features, now lightened with dreadful joy. Wholly mighty is the chief! Behind him, dark and slow, I moved. Straight came forward the strength of Gaul. His shield hung loose on its thong. He spoke, in haste,

to Ossian. "Bind,^y son of Fingal, this shield! Bind it high to the side of Gaul. The foe may behold it, and think I lift the spear. If I should fall, let my tomb be hid in the field; for fall I must without fame. Mine arm cannot lift the steel. Let not Evir-choma hear it, to blush between her locks. Fillan! the mighty behold us! Let us not forget the strife. Why should THEY come, from their hills, to aid our flying field?"

He strode onward, with the sound of his shield. My voice pursued him as he went. "Can the son of Morni fall without his fame in Erin? But the deeds of the mighty are forgot by themselves. They rush careless over the fields of renown. Their words are never heard!" I rejoiced over the steps of the chief. I strode to the rock of the king, where he sat, in his wandering locks, amid the mountain wind!

In two dark ridges bend the hosts, toward each other, at Lubar. Here Foldath rises, a pillar of darkness: there brightens the youth of Fillan. Each, with his spear in the stream, sent forth the voice of war. Gaul struck the shield of Selma. At once they plunge in battle! Steel

^y It is necessary to remember, that Gaul was wounded; which occasions his requiring here the assistance of Ossian to bind his shield on his side.

pours its gleam on steel: like the fall of streams shone the field, when they mix their foam together, from two dark-browed rocks! Behold he comes, the son of fame! He lays the people low! Deaths sit on blasts around him! Warriors strew thy paths, O Fillan!

Rothmar,^z the shield of warriors, stood between two chinky rocks. Two oaks, which winds had bent from high, spread their branches on either side. He rolls his darkening eyes on Fillan, and, silent, shades his friends. Fingal saw the approaching fight. The hero's soul arose. But, as the stone of Loda^a falls, shook,

^z Roth-mar, *the sound of the sea before a storm.* Drumanard, *high ridge.* Culmin, *soft-haired.* Cul-allin, *beautiful locks.* Strutha, *streamy river.*

^a By the stone of Loda is meant a place of worship among the Scandinavians. The Caledonians, in their many expeditions to Orkney and Scandinavia, became acquainted with some of the rites of the religion which prevailed in those countries, and the ancient poetry frequently alludes to them. There are some ruins, and circular pales of stones, remaining still in Orkney, and the islands of Shetland, which retain, to this day, the name of *Loda* or *Loden*. They seem to have differed materially, in their construction, from those Druidical monuments which remain in Britain, and the western isles. The places of worship among the Scandinavians were originally rude and unadorned. In after ages, when they opened a communication with other nations, they adopted their manners, and built temples. That at Upsal, in Sweden, was

at once, from rocking Druman-ard, when spirits heave the earth in their wrath; so fell blue-shielded Rothmar.

Near are the steps of Culmin. The youth came, bursting into tears. Wrathful he cut the wind, ere yet he mixed his strokes with Fillan. He had first bent the bow with Rothmar, at the rock of his own blue streams. There they had marked the place of the roe, as the sun-beam flew over the fern. Why, son of Cul-allin! Why, Culmin, dost thou rush on that beam^b of light? It is a fire that consumes. Son of Cul-allin, retire. Your fathers were not equal, in the glittering strife of the field. The mother of Culmin remains in the hall. She looks forth on blue-rolling Strutha. A whirlwind rises, on the stream, dark-eddying round the ghost of her son. His dogs^c are howling in their place,

amazingly rich and magnificent. Harquin, of Norway, built one, near Drontheim, little inferior to the former; and it went always under the name of Loden. *Mallet, introduction à l'histoire de Dannemarc.*

^b The poet, metaphorically, calls Fillan a beam of light. Culmin, mentioned here, was the son of Clonmar, chief of Strutha, by the beautiful Cul-allin. She was so remarkable for the beauty of her person, that she is introduced, frequently, in the similes and allusions of ancient poetry. *Mar Chulaluin Strutha nan sian; Lovely as Cul allin of Strutha of the storms.*

^c Dogs were thought to be sensible of the death of their

His shield is bloody in the hall. "Art thou fallen, my fair-haired son, in Erin's dismal war?"

As a roe, pierced in secret, lies panting, by her wonted streams; the hunter surveys her feet of wind; he remembers her stately bounding before. So lay the son of Cul-allin, beneath the eye of Fillan. His hair is rolled in a little stream. His blood wanders on his shield. Still his hand holds the sword, that failed him in the midst of danger. "Thou art fallen," said Fillan, "ere yet thy fame was heard. Thy father sent thee to war. He expects to hear of thy deeds. He is grey, perhaps, at his streams. His eyes are toward Moi-lena. But thou shalt not return with the spoil of the fallen foe!"

Fillan pours the flight of Erin before him, over the resounding heath. But, man on man, fell Morven, before the dark-red rage of Fol-

master, let it happen at ever so great distance. It was also the opinion of the times, that the arms which warriors left at home, became bloody, when they themselves fell in battle. It was from those signs that Cul-allin is supposed to understand that her son is killed; in which she is confirmed by the appearance of his ghost. Her sudden and short exclamation is more judicious in the poet, than if she had extended her complaints to a greater length. The attitude of the fallen youth, and Fillan's reflections over him, come forcibly back on the mind, when we consider, that the supposed situation of the father of Culmin, was so similar to that of Fingal, after the death of Fillan himself.

dath: for, far on the field, he poured the roar of half his tribes. Dermid stands before him in wrath. The sons of Selma gathered around. But his shield is cleft by Foldath. His people fly over the heath.

Then said the foe, in his pride, "They have fled. My fame begins! Go, Malthos, go bid Cathmor guard the dark-rolling of ocean; that Fingal may not escape from my sword. He must lie on earth. Beside some fen shall his tomb be seen. It shall rise without a song. His ghost shall hover, in mist, over the reedy pool."

Malthos heard, with darkening doubt. He rolled his silent eyes. He knew the pride of Foldath. He looked up to Fingal on his hills: then, darkly turning, in doubtful mood, he plunged his sword in war.

In Clono's^d narrow vale, where bend two

^d This valley had its name from Clono, son of Lethmal of Lora, one of the ancestors of Dermid, the son of Duthno. His history is thus related in an old poem. In the days of Conar, the son of Trenmor, the first king of Ireland, Clono passed over into that kingdom, from Caledonia, to aid Conar against the Fir-bolg. Being remarkable for the beauty of his person, he soon drew the attention of Sulmin, the young wife of an Irish chief. She disclosed her passion, which was not properly returned by the Caledonian. The lady sickened, through disappointment, and her love for Clono came to the ears of her husband. Fired with jealousy, he vowed revenge.

trees above the stream, dark, in his grief, stood Duthno's silent son. The blood pours from the

Clono, to avoid his rage, departed from Temora, in order to pass over into Scotland; and, being benighted in the valley mentioned here, he laid him down to sleep. *There Lethmal descended in the dreams of Clono, and told him that danger was near.*

GHOST OF LETHMAL.

Arise from thy bed of moss; son of low-laid Lethmal, arise. The sound of the coming of foes, descends along the wind.

CLONO.

Whose voice is that, like many streams, in the season of my rest?

GHOST OF LETHMAL.

Arise, thou dweller of the souls of the lovely; son of Lethmal, arise.

CLONO.

How dreary is the night! The moon is darkened in the sky! Red are the paths of ghosts along its sullen face! Green-skirted meteors set around. Dull is the roaring of streams, from the valley of dim forms. I hear thee, spirit of my father, on the eddying course of the wind. I hear thee; but thou bendest not, forward, thy tall form, from the skirts of night.

As Clono prepared to depart, the husband of Sulmin came up, with his numerous attendants. Clono defended himself, but, after a gallant resistance, he was overpowered and slain. He was buried in the place where he was killed, and the valley was called after his name. Dermid, in his request to Gaul the son of Morni, which immediately follows this paragraph, alludes to the tomb of Clono, and his own connexion with that unfortunate chief.

side of Dermid. His shield is broken near. His spear leans against a stone. Why, Dermid, why so sad? "I hear the roar of battle. My people are alone. My steps are slow on the heath; and no shield is mine. Shall he then prevail? It is then after Dermid is low! I will call thee forth, O Foldath! and meet thee yet in fight."

He took his spear, with dreadful joy. The son of Morni came. "Stay, son of Duthno, stay thy speed. Thy steps are marked with blood. No bossy shield is thine. Why shouldst thou fall unarmed?" "Son of Morni! give thou thy shield. It has often rolled back the war. I shall stop the chief in his course. Son of Morni! behold that stone! It lifts its grey head through grass. There dwells a chief of the race of Dermid. Place me there in night."

He slowly rose against the hill. He saw the troubled field; the gleaming ridges of battle, disjoined and broken round. As distant fires, on heath by night, now seem as lost in smoke, now rearing their red streams on the hill, as blow or cease the winds: so met the intermitting war, the eye of broad-shielded Dermid. Through the host are the strides of Foldath, like some dark ship on wintry waves, when she issues from between two isles, to sport on resounding ocean!

Dermid, with rage, beholds his course. He strives to rush along. But he fails amid his steps; and the big tear comes down. He sounds his father's horn. He thrice strikes his bossy shield. He calls thrice the name of Foldath, from his roaring tribes. Foldath, with joy, beholds the chief. He lifts aloft his bloody spear. As a rock is marked with streams, that fell troubled down its side in a storm; so, streaked with wandering blood, is the dark chief of Moma! The host, on either side, withdraw from the contending of kings. They raise, at once, their gleaming points. Rushing comes Fillan of Selma. Three paces back Foldath withdraws, dazzled with that beam of light, which came, as issuing from a cloud, to save the wounded chief. Growing in his pride he stands. He calls forth all his steel.

As meet two broad-winged eagles, in their sounding strife, in winds; so rush the two chiefs on Moi-lena, into gloomy fight. By turns are the steps of the kings^c forward on their rocks above; for now the dusky war seems to descend on their swords. Cathmor feels the joy of warriors on his mossy hill: their joy in secret, when dangers rise to match their souls. His eye is not turned on Lubar, but on Selma's dreadful

^c Fingal and Cathmor.

king. He beholds him, on Mora, rising in his arms.

Foldath^f falls on his shield. The spear of Fillan pierced the king. Nor looks the youth

^f The fall of Foldath, if we may believe tradition, was predicted to him, before he had left his own country to join Cairbar, in his designs on the Irish throne. He went to the cave of Moma, to inquire of the spirits of his fathers, concerning the success of the enterprise of Cairbar. The responses of oracles are always attended with obscurity, and liable to a double meaning: Foldath, therefore, put a favourable interpretation on the prediction, and pursued his adopted plan of aggrandising himself with the family of Atha.

FOLDATH, ADDRESSING THE SPIRITS OF HIS FATHERS.

Dark I stand, in your presence; fathers of Foldath, hear.
Shall my steps pass over Atha, to Ullin of the roes?

THE ANSWER.

Thy steps shall pass over Atha, to the green dwelling of kings. There shall thy stature arise, over the fallen, like a pillar of thunder clouds. There, terrible in darkness, shalt thou stand, till the *reflected beam*, or *Clon-cath* of Moruth, come; Moruth of many streams, that roars in distant lands.

Cloncath, or *reflected beam*, say my traditional authors, was the name of the sword of Fillan; so that it was in the latent signification of the word *Cloncath*, that the deception lay. My principal reason for introducing this note, is, that this tradition serves to shew, that the religion of the Fir-bolg differed from that of the Caledonians, as we never find the latter inquiring of the spirits of their deceased ancestors.

on the fallen, but onward rolls the war. The hundred voices of death arise. "Stay, son of Fingal, stay thy speed. Beholdest thou not that gleaming form, a dreadful sign of death? Awaken not the king of Erin. Return, son of blue-eyed Clatho."

"Malthos^s beholds Foldath low. He darkly stands above the chief. Hatred is rolled from his soul. He seems a rock in a desert, on whose dark side are the trickling of waters; when the slow-sailing mist has left it, and all its trees are blasted with winds. He spoke to the dying hero, about the narrow house. "Whether shall thy grey stone rise in Ullin, or in ^hMoma's woody land? where the sun looks, in secret,

^s The characters of Foldath and Malthos are sustained. They were both dark and surly, but each in a different way. Foldath was impetuous and cruel: Malthos, stubborn and incredulous. Their attachment to the family of Atha was equal; their bravery in battle the same. Foldath was vain and ostentatious: Malthos, unindulgent, but generous. His behaviour here, towards his enemy Foldath, shews that a good heart often lies concealed under a gloomy and sullen character.

^h Moma was the name of a country in the south of Connaught, once famous for being the residence of an Arch-Druid. The cave of Moma was thought to be inhabited by the spirits of the chiefs of the Fir-bolg, and their posterity sent to inquire there, as to an oracle, concerning the issue of their wars.

on the blue streams of Dal-rutho?¹ There are the steps of thy daughter, blue-eyed Dardulena!”

“Rememberest thou her,” said Foldath, “because no son is mine: no youth to roll the battle before him, in revenge of me? Malthos, I am revenged. I was not peaceful in the field. Raise the tombs of those I have slain, around my narrow house. Often shall I forsake the blast; to rejoice above their graves; when I behold them spread around, with their long whistling grass.”

His soul rushed to the vale of Moma, to Dardulena's dreams, where she slept, by Dal-rutho's stream, returning from the chase of the hinds. Her bow is near the maid, unstrung. The breezes fold her long hair on her breasts. Clothed in the beauty of youth, the love of heroes lay. Dark-bending, from the skirts of the wood, her wounded father seemed to come. He appeared, at times, then hid himself in mist.

¹ Dal-rhuäth, *parched or sandy field*. The etymology of Dar-dulena is uncertain. The daughter of Foldath, was, probably, so called, from a place in Ulster, where her father had defeated part of the adherents of Artho, king of Ireland. Dor-dulena; *the dark wood of Moi-lena*. As Foldath was proud and ostentatious, it would appear, that he transferred the name of a place, where he himself had been victorious, to his daughter.

Bursting into tears she rose. She knew that the chief was low. To her came a beam from his soul, when folded in its storms. Thou wert the last of his race, O blue-eyed Dardu-lena.

Wide-spreading over echoing Lubar, the flight of Bolgar is rolled along. Fillan hangs forward on their steps. He strews, with dead, the heath. Fingal rejoices over his son. Blue-shielded Cathmor rose.^k

Son of Alpin, bring the harp. Give Fillan's praise to the wind. Raise high his praise, in mine ear, while yet he shines in war.

“Leave, blue-eyed Clatho, leave thy hall! Behold that early beam of thine! The host is withered in its course. No further look, it is dark. Light-trembling from the harp, strike, virgins, strike the sound. No hunter he de-

^k The suspense, in which the mind of the reader is left here, conveys the idea of Fillan's danger more forcibly home, than any description that could be introduced. There is a sort of eloquence, in silence with propriety. A minute detail of the circumstances of an important scene, is generally cold and insipid. The human mind, free, and fond of thinking for itself, is disgusted to find every thing done by the poet. It is, therefore, his business only to mark the most striking outlines, and to allow the imaginations of his readers to finish the figure for themselves.

The book ends in the afternoon of the third day from the opening of the poem.

scends, from the dewy haunt of the bounding
roe. He bends not his bow on the wind; nor
sends his grey arrow abroad.

“Deep-folded in red war! See battle roll
against his side. Striding amid the ridgy strife,
he pours the death of thousands forth. Fillan
is like a spirit of heaven, that descends from
the skirt of winds. The troubled ocean feels
his steps, as he strides from wave to wave. His
path kindles behind him. Islands shake their
heads on the heaving seas! Leave, blue-eyed
Clatho, leave thy hall!”

