



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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Fingal, Book III.

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ARGUMENT

TO BOOK III.

CUTHULLIN, pleased with the story of Carril, insists with that bard for more of his songs. He relates the actions of Fingal in Lochlin, and death of Agandecca, the beautiful sister of Swaran. He had scarce finished, when Calmar, the son of Matha, who had advised the first battle, came wounded from the field, and told them of Swaran's design to surprise the remains of the Irish army. He himself proposes to withstand singly the whole force of the enemy, in a narrow pass, till the Irish should make good their retreat. Cuthullin, touched with the gallant proposal of Calmar, resolves to accompany him, and orders Carril to carry off the few that remained of the Irish. Morning comes; Calmar dies of his wounds; and, the ships of the Caledonians appearing, Swaran gives over the pursuit of the Irish, and returns to oppose Fingal's landing. Cuthullin, ashamed, after his defeat, to appear before Fingal, retires to the cave of Tura. Fingal engages the enemy, and puts them to flight; but the coming on of night makes the victory not decisive. The king, who had observed the gallant behaviour of his grandson Oscar, gives him advices concerning his conduct in peace and war. He recommends to him to place the example of his fathers before his eyes, as the best model for his conduct; which introduces the episode concerning Fainasollis, the daughter of the king of Craca, whom Fingal had taken under his protection, in his youth. Fillan and Oscar are dispatched to observe the motions of the enemy by night; Gaul, the son of Morni, desires the command of the army in the next battle; which Fingal promises to give him. Some general reflections of the poet close the third day.

F I N G A L,
AN ANCIENT EPIC POEM.
IN SIX BOOKS.

BOOK III.^a

“PLEASANT are the words of the song,” said Cuthullin; “lovely the tales of other times! They are like the calm dew of the morning on the hill of roes; when the sun is faint on its side, and the lake is settled and blue in the vale. O Carril, raise again thy voice! let me hear the song of Selma; which was sung in my halls of joy, when Fingal, king of shields, was there, and glowed at the deeds of his fathers.”

“Fingal! thou dweller of battle,” said Carril, “early were thy deeds in arms. Lochlin was consumed in thy wrath, when thy youth strove with the beauty of maids. They smiled at the

^a The second night, since the opening of the poem, continues; and Cuthullin, Connal, and Carril, still sit in the place described in the preceding book. The story of Agandecca is introduced here with propriety, as great use is made of it in the course of the poem, and as it, in some measure, brings about the catastrophe.

fair-blooming face of the hero; but death was in his hands. He was strong as the waters of Lora. His followers were the roar of a thousand streams. They took the king of Lochlin in war; they restored him to his ships. His big heart swelled with pride; the death of the youth was dark in his soul. For none ever, but Fingal, had overcome the strength of the mighty Starno.^b He sat in the hall of his shells, in Lochlin's woody land. He called the grey-haired Snivan, that often sung round the circle of Loda:^c when the stone of power heard his voice, and battle turned in the field of the valiant!

“Go; grey-haired Snivan,” Starno said, “go to Ardven's sea-surrounded rocks. Tell to the king of Selma; he, the fairest among his thousands; tell him I give him my daughter, the loveliest maid that ever heaved a breast of snow. Her arms are white as the foam of my waves. Her soul is generous and mild. Let him come with his bravest heroes, to the daughter of the secret hall.” Snivan came to Selma's hall: fair-

^b Starno was the father of Swaran as well as Agandecca. His fierce and cruel character is well marked in other poems concerning the times

^c This passage most certainly alludes to the religion of Lochlin, and *the stone of power* here mentioned, is the image of one of the deities of Scandinavia.

haired Fingal attended his steps. His kindled soul flew to the maid, as he bounded on the waves of the north. "Welcome," said the dark-brown Starno, "welcome, king of rocky Morven: welcome his heroes of might, sons of the distant isle! Three days within my halls shall ye feast; three days pursue my boars; that your fame may reach the maid who dwells in the secret hall."

"Starno designed their death. He gave the feast of shells. Fingal, who doubted the foe, kept on his arms of steel. The sons of death were afraid; they fled from the eyes of the king. The voice of sprightly mirth arose. The trembling harps of joy were strung. Bards sung the battle of heroes: they sung the heaving breast of love. Ullin, Fingal's bard, was there: the sweet voice of resounding Cona. He praised the daughter of Lochlin; and ^dMorven's high-descended chief. The daughter of Lochlin overheard. She left the hall of her secret sigh! She came in all her beauty, like the moon from the cloud of the east. Loveliness was around her as light. Her steps were the music of songs. She saw the youth and loved him. He was the stolen sigh of her soul. Her blue eye

^d All the north-west coast of Scotland probably went of old under the name of Morven, which signifies a ridge of very high hills.

rolled on him in secret: she blest the chief of resounding Morven.

“The third day, with all its beams, shone bright on the wood of boars. Forth moved the dark-brown Starno; and Fingal, king of shields. Half the day they spent in the chase; the spear of Selma was red in blood. It was then the daughter of Starno, with blue eyes rolling in tears: it was then she came with her voice of love, and spoke to the king of Morven. “Fingal, high-descended chief, trust not Starno’s heart of pride. Within that wood he has placed his chiefs. Beware of the wood of death. But remember, son of the isle, remember Agandecca: save me from the wrath of my father, king of the windy Morven!”

“The youth, with unconcern, went on; his heroes by his side. The sons of death fell by his hand: and Gormal echoed around! Before the halls of Starno the sons of the chase convened. The king’s dark brows were like clouds; his eyes like meteors of night. “Bring hither,” he said, “Agandecca, to her lovely king of Morven! His hand is stained with the blood of my people; her words have not been in vain!” She came with the red eye of tears. She came with loosely flowing locks. Her white breast heaved with broken sighs, like the foam of the streamy Lubar. Starno pierced her side with

steel. She fell, like a wreath of snow, which slides from the rocks of Ronan; when the woods are still, and echo deepens in the vale! Then Fingal eyed his valiant chiefs; his valiant chiefs took arms. The gloom of battle roared; Lochlin fled or died. Pale, in his bounding ship, he closed the maid of the softest soul. Her tomb ascends on Ardven; the sea roars round her narrow dwelling.

“Blessed be her soul,” said Cuthullin, “blessed be the mouth of the song! Strong was the youth of Fingal; strong is his arm of age. Lochlin shall fall again before the king of echoing Morven. Shew thy face from a cloud, O moon! light his white sails on the wave: and if any strong spirit^e of heaven sits on that low-hung cloud; turn his dark ships from the rock, thou rider of the storm!”

Such were the words of Cuthullin, at the sound of the mountain-stream; when Calmar ascended the hill, the wounded son of Matha. From the field he came in his blood. He leaned

^e This is the only passage in the poem that has the appearance of religion. But Cuthullin's apostrophe to this spirit is accompanied with a doubt, so that it is not easy to determine whether the hero meant a superior being, or the ghosts of deceased warriors, who were supposed in those times to rule the storms, and to transport themselves in a gust of wind from one country to another.

on his bending spear. Feeble is the arm of battle! but strong the soul of the hero! "Welcome, O son of Matha!" said Connal, "welcome art thou to thy friends! Why bursts that broken sigh from the breast of him who never feared before?" "And never, Connal, will he fear, chief of the pointed steel! My soul brightens in danger: in the noise of arms. I am of the race of battle. My fathers never feared.

"Cormar was the first of my race. He sported through the storms of waves. His black skiff bounded on ocean; he travelled on the wings of the wind. A spirit once embroiled the night. Seas swell, and rocks resound. Winds drive along the clouds. The lightning flies on wings of fire. He feared, and came to land: then blushed that he feared at all. He rushed again among the waves, to find the son of the wind. Three youths guide the bounding bark; he stood with sword unsheathed. When the low-hung vapour passed, he took it by the curling head. He searched its dark womb with his steel. The son of the wind forsook the air. The moon and stars returned! Such was the boldness of my race. Calmar is like his fathers. Danger flies from the lifted sword. They best succeed who dare!

"But now, ye sons of green Erin, retire from Lena's bloody heath. Collect the sad

remnant of our friends, and join the sword of Fingal. I heard the sound of Lochlin's advancing arms! Calmar will remain and fight. My voice shall be such, my friends, as if thousands were behind me. But, son of Semo, remember me: remember Calmar's lifeless corse. When Fingal shall have wasted the field, place me by some stone of remembrance, that future times may hear my fame; that the mother of Calmar may rejoice in my renown."

"No: son of Matha;" said Cuthullin, "I will never leave thee here. My joy is in unequal fight: my soul increases in danger. Connal, and Carril of other times, carry off the sad sons of Erin. When the battle is over, search for us in this narrow way. For near this oak we shall fall, in the stream of the battle of thousands. O Fithil's son, with flying speed rush over the heath of Lena. Tell to Fingal that Erin is fallen. Bid the king of Morven come. O let him come, like the sun in a storm, to lighten, to restore the isle!"

Morning is grey on Cromla. The sons of the sea ascend. Calmar stood forth to meet them, in the pride of his kindling soul. But pale was the face of the chief. He leaned on his father's spear. That spear which he brought from Lara, when the soul of his mother was sad; the soul of the lonely Alcletha, waining in

the sorrow of years. But slowly now the hero falls, like a tree on the plain. Dark Cuthullin stands alone, like a rock in a sandy vale. The sea comes with its waves, and roars on its hardened sides. Its head is covered with foam; the hills are echoing around.

Now from the grey mist of the ocean, the white-sailed ships of Fingal appear. High is the grove of their masts, as they nod, by turns, on the rolling wave. Swaran saw them from the hill. He returned from the sons of Erin. As ebbs the resounding sea, through the hundred isles of Inistore; so loud, so vast, so immense, return the sons of Lochlin against the king. But bending, weeping, sad, and slow, and dragging his long spear behind, Cuthullin sunk in Cromla's wood, and mourned his fallen friends. He feared the face of Fingal, who was wont to greet him from the fields of renown!

“How many lie there of my heroes! the chief of Erin's race! they that were cheerful in the hall, when the sound of the shells arose! No more shall I find their steps in the heath. No more shall I hear their voice in the chase. Pale, silent, low on bloody beds, are they who were my friends! O spirits of the lately dead, meet Cuthullin on his heath! Speak to him on the wind, when the rustling tree of Tura's cave resounds. There, far remote, I shall lie un-

known. No bard shall hear of me. No grey stone shall rise to my renown. Mourn me with the dead, O Bragela! departed is my fame." Such were the words of Cuthullin, when he sunk in the woods of Cromla!

Fingal, tall in his ship, stretched his bright lance before him. Terrible was the gleam of the steel: it was like the green meteor of death, setting in the heath of Malmor, when the traveller is alone, and the broad moon is darkened in heaven.

"The battle is past," said the king. "I behold the blood of my friends. Sad is the heath of Lena! mournful the oaks of Cromla! The hunters have fallen in their strength: the son of Semo is no more. Ryno and Fillan, my sons, sound the horn of Fingal. Ascend that hill on the shore; call the children of the foe. Call them from the grave of Lamdarg, the chief of other times. Be your voice like that of your father, when he enters the battles of his strength. I wait for the mighty stranger. I wait on Lena's shore for Swaran. Let him come with all his race; strong in battle are the friends of the dead!"

Fair Ryno as lightning gleamed along: dark Fillan rushed like the shade of autumn. On Lena's heath their voice is heard. The sons of ocean heard the horn of Fingal. As the roar-

ing eddy of ocean returning from the kingdom of snows; so strong, so dark, so sudden, came down the sons of Lochlin. The king in their front appears, in the dismal pride of his arms! Wrath burns on his dark-brown face; his eyes roll in the fire of his valour. Fingal beheld the son of Starno: he remembered Agandecca. For Swaran, with the tears of youth, had mourned his white-bosomed sister. He sent Ullin of songs to bid him to the feast of shells: for pleasant on Fingal's soul returned the memory of the first of his loves!

Ullin came with aged steps, and spoke to Starno's son. "O thou that dwellest afar, surrounded like a rock, with thy waves! come to the feast of the king, and pass the day in rest. To-morrow let us fight, O Swaran, and break the echoing shields." "To-day," said Starno's wrathful son, "we break the echoing shields: to-morrow my feast shall be spread; but Fingal shall lie on earth." "To-morrow let his feast be spread," said Fingal with a smile. "To-day, O my sons, we shall break the echoing shields! Ossian, stand thou near my arm. Gaul, lift thy terrible sword. Fergus, bend thy crooked yew. Throw, Fillan, thy lance through heaven. Lift your shields, like the darkened moon. Be your spears the meteors of death. Follow me in the path of my fame. Equal my deeds in battle."

As a hundred winds on Morven; as the streams of a hundred hills; as clouds fly successive over heaven; as the dark ocean assails the shore of the desert; so roaring, so vast, so terrible, the armies mixed on Lena's echoing heath. The groan of the people spread over the hills: it was like the thunder of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona; and a thousand ghosts shriek at once on the hollow wind. Fingal rushed on in his strength, terrible as the spirit of Trenmor; when, in a whirlwind, he comes to Morven, to see the children of his pride. The oaks resound on their mountains, and the rocks fall down before him. Dimly seen, as lightens the night, he strides largely from hill to hill. Bloody was the hand of my father, when he whirled the gleam of his sword. He remembers the battles of his youth. The field is wasted in his course!

Ryno went on like a pillar of fire. Dark is the brow of Gaul. Fergus rushed forward with feet of wind. Fillan like the mist of the hill. Ossian, like a rock, came down. I exulted in the strength of the king. Many were the deaths of my arm! dismal the gleam of my sword! My locks were not then so grey; nor trembled my hands with age. My eyes were not closed in darkness; my feet failed not in the race!

Who can relate the deaths of the people?

Who the deeds of mighty heroes? when Fingal, burning in his wrath, consumed the sons of Lochlin? Groans swelled on groans from hill to hill, till night had covered all. Pale, staring like a herd of deer, the sons of Lochlin convene on Lena. We sat and heard the sprightly harp, at Lubar's gentle stream. Fingal himself was next to the foe. He listened to the tales of his bards. His godlike race were in the song, the chiefs of other times. Attentive, leaning on his shield, the king of Morven sat. The wind whistled through his locks; his thoughts are of the days of other years. Near him, on his bending spear, my young, my valiant Oscar stood. He admired the king of Morven: his deeds were swelling in his soul!

“Son of my son,” begun the king, “O Oscar, pride of youth! I saw the shining of thy sword. I gloried in my race. Pursue the fame of our fathers; be thou what they have been, when Trenmor lived, the first of men, and Trathal, the father of heroes! They fought the battle in their youth. They are the song of bards. O Oscar! bend the strong in arms; but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but like the gale that moves the grass, to those who ask thine aid. So Trenmor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was

the support of the injured; the weak rested behind the lightning of my steel.

“Oscar! I was young like thee, when lovely Fainasóllis came: that sun-beam! that mild light of love! the daughter of Craca’s^f king! I then returned from Cona’s heath, and few were in my train. A white-sailed boat appeared far off; we saw it like a mist, that rode on ocean’s wind. It soon approached. We saw the fair. Her white breast heaved with sighs. The wind was in her loose dark hair; her rosy cheek had tears. “Daughter of beauty,” calm I said, “what sigh is in thy breast? Can I, young as I am, defend thee, daughter of the sea? My sword is not unmatched in war; but dauntless is my heart.”

“To thee I fly,” with sighs she said, “O prince of mighty men! To thee I fly, chief of the generous shells, supporter of the feeble hand! The king of Craca’s echoing isle owned me the sun-beam of his race. Cromala’s hills have heard the sighs of love for unhappy Fainasóllis! Sora’s chief beheld me fair; he loved the daughter of Craca. His sword is a beam of light upon the warrior’s side. But dark is his brow; and tempests are in his soul. I shun

^f What the Craca here mentioned was, is not, at this distance of time, easy to determine. The most probable opinion is, that it was one of the Shetland isles. There is a story concerning a daughter of the king of Craca in the sixth book.

him, on the roaring sea; but Sora's chief pursues."

"Rest thou," I said, "behind my shield: rest in peace, thou beam of light! The gloomy chief of Sora will fly, if Fingal's arm is like his soul. In some lone cave I might conceal thee, daughter of the sea! But Fingal never flies. Where the danger threatens, I rejoice in the storm of spears." I saw the tears upon her cheek. I pitied Craca's fair. Now, like a dreadful wave afar, appeared the ship of stormy Borbar. His masts high-bended over the sea, behind their sheets of snow. White roll the waters on either side. The strength of ocean sounds. "Come thou," I said, "from the roar of ocean, thou rider of the storm! Partake the feast within my hall. It is the house of strangers."

"The maid stood trembling by my side. He drew the bow. She fell. "Unerring is thy hand," I said, "but feeble was the foe!" We fought; nor weak the strife of death! He sunk beneath my sword. We laid them in two tombs of stone; the hapless lovers of youth! Such have I been in my youth, O Oscar! be thou like the age of Fingal. Never search thou for battle; nor shun it when it comes.

"Fillan, and Oscar of the dark-brown hair! ye, that are swift in the race! fly over the heath

in my presence. View the sons of Lochlin. Far off I hear the noise of their feet, like distant sounds in woods. Go; that they may not fly from my sword, along the waves of the north. For many chiefs of Erin's race lie here on the dark bed of death. The children of war are low; the sons of echoing Cromla."

The heroes flew like two dark clouds: two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts; when air's dark children come forth to frighten hapless men. It was then that Gaul,[§] the son of Morni, stood like a rock in night. His spear is glittering to the stars; his voice like many streams.

"Son of battle," cried the chief, "O Fingal, king of shells! let the bards of many songs sooth Erin's friends to rest. Fingal, sheathe thou thy sword of death; and let thy people fight. We wither away without our fame; our king is the only breaker of shields! When morning rises on our hills, behold, at a distance, our

[§] Gaul, the son of Morni, was chief of a tribe that disputed long the pre-eminence with Fingal himself. They were reduced at last to obedience, and Gaul, from an enemy, turned Fingal's best friend and greatest hero. His character is something like that of Ajax in the Iliad; a hero of more strength than conduct in battle. He was very fond of military fame, and here he demands the next battle to himself. The poet, by an artifice, removes Fingal, that his return may be the more magnificent.

deeds. Let Lochlin feel the sword of Morni's son; that bards may sing of me. Such was the custom heretofore of Fingal's noble race. Such was thine own, thou king of swords, in battles of the spear."

"O son of Morni," Fingal replied, "I glory in thy fame. Fight; but my spear shall be near, to aid thee in the midst of danger. Raise, raise the voice, ye sons of song! and lull me into rest. Here will Fingal lie, amidst the wind of night. And if thou, Agandecca, art near, among the children of thy land; if thou sittest on a blast of wind, among the high-shrouded masts of Lochlin; come to my dreams,^h my fair one. Shew thy bright face to my soul."

Many a voice, and many a harp, in tuneful sounds arose. Of Fingal's noble deeds they sung; of Fingal's noble race: and sometimes, on the lovely sound, was heard the name of Ossian. I often fought, and often won, in battles of the spear. But blind, and tearful, and forlorn, I walk with little men! O Fingal, with thy race of war, I now behold thee not! The wild roes feed on the green tomb of the mighty king of Morven! Blest be thy soul, thou king of swords, thou most renowned on the hills of Cona! -

^h The poet prepares us for the dream of Fingal in the next book.