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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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Fingal, Book IV.

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F I N G A L,

AN ANCIENT EPIC POEM.

BOOK IV.

VOL. II.

Y

A R G U M E N T

TO BOOK IV.

THE action of the poem being suspended by night, Ossian takes that opportunity to relate his own actions at the lake of Lego, and his courtship of Everallin, who was the mother of Oscar, and had died some time before the expedition of Fingal into Ireland. Her ghost appears to him, and tells him that Oscar, who had been sent the beginning of the night, to observe the enemy, was engaged with an advanced party, and almost overpowered. Ossian relieves his son; and an alarm is given to Fingal of the approach of Swaran. The king rises, calls his army together, and, as he had promised the preceding night, devolves the command on Gaul, the son of Morni; while he himself, after charging his sons to behave gallantly and defend his people, retires to a hill, from whence he could have a view of the battle. The battle joins: the poet relates Oscar's great actions. But when Oscar, in conjunction with his father, conquered in one wing, Gaul, who was attacked by Swaran in person, was on the point of retreating in the other. Fingal sends Ullin his bard to encourage him with a war song, but notwithstanding, Swaran prevails; and Gaul and his army are obliged to give way. Fingal, descending from the hill, rallies them again: Swaran desists from the pursuit, possesses himself of a rising ground, restores the ranks, and waits the approach of Fingal. The king, having encouraged his men, gives the necessary orders, and renews the battle. Cuthullin, who, with his friend Connal, and Carril his bard, had retired to the cave of Tura, hearing the noise, came to the brow of the hill, which overlooked the field of battle, where he saw Fingal engaged with the enemy. He, being hindered by Connal from joining Fingal, who was himself upon the point of obtaining a complete victory, sends Carril to congratulate that hero on his success.

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

IN SIX BOOKS.

BOOK IV.ⁱ

Who comes with her songs from the hill, like the bow of the showery Lena? It is the maid of the voice of love! The white-armed daughter of Toscar! Often hast thou heard my song; often given the tear of beauty. Dost thou come to the wars of thy people? to hear the actions of Oscar? When shall I cease to mourn, by the streams of resounding Cona? My years have passed away in battle. My age is darkened with grief!

ⁱ Fingal being asleep, and the action suspended by night, the poet introduces the story of his courtship of Everallin, the daughter of Branno. The episode is necessary to clear up several passages that follow in the poem; at the same time that it naturally brings on the action of the book, which may be supposed to begin about the middle of the third night from the opening of the poem. This book, as many of Ossian's other compositions, is addressed to the beautiful Malvina, the daughter of Toscar. She appears to have been in love with Oscar, and to have affected the company of the father after the death of the son.

Daughter of the hand of snow! I was not so mournful and blind. I was not so dark and forlorn, when Everallin loved me! Everallin with the dark-brown hair, the white-bosomed daughter of Branno! A thousand heroes sought the maid; she refused her love to a thousand. The sons of the sword were despised: for graceful, in her eyes, was Ossian! I went, in suit of the maid, to Lego's sable surge. Twelve of my people were there, the sons of streamy Morven! We came to Branno, friend of strangers! Branno of the sounding mail! "From whence," he said, "are the arms of steel? Not easy to win is the maid, who has denied the blue-eyed sons of Erin! But blest be thou, O son of Fingal! Happy is the maid that waits thee! Though twelve daughters of beauty were mine, thine were the choice, thou son of fame!"

He opened the hall of the maid, the dark-haired Everallin. Joy kindled in our manly breasts. We blest the maid of Branno. Above us, on the hill, appeared the people of stately Cormac. Eight were the heroes of the chief. The heath flamed wide with their arms. There Colla, there Durra of wounds; there mighty Toscar, and Tago, there Frestal the victorious stood; Dairo of the happy deeds; Dala, the battle's bulwark in the narrow way! The sword flamed in the hand of Cormac. Graceful was

the look of the hero! Eight were the heroes of Ossian. Ullin, stormy son of war. Mullo, of the generous deeds. The noble, the graceful Scelacha. Oglan, and Cerdan the wrathful. Dumariccan's brows of death! And why should Ogar be the last; so wide renowned on the hills of Ardven?

Ogar met Dala the strong, face to face, on the field of heroes. The battle of the chiefs was like wind, on ocean's foamy waves. The dagger is remembered by Ogar; the weapon which he loved. Nine times he drowned it in Dala's side. The stormy battle turned. Three times I broke on Cormac's shield: three times he broke his spear. But, unhappy youth of love! I cut his head away. Five times I shook it by the lock. The friends of Cormac fled. Whoever would have told me, lovely maid, when then I strove in battle; that blind, forsaken, and forlorn, I now should pass the night; firm ought his mail to have been; unmatched his arm in war!

On Lena's^k gloomy heath, the voice of music died away. The unconstant blast blew hard.

^k The poet returns to his subject. If one could fix the time of the year in which the action of the poem happened, from the scene described here, I should be tempted to place it in autumn. The trees shed their leaves, and the winds are variable, both which circumstances agree with that season of the year.

The high oak shook its leaves around. Of Everallin were my thoughts, when, in all the light of beauty she came; her blue eyes rolling in tears. She stood on a cloud before my sight, and spoke with feeble voice! "Rise, Ossian, rise, and save my son; save Oscar, prince of men. Near the red oak of Lubar's stream, he fights with Lochlin's sons." She sunk into her cloud again. I covered me with steel. My spear supported my steps; my rattling armour rung. I hummed, as I was wont in danger, the songs of heroes of old. Like distant thunder Lochlin heard. They fled; my son pursued.

I called him like a distant stream. "Oscar, return over Lena. No further pursue the foe," I said, "though Ossian is behind thee." He came! and pleasant to my ear was Oscar's sounding steel. "Why didst thou stop my hand," he said, "till death had covered all? For dark and dreadful by the stream they met thy son and Fillan! They watched the terrors of the night. Our swords have conquered some. But as the winds of night pour the ocean over the white sands of Mora, so dark advance the sons of Lochlin, over Lena's rustling heath! The ghosts of night shriek afar: I have seen the meteors of death. Let me awake the king of Morven, he that smiles in danger! He that is like the sun of heaven, rising in a storm!"

Fingal had started from a dream, and leaned on Trenmor's shield; the dark-brown shield of his fathers; which they had lifted of old in war. The hero had seen, in his rest, the mournful form of Agandecca. She came from the way of the ocean. She slowly, lonely, moved over Lena. Her face was pale like the mist of Cromla. Dark were the tears of her cheek. She often raised her dim hand from her robe: her robe which was of the clouds of the desert: she raised her dim hand over Fingal, and turned away her silent eyes! "Why weeps the daughter of Starno?" said Fingal with a sigh; "why is thy face so pale, fair wanderer of the clouds?" She departed on the wind of Lena. She left him in the midst of the night. She mourned the sons of her people, that were to fall by the hand of Fingal.

The hero started from rest. Still he beheld her in his soul. The sound of Oscar's steps approached. The king saw the grey shield on his side: for the faint beam of the morning came over the waters of Ullin. "What do the foes in their fear?" said the rising king of Morven; "or fly they through ocean's foam, or wait they the battle of steel? But why should Fingal ask? I hear their voice on the early wind! Fly over Lena's heath: O Oscar, awake our friends!"

The king stood by the stone of Lubar. Thrice he reared his terrible voice. The deer started from the fountains of Cromla. The rocks shook on all their hills. Like the noise of a hundred mountain-streams, that burst, and roar, and foam! like the clouds, that gather to a tempest, on the blue face of the sky! so met the sons of the desert, round the terrible voice of Fingal. Pleasant was the voice of the king of Morven to the warriors of his land. Often had he led them to battle; often returned with the spoils of the foe!

“Come to battle,” said the king, “ye children of echoing Selma! Come to the death of thousands. Comhal’s son will see the fight. My sword shall wave on the hill, the defence of my people in war. But never may you need it, warriors; while the son of Morni fights, the chief of mighty men! He shall lead my battle; that his fame may rise in song. O ye ghosts of heroes dead! ye riders of the storm of Cromla! receive my falling people with joy, and bear them to your hills. And may the blast of Lena carry them over my seas, that they may come to my silent dreams, and delight my soul in rest! Fillan, and Oscar of the dark-brown hair! fair Ryno, with the pointed steel! advance with valour to the fight. Behold the son of Morni! Let your swords be like his in strife: behold the

deeds of his hands. Protect the friends of your father. Remember the chiefs of old. My children, I will see you yet, though here you should fall in Erin. Soon shall our cold pale ghosts meet in a cloud, on Cona's eddying winds!"

Now like a dark and stormy cloud, edged round with the red lightning of heaven; flying westward from the morning's beam, the king of Selma removed. Terrible is the light of his armour; two spears are in his hand. His grey hair falls on the wind. He often looks back on the war. Three bards attend the son of fame, to bear his words to the chiefs. High on Cromla's side he sat, waving the lightning of his sword; and as he waved we moved.

Joy rises in Oscar's face. His cheek is red. His eye sheds tears. The sword is a beam of fire in his hand. He came, and smiling, spoke to Ossian. "O ruler of the fight of steel! my father, hear thy son! Retire with Morven's mighty chief. Give me the fame of Ossian. If here I fall; O chief, remember that breast of snow, the lonely sun-beam of my love, the white-handed daughter of Toscar! For, with red cheek from the rock, bending over the stream, her soft hair flies about her bosom, as she pours the sigh for Oscar. Tell her I am on my hills, a lightly-bounding son of the wind; tell her, that in a cloud, I may meet the lovely

maid of Toscar." "Raise, Oscar, rather raise my tomb. I will not yield the war to thee. The first and bloodiest in the strife, my arm shall teach thee how to fight. But, remember, my son, to place this sword, this bow, the horn of my deer, within that dark and narrow house, whose mark is one grey stone. Oscar, I have no love to leave to the care of my son! Everallin is no more, the lovely daughter of Branno!"

Such were our words, when Gaul's loud voice came growing on the wind. He waved on high the sword of his father. We rushed to death and wounds. As waves, white-bubbling over the deep, come swelling, roaring on; as rocks of ooze meet roaring waves; so foes attacked and fought. Man met with man, and steel with steel. Shields sound, and warriors fall. As a hundred hammers on the red son of the furnace, so rose, so rung their swords!

Gaul rushed on, like a whirlwind in Ardven. The destruction of heroes is on his sword. Swaran was like the fire of the desert in the echoing heath of Gormal! How can I give to the song the death of many spears? My sword rose high, and flamed in the strife of blood. Oscar, terrible wert thou, my best, my greatest son! I rejoiced in my secret soul, when his sword flamed over the slain. They fled amain through Lena's heath. We pursued and slew. As stones

that bound from rock to rock; as axes in echoing woods; as thunder rolls from hill to hill, in dismal broken peals; so blow succeeded to blow, and death to death, from the hand of Oscar and mine.

But Swaran closed round Morni's son, as the strength of the tide of Inistore. The king half-rose from his hill at the sight. He half-assumed the spear. "Go, Ullin; go, my aged bard," begun the king of Morven. "Remind the mighty Gaul of war. Remind him of his fathers. Support the yielding fight with song; for song enlivens war." Tall Ullin went, with step of age, and spoke to the king of swords. "Son¹ of the chief of generous steeds! high-bounding king of spears. Strong arm in every perilous toil. Hard heart that never yields. Chief of the pointed arms of death. Cut down the foe; let no white sail bound round dark Inistore. Be thine arm like thunder; thine eyes like fire; thy heart of solid rock. Whirl round thy sword as a meteor at night: lift thy shield like the flame of death. Son of the chief of generous steeds! Cut down the foe. Destroy!"

¹ The custom of encouraging men in battle with extempore rhymes, has been carried down almost to our own times. Several of these war songs are extant, but the most of them are only a group of epithets, without either beauty or harmony, utterly destitute of poetical merit.

The hero's heart beat high. But Swaran came with battle. He cleft the shield of Gaul in twain. The sons of Selma fled.

Fingal at once arose in arms. Thrice he reared his dreadful voice. Cromla answered around. The sons of the desert stood still. They bent their blushing faces to earth, ashamed at the presence of the king. He came, like a cloud of rain in the day of the sun, when slow it rolls on the hill, and fields expect the shower. Silence attends its slow progress aloft; but the tempest is soon to arise. Swaran beheld the terrible king of Morven. He stopped in the midst of his course. Dark he leaned on his spear, rolling his red eyes around. Silent and tall he seemed, as an oak on the banks of Lubar, which had its branches blasted of old by the lightning of heaven. It bends over the stream: the grey moss whistles in the wind: so stood the king. Then slowly he retired to the rising heath of Lena. His thousands pour around the hero. Darkness gathers on the hill!

Fingal, like a beam from heaven, shone in the midst of his people. His heroes gather around him. He sends forth the voice of his power. "Raise my standards on high; spread them on Lena's wind, like the flames of an hundred hills! Let them sound on the winds of Erin, and remind us of the fight. Ye sons of

the roaring streams, that pour from a thousand hills, be near the king of Morven! attend to the words of his power! Gaul, strongest arm of death! O Oscar, of the future fights! Connal, son of the blue shields of Sora! Dermid, of the dark-brown hair! Ossian, king of many songs, be near your father's arm!" We reared the sun-beam^m of battle; the standard of the king! Each hero exulted with joy, as, waving, it flew on the wind. It was studded with gold above, as the blue wide shell of the nightly sky. Each hero had his standard too; and each his gloomy men!

"Behold," said the king of generous shells, "how Lochlin divides on Lena! They stand like broken clouds on a hill; or an half consumed grove of oaks, when we see the sky through its branches, and the meteor passing behind! Let every chief among the friends of Fingal, take a dark troop of those that frown so high: nor let a son of the echoing groves bound on the waves of Inistore!"

"Mine," said Gaul, "be the seven chiefs that came from Lano's lake." "Let Inistore's dark king," said Oscar, "come to the sword of

^m Fingal's standard was distinguished by the name of *sun-beam*; probably on account of its bright colour, and its being studded with gold. To begin a battle, is expressed, in old composition, by *lifting of the sun-beam*.

Ossian's son." "To mine the king of Iniscon," said Connal, heart of steel! "Or Mudan's chief, or I," said brown-haired Dermid, "shall sleep on clay-cold earth." My choice, though now so weak and dark, was Terman's battling king; I promised with my hand to win the hero's dark-brown shield. "Blest and victorious be my chiefs," said Fingal, of the mildest look. "Swaran, king of roaring waves, thou art the choice of Fingal!"

Now, like an hundred different winds, that pour through many vales; divided, dark, the sons of Selma advanced. Cromla echoed around! How can I relate the deaths, when we closed in the strife of arms! O daughter of Toscar! bloody were our hands! The gloomy ranks of Lochlin fell, like the banks of the roaring Cona! Our arms were victorious on Lena: each chief fulfilled his promise! Beside the murmur of Branno thou didst often sit, O maid! thy white bosom rose frequent, like the down of the swan, when slow she swims on the lake, and sidelong winds blow on her ruffled wing. Thou hast seen the sun retire, red and slow behind his cloud: night gathering round on the mountain, while the unfrequent blast roared in the narrow vales. At length the rain beats hard: thunder rolls in peals. Lightning glances on the rocks! Spirits ride on beams of fire! The strength of

the mountain-streams comes roaring down the hills. Such was the noise of battle, maid of the arms of snow! Why, daughter of Toscar, why that tear? The maids of Lochlin have cause to weep! The people of their country fell. Bloody were the blue swords of the race of my heroes! But I am sad, forlorn, and blind; no more the companion of heroes! Give, lovely maid, to me thy tears. I have seen the tombs of all my friends!

It was then, by Fingal's hand, a hero fell, to his grief! Grey-haired he rolled in the dust. He lifted his faint eyes to the king: "And is it by me thou hast fallen," said the son of Comhal, "thou friend of Agandecca! I have seen thy tears for the maid of my love, in the halls of the bloody Starno! Thou hast been the foe of the foes of my love, and hast thou fallen by my hand? Raise, Ullin, raise the grave of Mathon; and give his name to Agandecca's song. Dear to my soul hast thou been, thou darkly-dwelling maid of Ardven!"

Cuthullin, from the cave of Cromla, heard the noise of the troubled war. He called to Connal, chief of swords; to Carril, of other times. The grey-haired heroes heard his voice. They took their pointed spears. They came, and saw the tide of battle, like ocean's crowded waves: when the dark wind blows from the

deep, and rolls the billows through the sandy vale! Cuthullin kindled at the sight. Darkness gathered on his brow. His hand is on the sword of his fathers: his red rolling eyes on the foe. He thrice attempted to rush to battle: he thrice was stopt by Connal. "Chief of the isle of mist," he said, "Fingal subdues the foe. Seek not a part of the fame of the king; himself is like the storm!"

"Then, Carril, go," replied the chief, "go, greet the king of Morven. When Lochlin falls away like a stream after rain: when the noise of the battle is past. Then be thy voice sweet in his ear, to praise the king of Selma! Give him the sword of Caithbat. Cuthullin is not worthy to lift the arms of his fathers! Come, O ye ghosts of the lonely Cromla! ye souls of chiefs that are no more! be near the steps of Cuthullin; talk to him in the cave of his grief. Never more shall I be renowned, among the mighty in the land. I am a beam that has shone; a mist that has fled away: when the blast of the morning came, and brightened the shaggy side of the hill: Connal! talk of arms no more: departed is my fame. My sighs shall be on Cromla's wind; till my footsteps cease to be seen. And thou, white-bosomed Bragela! mourn over the fall of my fame: vanquished, I will never return to thee, thou sun-beam of my soul!"