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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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Fingal, Book VI.

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F I N G A L,

AN ANCIENT EPIC POEM.

BOOK VI.

VOL. II.

2 A

ARGUMENT

TO BOOK VI.

NIGHT comes on. Fingal gives a feast to his army, at which Swaran is present. The king commands Ullin, his bard, to give *the song of peace*; a custom always observed at the end of a war. Ullin relates the actions of Trenmor, great grandfather to Fingal, in Scandinavia, and his marriage with Inibaca, the daughter of a king of Lochlin, who was ancestor to Swaran; which consideration, together with his being brother to Agandecca, with whom Fingal was in love in his youth, induced the king to release him, and permit him to return, with the remains of his army, into Lochlin, upon his promise of never returning to Ireland in a hostile manner. The night is spent in settling Swaran's departure, in songs of bards, and in a conversation in which the story of Grumal is introduced by Fingal. Morning comes; Swaran departs. Fingal goes on a hunting party, and, finding Cuthullin in the cave of Tura, comforts him, and sets sail the next day for Scotland; which concludes the poem.

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

IN SIX BOOKS.

BOOK VI.

THE clouds of night come rolling down. Darkness rests on the steeps of Cromla. The stars of the north arise over the rolling of Erin's waves: they shew their heads of fire, through the flying mist of heaven. A distant wind roars in the wood. Silent and dark is the plain of death! Still on the dusky Lena arose in my ears the voice of Carril. He sung of the friends of our youth; the days of former years; when we met on the banks of Lego: when we sent round the joy of the shell. Cromla answered to his voice. The ghosts of those he sung came in their rustling winds. They were seen to bend with joy, towards the sound of their praise!

Be thy soul blest, O Carril! in the midst of thy eddying winds. O that thou wouldst come to my hall, when I am alone by night! And thou dost come, my friend. I hear often thy

light hand on my harp; when it hangs, on the distant wall, and the feeble sound touches my ear. Why dost thou not speak to me in my grief, and tell when I shall behold my friends? But thou passest away in thy murmuring blast; the wind whistles through the grey hair of Ossian!

Now, on the side of Mora, the heroes gathered to the feast! A thousand aged oaks are burning to the wind. The strength¹ of the shells goes round. The souls of warriors brighten with joy. But the king of Lochlin is silent. Sorrow reddens in the eyes of his pride. He often turned toward Lena. He remembered that he fell. Fingal leaned on the shield of his fathers. His grey locks slowly waved on the wind, and glittered to the beam of night. He saw the grief of Swaran, and spoke to the first of bards.

“ Raise, Ullin, raise the song of peace. O sooth my soul from war! Let mine ear forget, in the sound, the dismal noise of arms. Let a

¹ The ancient Celtæ brewed beer, and they were no strangers to mead. Several ancient poems mention wax lights and wine as common in the halls of Fingal. The Caledonians, in their frequent incursions to the province, might become acquainted with those conveniences of life, and introduce them into their own country, among the booty which they carried from South Britain.

hundred harps be near to gladden the king of Lochlin. He must depart from us with joy. None ever went sad from Fingal. Oscar! the lightning of my sword is against the strong in fight. Peaceful it lies by my side when warriors yield in war."

"Trenmor,"^r said the mouth of songs, "lived in the days of other years. He bounded over the waves of the north: companion of the storm! The high rocks of the land of Lochlin, its groves of murmuring sounds, appeared to the hero through mist; he bound his white-bosomed sails. Trenmor pursued the boar, that roared through the woods of Gormal. Many had fled from its presence: but it rolled in death on the spear of Trenmor. Three chiefs, who beheld the deed, told of the mighty stranger. They told, that he stood, like a pillar of fire, in the bright arms of his valour. The king of Lochlin prepared the feast. He called the blooming Trenmor. Three days he feasted at Gormal's windy towers; and received his choice in the combat. The land of Lochlin had no hero, that yielded not to Trenmor. The shell of joy went round with songs, in praise of the king of Morven. He that came over the waves, the first of mighty men!

^r Trenmor was great-grandfather to Fingal. The story is introduced to facilitate the dismissal of Swaran.

“Now when the fourth grey morn arose, the hero launched his ship. He walked along the silent shore, and called for the rushing wind: for loud and distant he heard the blast murmuring behind the groves. Covered over with arms of steel, a son of the woody Gormal appeared. Red was his cheek, and fair his hair. His skin like the snow of Morven. Mild rolled his blue and smiling eye, when he spoke to the king of swords.

“Stay, Trenmor, stay, thou first of men; thou hast not conquered Lonval’s son. My sword has often met the brave. The wise shun the strength of my bow.” “Thou fair-haired youth,” Trenmor replied, “I will not fight with Lonval’s son. Thine arm is feeble, sun-beam of youth! Retire to Gormal’s dark-brown hinds.” “But I will retire,” replied the youth, “with the sword of Trenmor; and exult in the sound of my fame. The virgins shall gather with smiles, around him who conquered mighty Trenmor. They shall sigh with the sighs of love, and admire the length of thy spear; when I shall carry it among thousands; when I lift the glittering point to the sun.”

“Thou shalt never carry my spear,” said the angry king of Morven. “Thy mother shall find thee pale on the shore; and, looking over the dark blue deep, see the sails of him that

slew her son!" "I will not lift the spear," replied the youth, "my arm is not strong with years. But, with the feathered dart, I have learned to pierce a distant foe. Throw down that heavy mail of steel. Trenmor is covered from death. I, first, will lay my mail on earth. Throw now thy dart, thou king of Morven!" He saw the heaving of her breast. It was the sister of the king. She had seen him in the hall: and loved his face of youth. The spear dropt from the hand of Trenmor: he bent his red cheek to the ground. She was to him a beam of light that meets the sons of the cave; when they revisit the fields of the sun, and bend their aching eyes!

"Chief of the windy Morven," begun the maid of the arms of snow, "let me rest in thy bounding ship, far from the love of Corlo. For he, like the thunder of the desert, is terrible to Inibaça. He loves me in the gloom of pride. He shakes ten thousand spears!" "Rest thou in peace," said the mighty Trenmor: "rest behind the shield of my fathers. I will not fly from the chief, though he shakes ten thousand spears!" Three days he waited on the shore. He sent his horn abroad. He called Corlo to battle, from all his echoing hills. But Corlo came not to battle. The king of Lochlin de-

scends from his hall. He feasted on the roaring shore. He gave the maid to Trenmor."

"King of Lochlin," said Fingal, "thy blood flows in the veins of thy foe. Our fathers met in battle, because they loved the strife of spears. But often did they feast in the hall, and send round the joy of the shell. Let thy face brighten with gladness, and thine ear delight in the harp. Dreadful as the storm of thine ocean, thou hast poured thy valour forth; thy voice has been like the voice of thousands, when they engage in war. Raise, to-morrow, raise thy white sails to the wind, thou brother of Agandecca! Bright as the beam of noon, she comes on my mournful soul. I have seen thy tears for the fair one. I spared thee in the halls of Starno; when my sword was red with slaughter; when my eye was full of tears for the maid. Or dost thou choose the fight? The combat which thy fathers gave to Trenmor is thine! that thou mayest depart renowned, like the sun setting in the west!"

"King of the race of Morven!" said the chief of resounding Lochlin, "never will Swaran fight with thee, first of a thousand heroes! I have seen thee in the halls of Starno: few were thy years beyond my own. When shall I, I said to my soul, lift the spear like the noble

Fingal? We have fought heretofore, O warrior, on the side of the shaggy Malmor; after my waves had carried me to thy halls, and the feast of a thousand shells was spread. Let the bards send his name who overcame to future years, for noble was the strife of Malmor! But many of the ships of Lochlin have lost their youths on Lena. Take these, thou king of Morven; and be the friend of Swaran! When thy sons shall come to Gormal, the feast of shells shall be spread, and the combat offered on the vale."

"Nor ship," replied the king, "shall Fingal take, nor land of many hills. The desert is enough to me, with all its deer and woods. Rise on thy waves again, thou noble friend of Agandecca! Spread thy white sails to the beam of the morning; return to the echoing hills of Gormal." "Blest be thy soul, thou king of shells," said Swaran of the dark-brown shield. "In peace thou art the gale of spring. In war the mountain-storm. Take now my hand in friendship, king of echoing Selma! Let thy bards mourn those who fell. Let Erin give the sons of Lochlin to earth. Raise high the mossy stones of their fame; that the children of the north hereafter may behold the place where their fathers fought. The hunter may say, when he leans on a mossy tomb, Here Fingal and Swaran fought, the heroes of other years.

Thus hereafter shall he say, and our fame shall last for ever!"

"Swaran," said the king of hills, "to-day our fame is greatest. We shall pass away like a dream. No sound will remain in our fields of war. Our tombs will be lost in the heath. The hunter shall not know the place of our rest. Our names may be heard in song. What avails it when our strength has ceased? O Ossian, Carril, and Ullin! you know of heroes that are no more. Give us the song of other years. Let the night pass away on the sound, and morning return with joy."

We gave the song to the kings. An hundred harps mixed their sound with our voice. The face of Swaran brightened, like the full moon of heaven; when the clouds vanish away, and leave her calm and broad in the midst of the sky!

"Where, Carril," said the great Fingal, "Carril of other times! Where is the son of Semo, the king of the isle of mist? Has he retired, like the meteor of death, to the dreary cave of Tura?" "Cuthullin," said Carril of other times, "lies in the dreary cave of Tura. His hand is on the sword of his strength. His thoughts on the battles he lost. Mournful is the king of spears; till now unconquered in war. He sends his sword to rest on the side of

Fingal: for, like the storm of the desert, thou hast scattered all his foes. Take, O Fingal! the sword of the hero. His fame is departed like mist, when it flies, before the rustling wind, along the brightening vale."

"No:" replied the king, "Fingal shall never take his sword. His arm is mighty in war: his fame shall never fail. Many have been overcome in battle; whose renown arose from their fall. O Swaran! king of resounding woods, give all thy grief away. The vanquished, if brave, are renowned. They are like the sun in a cloud, when he hides his face in the south, but looks again on the hills of grass!

"Grumal was a chief of Cona. He sought the battle on every coast. His soul rejoiced in blood; his ear in the din of arms. He poured his warriors on Craca; Craca's king met him from his grove: for then, within the circle of Brumo,^s he spoke to the stone of power. Fierce was the battle of the heroes, for the maid of the breast of snow. The fame of the daughter of Craca had reached Grumal at the streams of Cona: he vowed to have the white-bosomed maid, or die on echoing Craca. Three days they strove together, and Grumal on the fourth was bound. Far from his friends they placed

^s This passage alludes to the religion of the king of Craca.

him, in the horrid circle of Brumo; where often, they said, the ghosts of the dead howled round the stone of their fear. But he afterwards shone, like a pillar of the light of heaven. They fell by his mighty hand. Grumal had all his fame!

“Raise, ye bards of other times,” continued the great Fingal, “raise high the praise of heroes: that my soul may settle on their fame; that the mind of Swaran may cease to be sad.” They lay in the heath of Mora. The dark winds rustled over the chiefs. A hundred voices, at once, arose: a hundred harps were strung. They sung of other times; the mighty chiefs of former years! When now shall I hear the bard? When rejoice at the fame of my fathers? The harp is not strung on Morven. The voice of music ascends not on Cona. Dead, with the mighty, is the bard. Fame is in the desert no more.

Morning trembles with the beam of the east; it glimmers on Cromla’s side. Over Lena is heard the horn of Swaran. The sons of the ocean gather around. Silent and sad they rise on the wave. The blast of Erin is behind their sails. White, as the mist of Morven, they float along the sea. “Call,” said Fingal, “call my dogs, the long-bounding sons of the chase. Call white-breasted Bran, and the surly strength of Luath. Fillan and Ryno; but he is not here!

my son rests on the bed of death. Fillan and Fergus! blow the horn, that the joy of the chase may arise: that the deer of Cromla may hear, and start at the lake of roes."

The shrill sound spreads along the wood. The sons of heathy Cromla arise. - A thousand dogs fly off at once, grey-bounding through the heath. A deer fell by every dog; three by the white-breasted Bran. He brought them, in their flight, to Fingal, that the joy of the king might be great! One deer fell at the tomb of Ryno. The grief of Fingal returned. He saw how peaceful lay the stone of him, who was the first at the chase. "No more shalt thou rise, O my son! to partake of the feast of Cromla. Soon will thy tomb be hid, and the grass grow rank on thy grave. The sons of the feeble shall pass along. They shall not know where the mighty lie.

"Ossian and Fillan, sons of my strength! Gaul, chief of the blue steel of war! let us ascend the hill, to the cave of Tura. Let us find the chief of the battles of Erin. Are these the walls of Tura? grey and lonely they rise on the heath. The chief of shells is sad, and the halls are silent and lonely. Come, let us find Cuthullin, and give him all our joy. But is that Cuthullin, O Fillan, or a pillar of smoke

on the heath? The wind of Cromla is on my eyes. I distinguish not my friend."

"Fingal!" replied the youth, "it is the son of Semo! Gloomy and sad is the hero! his hand is on his sword. Hail to the son of battle, breaker of the shields!" "Hail to thee," replied Cuthullin; "hail to all the sons of Morven! Delightful is thy presence, O Fingal! it is the sun on Cromla; when the hunter mourns his absence for a season, and sees him between the clouds. Thy sons are like stars that attend thy course. They give light in the night. It is not thus thou hast seen me, O Fingal! returning from the wars of thy land: when the kings of the world^t had fled, and joy returned to the hill of hinds!" "Many are thy words, Cuthullin," said Connan,^u of small renown. "Thy words are many, son of Semo, but where are thy deeds in arms? Why did we come, over ocean, to aid thy feeble sword? Thou flyest to thy cave of grief, and Connan fights thy battles.

^t This is the only passage in the poem wherein the wars of Fingal against the Romans are alluded to: the Roman emperor is distinguished in old composition by the title of *king of the world*.

^u Connan was of the family of Morni. He is mentioned in several other poems, and always appears with the same character. The poet passed him over in silence till now, and his behaviour here deserves no better usage.

Resign to me these arms of light. Yield them, thou chief of Erin." "No hero," replied the chief, "ever sought the arms of Cuthullin! and had a thousand heroes sought them, it were in vain, thou gloomy youth! I fled not to the cave of grief, till Erin failed at her streams."

"Youth of the feeble arm," said Fingal, "Connán, cease thy words! Cuthullin is renowned in battle; terrible over the world. Often have I heard thy fame, thou stormy chief of Inis-fail. Spread now thy white sails for the isle of mist. See Bragela leaning on her rock. Her tender eye is in tears; the winds lift her long hair from her heaving breast. She listens to the breeze of night, to hear the voice of thy rowers;* to hear the song of the sea! the sound of thy distant harp!"

"Long shall she listen in vain. Cuthullin shall never return! How can I behold Bragela, to raise the sigh of her breast? Fingal, I was always victorious, in battles of other spears!" "And hereafter thou shalt be victorious," said Fingal of generous shells. "The fame of Cuthullin shall grow, like the branchy tree of Cromla. Many battles await thee, O chief!"

* The practice of singing when they row is universal among the inhabitants of the north-west coast of Scotland and the isles. It deceives time, and inspirits the rowers.

Many shall be the wounds of thy hand! Bring hither, Oscar, the deer! Prepare the feast of shells. Let our souls rejoice after danger, and our friends delight in our presence!"

We sat. We feasted. We sung. The soul of Cuthullin rose. The strength of his arm returned. Gladness brightened along his face. Ullin gave the song; Carril raised the voice. I joined the bards, and sung of battles of the spear. Battles, where I often fought. Now I fight no more! The fame of my former deeds is ceased. I sit forlorn at the tombs of my friends!

Thus the night passed away in song. We brought back the morning with joy. Fingal arose on the heath, and shook his glittering spear. He moved first toward the plains of Lena. We followed in all our arms.

"Spread the sail," said the king, "seize the winds as they pour from Lena." We rose on the wave with songs. We rushed, with joy, through the foam of the deep.