The poems of Ossian

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Cath-Loda, Part Second

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CATH-LODA.

DUAN SECOND.

ARGUMENT.

FINGAL, returning with day, devolves the command on Duth-maruno, who engages the enemy, and drives them over the stream of Turthor. Having recalled his people, he congratulates Duth-maruno on his success, but discovers, that that hero had been mortally wounded in the action.—Duth-maruno dies. Ulin, the bard, in honour of the dead, introduces the episode of Colgorm and Strinadona, which concludes this *duän.*

CATH-LODA.

DUAN SECOND.

"WHERE art thou, son of the king?" said dark-haired Duth-maruno. "Where hast thou failed, young beam of Selma? He returns not from the bosom of night! Morning is spread on U-thorno. In his mist is the sun on his hill. Warriors, lift the shields in my presence. He must not fall, like a fire from heaven, whose place is not marked on the ground. He comes, like an eagle, from the skirt of his squally wind! In his hand are the spoils of foes. King of Selma, our souls were sad!"

"Near us are the foes, Duth-maruno. They come forward, like waves in mist, when their foamy tops are seen, at times, above the low-sailing vapour. The traveller shrinks on his journey; he knows not whither to fly. No trembling travellers are we! Sons of heroes call forth the steel. Shall the sword of Fingal arise, or shall a warrior lead?"

The° deeds of old, said Duth-maruno, are like paths to our eyes, O Fingal! Broad-shielded Trenmor is still seen amidst his own dim years. Nor feeble was the soul of the king. There no dark deed wandered in secret. From their hundred streams came the tribes to grassy Colglancrona. Their chiefs were before them. Each

° In this short episode we have a very probable account given us, of the origin of monarchy in Caledonia. The *Cael* or Gauls, who possessed the countries to the north of the Frith of Edinburgh, were, originally, a number of distinct tribes, or clans, each subject to its own chief, who was free and independent of any other power. When the Romans invaded them, the common danger might, perhaps, have induced those *reguli* to join together; but, as they were unwilling to yield to the command of one of their own number, their battles were ill-conducted, and, consequently, unsuccessful. Trenmor was the first who represented to the chiefs, the bad consequences of carrying on their wars in this irregular manner, and advised, that they themselves should alternately lead in battle. They did so, but they were unsuccessful. When it came to Trenmor's turn, he totally defeated the enemy, by his superior valour and conduct, which gained him such an interest among the tribes, that he, and his family after him, were regarded as kings; or, to use the poet's expression, *the words of power rushed forth from Selma of kings.* The regal authority, however, except in time of war, was but inconsiderable; for every chief, within his own district, was absolute and independent. From the scene of the battle in this episode (which was in the valley of Crona, a little to the north of Agricola's wall), I should suppose, that the enemies of the Caledonians were the Romans, or provincial Britons.

strove to lead the war. Their swords were often half-unsheathed. Red rolled their eyes of rage. Separate they stood, and hummed their surly songs. "Why should they yield to each other? their fathers were equal in war." Trenmor was there, with his people, stately in youthful locks. He saw the advancing foe. The grief of his soul arose. He bade the chiefs to lead by turns: they led, but they were rolled away. From his own mossy hill, blue-shielded Trenmor came down. He led wide-skirted battle, and the strangers failed. Around him the dark-browed warriors came: they struck the shield of joy. Like a pleasant gale, the words of power rushed forth from Selma of kings. But the chiefs led, by turns, in war, till mighty danger rose: then was the hour of the king to conquer in the field.

"Not unknown," said Cromma-glas [p] of

[p] In tradition, this Cromma-glas makes a great figure in that battle which Comhal lost, together with his life, to the tribe of Morni. I have just now, in my hands, an Irish composition, of a very modern date, as appears from the language, in which all the traditions, concerning that decisive engagement, are jumbled together. In justice to the merit of the poem, I should have here presented to the reader a translation of it, did not the bard mention some circumstances very ridiculous, and others altogether indecent. Morna, the wife of Comhal, had a principal hand in all the transactions previous to the defeat and death of her husband; she, to use the

shields, "are the deeds of our fathers. But who shall now lead the war, before the race of kings? Mist settles on these four dark hills: within it let each warrior strike his shield. Spirits may descend in darkness, and mark us for the war."

They went, each to his hill of mist. Bards marked the sounds of the shields. Loudest rung thy boss, Duth-maruno. Thou must lead in war!

Like the murmur of waters, the race of U-thorno came down. Starno led the battle, and Swaran of stormy isles. They looked forward from iron shields, like Cruth-loda fiery-eyed, when he looks from behind the darkened moon, and strews his signs on night. The foes met

words of the bard, *who was the guiding star of the women of Erin*. The bard, it is to be hoped, misrepresented the ladies of his country, for Morna's behaviour was, according to him, so void of all decency and virtue, that it cannot be supposed, they had chosen her for their *guiding star*. The poem consists of many stanzas. The language is figurative, and the numbers harmonious; but the piece so full of anachronisms, and so unequal in its composition, that the author, most undoubtedly, was either mad, or drunk, when he wrote it. It is worthy of being remarked, that Comhal is, in this poem, very often called, *Comhal na h'Albin*, or *Comhal of Albion*, which sufficiently demonstrates, that the allegations of Keating and O'Flaherty, concerning *Fion Mac-Comnal*, are but of late invention.

by Turthor's stream. They heaved like ridgy waves. Their echoing strokes are mixed. Shadowy death flies over the hosts. They were clouds of hail, with squally winds in their skirts. Their showers are roaring together. Below them swells the dark-rolling deep.

Strife of gloomy U-thorno, why should I mark thy wounds! Thou art with the years that are gone; thou fadest on my soul!

Starno brought forward his skirt of war, and Swaran his own dark wing. Nor a harmless fire is Duth-maruno's sword. Lochlin is rolled over her streams. The wrathful kings are lost in thought. They roll their silent eyes over the flight of their land. The horn of Fingal was heard; the sons of woody Albion returned. But many lay, by Turthor's stream, silent in their blood.

"Chief of Crathmo," said the king, "Duth-maruno, hunter of boars! not harmless returns my eagle from the field of foes! For this white-bosomed Lanul shall brighten at her streams; Candona shall rejoice, as he wanders in Crathmo's fields."

"Colgorm,"[q] replied the chief, "was the

[q] The family of Duth-maruno, it appears, came originally from Scandinavia, or at least, from some of the northern isles, subject, in chief, to the kings of Lochlin. The Highland senachies, who never missed to make their comments on, and

first of my race in Albion; Colgorm, the rider of ocean, through its watry vales. He slew his brother in I-thorno:[r] he left the land of his fathers. He chose his place, in silence, by rocky Crathmo-craulo. His race came forth in their years; they came forth to war, but they always fell. The wound of my fathers is mine, king of echoing isles!"

He drew an arrow from his side! He fell pale, in a land unknown. His soul came forth to his fathers, to their stormy isle. There they pursued boars of mist, along the skirts of winds. The chiefs stood silent around, as the stones of Loda, on their hill. The traveller sees them, through the twilight, from his lonely path. He thinks them the ghosts of the aged, forming future wars.

Night came down on U-thorno. Still stood the chiefs in their grief. The blast whistled, by turns, through every warrior's hair. Fingal,

additions to, the works of Ossian, have given us a long list of the ancestors of Duth-maruno, and a particular account of their actions, many of which are of the marvellous kind. One of the tale-makers of the north has chosen for his hero, Starnmor, the father of Duth-maruno, and, considering the adventures through which he has led him, the piece is neither disagreeable, nor abounding with that kind of fiction which shocks credibility.

[r] An island of Scandinavia.

at length, broke forth from the thoughts of his soul. He called Ullin of harps, and bade the song to rise. "No falling fire, that is only seen, and then retires in night; no departing meteor was he that is laid so low. He was like the strong-beaming sun, long rejoicing on his hill. Call the names of his fathers, from their dwellings old!"

"I-thorno,"[s] said the bard, "that risest midst ridgy seas! Why is thy head so gloomy, in the ocean's mist? From thy vales came forth a race, fearless as thy strong-winged eagles; the race of Colgorm of iron shields, dwellers of Loda's hall.

"In Tormoth's resounding isle, arose Lurthan, streamy hill. It bent its woody head over a silent vale. There, at foamy Cruruth's source,

[s] This episode is, in the original, extremely beautiful. It is set to that wild kind of music, which some of the Highlanders distinguish, by the title of *Fon Oi-marra*, or, the *Song of mermaids*. Some part of the air is absolutely infernal, but there are many returns in the measure, which are inexpressibly wild and beautiful. From the genius of the music, I should think it came originally from Scandinavia; for the fictions delivered down concerning the *Oi-marra* (who are reputed the authors of the music), exactly correspond with the notions of the northern nations, concerning the *diræ*, or *goddesses of death*.—Of all the names in this episode, there is none of a Galic original, except Strina-dona, which signifies the *strife of heroes*.

dwelt Rurmar, hunter of boars! His daughter was fair as a sun-beam, white-bosomed Strina-dona!

"Many a king of heroes, and hero of iron shields; many a youth of heavy locks came to Rurmar's echoing hall. They came to woo the maid, the stately huntress of Tormoth wild. But thou lookest careless from thy steps, high-bosomed Strina-dona!

"If on the heath she moved, her breast was whiter than the down of Cana;[t] if on the sea-beat shore, than the foam of the rolling ocean. Her eyes were two stars of light. Her face was heaven's bow in showers. Her dark hair flowed round it, like the streaming clouds. Thou wert the dweller of souls, white-handed Strina-dona!

"Colgorm came, in his ship, and Corcul-suran, king of shells. The brothers came, from I-thorno, to woo the sun-beam of Tormoth wild. She saw them in their echoing steel. Her soul was fixed on blue-eyed Colgorm. [u] Ul-lochlin's

[t] The *Cana* is a certain kind of grass, which grows plentifully in the heathy morasses of the north. Its stalk is of the reedy kind, and it carries a tuft of down, very much resembling cotton. It is excessively white, and, consequently, often introduced by the bards, in their similes concerning the beauty of women.

[u] Ul-lochlin, *the guide to Lochlin*; the name of a star.

nightly eye looked in, and saw the tossing arms of Strina-dona.

"Wrathful the brothers frowned. Their flaming eyes, in silence, met. They turned away. They struck their shields. Their hands were trembling on their swords. They rushed into the strife of heroes, for long-haired Strina-dona.

"Corcul-suran fell in blood. On his isle, raged the strength of his father. He turned Colgorm, from I-thorno, to wander on all the winds. In Crathmo-craulo's rocky field, he dwelt by a foreign stream. Nor darkened the king alone, that beam of light was near, the daughter of echoing Tormoth, white-armed Strina-dona." [x]

[x] The continuation of this episode is just now in my hands; but the language is so different from, and the ideas so unworthy of, Ossian, that I have rejected it, as an interpolation by a modern bard.