The poems of Ossian

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

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Cath-Loda, Part Third

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CATH-LODA.

DUAN THIRD.

ARGUMENT.

Ossian, after some general reflections, describes the situation of Fingal, and the position of the army of Lochlin.—The conversation of Starno and Swaran.—The episode of Corman-trunar and Foina-brâgal.—Starno, from his own example, recommends to Swaran to surprise Fingal, who had retired alone to a neighbouring hill. Upon Swaran's refusal, Starno undertakes the enterprise himself, is overcome, and taken prisoner by Fingal.—He is dismissed, after a severe reprimand for his cruelty.

CATH-LODA.

DUAN THIRD.

WHENCE is the stream of years? Whither do they roll along? Where have they hid, in mist, their many-coloured sides?

I look into the times of old, but they seem dim to Ossian's eyes, like reflected moon-beams on a distant lake. Here rise the red beams of war! There, silent, dwells a feeble race! They mark no years with their deeds, as slow they pass along. Dweller between the shields! thou that awakest the failing soul! descend from thy wall, harp of Cona, with thy voices three! Come with that which kindles the past: rear the forms of old on their own dark-brown years!

U-thorno,[y] hill of storms, I behold my race on thy side. Fingal is bending, in night, over

[y] The bards, who were always ready to supply what they thought deficient in the poems of Ossian, have inserted a great many incidents between the second and third *Duän* of Cath-loda. Their interpolations are so easily distinguished from the genuine remains of Ossian, that it took me very little time

Duth-maruno's tomb. Near him are the steps of his heroes, hunters of the boar. By Turthor's stream the host of Lochlin is deep in shades. The wrathful kings stood on two hills; they looked forward from their bossy shields. They looked forward to the stars of night, red-wandering in the west. Cruth-loda bends from

to mark them out, and totally to reject them. If the modern Scotch and Irish bards have shewn any judgment, it is in ascribing their own compositions to names of antiquity, for, by that means, they themselves have escaped that contempt, which the authors of such futile performances must, necessarily, have met with, from people of true taste. I was led into this observation, by an Irish poem just now before me. It concerns a descent made by Swaran, king of Lochlin, on Ireland, and is the work, says the traditional preface prefixed to it, of *Ossian Mac-Fion*. It however appears, from several pious ejaculations, that it was rather the composition of some good priest in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, for he speaks, with great devotion, of pilgrimage, and more particularly, of the *blue-eyed daughters of the convent*. Religious, however, as this poet was, he was not altogether decent in the scenes he introduces between Swaran and the wife of *Congcullion*, both of whom he represents as giants. It happening, unfortunately, that *Congcullion* was only of a moderate stature, his wife, without hesitation, preferred Swaran, as a more adequate match for her own gigantic size. From this fatal preference proceeded so much mischief, that the good poet altogether lost sight of his principal action, and he ends the piece with advice to men in the choice of their wives, which, however good it may be, I shall leave concealed in the obscurity of the original.

high, like a formless meteor in clouds. He sends abroad the winds, and marks them with his signs. Starno foresaw, that Morven's king was not to yield in war.

He twice struck the tree in wrath. He rushed before his son. He hummed a surly song; and heard his hair in wind. [z] Turned from one another, they stood, like two oaks, which different winds had bent; each hangs over its own loud rill, and shakes its boughs in the course of blasts."

"Annir," said Starno of lakes, "was a fire that consumed of old. He poured death from his eyes, along the striving fields. His joy was in the fall of men. Blood to him was a summer stream, that brings joy to withered vales, from its own mossy rock. He came forth to the lake Luth-cormo, to meet the tall Corman-trunar, he from Urlor of streams, dweller of battle's wing.

[z] The surly attitude of Starno and Swaran is well adapted to their fierce and uncomplying dispositions. Their characters, at first sight, seem little different; but, upon examination, we find that the poet has dexterously distinguished between them. They were both dark, stubborn, haughty, and reserved; but Starno was cunning, revengeful, and cruel to the highest degree; the disposition of Swaran, though savage, was less bloody, and somewhat tinctured with generosity. It is doing injustice to Ossian, to say, that he has not a great variety of characters.

"The chief of Urlor had come to Gormal, with his dark-bosomed ships. He saw the daughter of Annir, white-armed Foina-brâgal. He saw her! Nor careless rolled her eyes, on the rider of stormy waves. She fled to his ship in darkness, like a moon-beam through a nightly vale. Annir pursued along the deep; he called the winds of heaven. Nor alone was the king! Starno was by his side. Like U-thorno's young eagle, I turned my eyes on my father.

"We rushed into roaring Urlor. With his people came tall Corman-trunar. We fought; but the foe prevailed. In his wrath my father stood. He lopped the young trees with his sword. His eyes rolled red in his rage. I marked the soul of the king, and I retired in night. From the field I took a broken helmet: a shield that was pierced with steel: pointless was the spear in my hand. I went to find the foe.

"On a rock sat tall Corman-trunar, beside his burning oak; and near him, beneath a tree, sat deep-bosomed Foina-brâgal. I threw my broken shield before her. I spoke the words of peace. "Beside his rolling sea, lies Annir of many lakes. The king was pierced in battle; and Starno is to raise his tomb. Me, a son of Loda, he sends to white-handed Foina, to bid her send a lock from her hair, to rest with her

father in earth. And thou, king of roaring Urlor, let the battle cease, till Annir receive the shell from fiery-eyed Cruth-loda."

"Bursting into tears,[a] she rose and tore a lock from her hair; a lock, which wandered in the blast, along her heaving breast. Corman-trunar gave the shell; and bade me to rejoice before him. I rested in the shade of night; and hid my face in my helmet deep. Sleep descended on the foe. I rose, like a stalking ghost. I pierced the side of Corman-trunar. Nor did Foina-brâgal escape. She rolled her white bosom in blood.

"Why then, daughter of heroes, didst thou wake my rage?

"Morning rose. The foe were fled, like the departure of mist. Annir struck his bossy shield. He called his dark-haired son. I came, streaked with wandering blood: thrice rose the shout of the king, like the bursting forth of a squall of wind from a cloud, by night. We re-

[a] Ossian is very partial to the fair sex. Even the daughter of the cruel Annir, the sister of the revengeful and bloody Starno, partakes not of those disagreeable characters so peculiar to her family. She is altogether tender and delicate. Homer, of all ancient poets, uses the sex with least ceremony. His cold contempt is even worse than the downright abuse of the moderns; for to draw abuse implies the possession of some merit.

joiced, three days, above the dead, and called the hawks of heaven. They came, from all their winds, to feast on Annir's foes. Swaran, Fingal is alone, [b] on his hill of night. Let thy spear pierce the king in secret; like Annir, my soul shall rejoice."

"Son of Annir," said Swaran, "I shall not slay in shades, I move forth in light: the hawks rush from all their winds. They are wont to trace my course: it is not harmless through war."

Burning rose the rage of the king. He thrice raised his gleaming spear. But, starting, he spared his son; and rushed into the night. By Turthor's stream a cave is dark, the dwelling of Conban-carglas. There he laid the helmet of kings, and called the maid of Lulan; but she was distant far, in Loda's resounding hall.

Swelling in his rage, he strode, to where Fingal lay alone. The king was laid on his shield, on his own secret hill.

Stern hunter of shaggy boars! no feeble maid is laid before thee. No boy, on his ferny

[b] Fingal, according to the custom of the Caledonian kings, had retired to a hill alone, as he himself was to resume the command of the army the next day. Starno might have some intelligence of the king's retiring, which occasions his request to Swaran, to stab him; as he foresaw, by his art of divination, that he could not overcome him in open battle.

bed, by Turthor's murmuring stream. Here is spread the couch of the mighty, from which they rise to deeds of death! Hunter of shaggy boars, awaken not the terrible!

Starno came murmuring on. Fingal arose in arms. "Who art thou, son of night?" Silent he threw the spear. They mixed their gloomy strife. The shield of Starno fell, cleft in twain. He is bound to an oak. The early beam arose. It was then Fingal beheld the king. He rolled awhile his silent eyes. He thought of other days, when white-bosomed Agandecca moved like the music of songs. He loosed the thong from his hands. "Son of Annir," he said, "retire. Retire to Gormal of shells; a beam that was set returns. I remember thy white-bosomed daughter; dreadful king, away! Go to thy troubled dwelling, cloudy foe of the lovely! Let the stranger shun thee, thou gloomy in the hall!"

A tale of the times of old!