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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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Berrathon

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B E R R A T H O N :

A

P O E M.

VOL. II.

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ARGUMENT.

FINGAL, in his voyage to Lochlin, whither he had been invited by Starno, the father of Agandecca, touched at Berrathon, an island of Scandinavia, where he was kindly entertained by Larthmor, the petty king of the place, who was a vassal of the supreme kings of Lochlin. The hospitality of Larthmor gained him Fingal's friendship; which that hero manifested, after the imprisonment of Larthmor by his own son, by sending Ossian, and Toscar, the father of Malvina, so often mentioned, to rescue Larthmor, and to punish the unnatural behaviour of Uthal. Uthal was handsome, and, by the ladies, much admired. Nina-thoma, the beautiful daughter of Torthóma, a neighbouring prince, fell in love, and fled with him. He proved unconstant: for another lady, whose name is not mentioned, gaining his affections, he confined Nina-thoma to a desert island near the coast of Berrathon. She was relieved by Ossian, who, in company with Toscar, landing on Berrathon, defeated the forces of Uthal, and killed him in a single combat. Nina-thoma, whose love not all the bad behaviour of Uthal could erase, hearing of his death, died of grief. In the mean time, Larthmor is restored, and Ossian and Toscar return in triumph to Fingal.

The poem opens with an elegy on the death of Malvina, the daughter of Toscar, and closes with presages of Ossian's death.

BERRATHON:

A POEM.

BEND thy blue course, O stream! round the narrow plain of Lutha.^r Let the green woods hang over it, from their hills: the sun look on it at noon. The thistle is there on its rock, and shakes its beard to the wind. The flower hangs its heavy head, waving, at times, to the gale. "Why dost thou awake me, O gale?" it seems to say, "I am covered with the drops of heaven. The time of my fading is near; the blast that shall scatter my leaves. To-morrow shall the traveller come; he that saw me in my beauty shall come. His eyes will search the field, but they will not find me." So shall they search in vain, for the voice of Cona, after it has failed in the field. The hunter shall come forth in the morning, and the voice of my harp shall not be heard. "Where is the son of car-

^r Lutha, *swift stream*.

borne Fingal?" The tear will be on his cheek! Then come thou, O Malvina; with all thy music come! Lay Ossian in the plain of Lutha: let his tomb rise in the lovely field.

Malvina! where art thou, with thy songs, with the soft sound of thy steps? Son^s of Alpin, art thou near? where is the daughter of Toscar? "I passed, O son of Fingal, by Tor-lutha's mossy walls. The smoke of the hall was ceased. Silence was among the trees of the hill. The voice of the chase was over. I saw the daughters of the bow. I asked about Malvina, but they answered not. They turned their faces away: thin darkness covered their beauty. They were like stars, on a rainy hill, by night, each looking faintly through her mist."

Pleasant^t be thy rest, O lovely beam! soon hast thou set on our hills! The steps of thy departure were stately, like the moon on the blue, trembling wave. But thou hast left us in darkness, first of the maids of Lutha! We sit, at the rock, and there is no voice; no light but the meteor of fire! Soon hast thou set, O Malvina! daughter of generous Toscar! But thou

^s His father was one of Fingal's principal bards, and he had a poetical genius.

^t Ossian speaks. He calls Malvina a beam of light; and continues the metaphor throughout the paragraph.

risest like the beam of the east, among the spirits of thy friends, where they sit, in their stormy halls, the chambers of the thunder! A cloud hovers over Cona. Its blue curling sides are high. The winds are beneath it, with their wings. Within it is the dwelling^u of Fingal. There the hero sits in darkness. His airy spear is in his hand. His shield, half-covered with clouds, is like the darkened moon; when one half still remains in the wave, and the other looks sickly on the field!

His friends sit around the king, on mist! They hear the songs of Ullin: he strikes the half-viewless harp. He raises the feeble voice. The lesser heroes, with a thousand meteors, light the airy hall. Malvina rises in the midst; a blush is on her cheek. She beholds the unknown faces of her fathers. She turns aside her humid eyes. "Art thou come so soon," said Fingal, "daughter of generous Toscar? Sadness dwells in the halls of Lutha. My aged

^u The description of this ideal palace of Fingal, is agreeable to the notions of those times, concerning the state of the deceased, who were supposed to pursue, after death, the pleasures and employments of their former life. The situation of the Celtic heroes, in their separate state, if not entirely happy, is more agreeable than the notions of the ancient Greeks concerning their departed heroes.

son ^x is sad! I hear the breeze of Cona, that was wont to lift thy heavy locks. It comes to the hall, but thou art not there. Its voice is mournful among the arms of thy fathers! Go, with thy rustling wing, O breeze! sigh on Malvina's tomb. It rises yonder, beneath the rock, at the blue stream of Lutha. The maids ^y are departed to their place. Thou alone, O breeze, mournest there!"

But who comes from the dusky west, supported on a cloud? A smile is on his grey, watery face. His locks of mist fly on wind. He bends forward on his airy spear. It is thy father, Malvina! "Why shinest thou, so soon, on our clouds," he says, "O lovely light of Lutha! But thou wert sad, my daughter. Thy friends had passed away. The sons of little men ^z were in the hall. None remained of the heroes, but Ossian, king of spears!"

^x Ossian; who had a great friendship for Malvina, both on account of her love for his son Oscar, and her attention to himself.

^y That is, the young virgins who sung the funeral elegy over her tomb.

^z Tradition is entirely silent concerning what passed in the north immediately after the death of Fingal and all his heroes; by which it would seem that the actions of their successors were not to be compared to those of the renowned Fingalians.

And dost thou remember Ossian, car-borne
Toscar,^a son of Conloch? The battles of our
youth were many. Our swords went together
to the field. They saw us coming, like two
falling rocks. The sons of the stranger fled.
“There come the warriors of Cona!” they said.
“Their steps are in the paths of the flying!”
Draw near, son of Alpin, to the song of the
aged. The deeds of other times are in my soul.
My memory beams on the days that are past:
on the days of mighty Toscar, when our path
was in the deep. Draw near, son of Alpin, to
the last sound of the voice of Cona!

The king of Morven commanded. I raised
my sails to the wind. Toscar, chief of Lutha,
stood at my side; I rose on the dark-blue wave.
Our course was to sea-surrounded^b Berrathon,
the isle of many storms. There dwelt, with his
locks of age, the stately strength of Larthmor;
Larthmor, who spread the feast of shells to
Fingal, when he went to Starno's halls, in the
days of Agandecca. But when the chief was
old, the pride of his son arose; the pride of
fair-haired Uthal, the love of a thousand maids.

^a Toscar was the son of that Conloch, who was also father
to the lady whose unfortunate death is related in the last epi-
sode of the second book of Fingal.

^b Barrathón, *a promontory in the midst of waves.*

He bound the aged Larthmor, and dwelt in his sounding halls!

Long pined the king in his cave, beside his rolling sea. Day did not come to his dwelling; nor the burning oak by night. But the wind of ocean was there, and the parting beam of the moon. The red star looked on the king, when it trembled on the western wave. Snitho came to Selma's hall: Snitho, the friend of Larthmor's youth. He told of the king of Berrathon: the wrath of Fingal arose. Thrice he assumed the spear, resolved to stretch his hand to Uthal. But the memory^c of his deeds rose before the king. He sent his son and Toscar. Our joy was great on the rolling sea. We often half-unsheathed our swords. For never before had we fought alone, in battles of the spear.

Night came down on the ocean. The winds departed on their wings. Cold and pale is the moon. The red stars lift their heads on high. Our course is slow along the coast of Berrathon. The white waves tumble on the rocks. "What voice is that," said Toscar, "which comes between the sounds of the waves? It is soft, but

^c The meaning is, that Fingal remembered his own great actions, and consequently would not sully them by engaging in a petty war against Uthal, who was so far his inferior in valour and power.

mournful, like the voice of departed bards. But I behold a maid.^d She sits on the rock alone. Her head bends on her arm of snow. Her dark hair is in the wind. Hear, son of Fingal, her song; it is smooth as the gliding stream." We came to the silent bay, and heard the maid of night.

"How long will ye roll around me, blue-tumbling waters of ocean? My dwelling was not always in caves, nor beneath the whistling tree. The feast was spread in Torthóma's hall. My father delighted in my voice. The youths beheld me in the steps of my loveliness. They blessed the dark-haired Nina-thoma. It was then thou didst come, O Uthal! like the sun of heaven! The souls of the virgins are thine, son of generous Larthmor! But why dost thou leave me alone, in the midst of roaring waters? Was my soul dark with thy death? Did my white hand lift the sword? Why then hast thou left me alone, king of high Finthormo?"^e

The tear started from my eye, when I heard the voice of the maid. I stood before her in my arms. I spoke the words of peace. "Lovely

^d Nina-thoma, the daughter of Torthóma, who had been confined to a desert island by her lover Uthal.

^e Finthormo, the palace of Uthal. The names in this episode are not of a Celtic original.

dweller of the cave! what sigh is in thy breast? Shall Ossian lift his sword in thy presence, the destruction of thy foes? Daughter of Torthóma, rise. I have heard the words of thy grief. The race of Morven are around thee, who never injured the weak. Come to our dark-bosomed ship; thou brighter than that setting moon! Our course is to the rocky Berrathon, to the echoing walls of Finthormo." She came in her beauty; she came with all her lovely steps. Silent joy brightened in her face; as when the shadows fly from the field of spring; the blue stream is rolling in brightness, and the green bush bends over its course!

The morning rose with its beams. We came to Rothma's bay. A boar rushed from the wood: my spear pierced his side, and he fell. I rejoiced over the blood.^f I foresaw my growing fame. But now the sound of Uthal's train came from the high Finthormo. They spread over the heath to the chase of the boar. Himself comes slowly on, in the pride of his strength. He lifts two pointed spears. On his side is the hero's sword. Three youths carry his polished

^f Ossian might have thought that his killing a boar on his first landing in Berrathon, was a good omen of his future success in that island. The present Highlanders look, with a degree of superstition, upon the success of their first action, after they have engaged in any desperate undertaking.

bows. The bounding of five dogs is before him. His heroes move on, at a distance, admiring the steps of the king. Stately was the son of Larthmor! but his soul was dark! Dark as the troubled face of the moon, when it foretels the storms.

We rose on the heath before the king. He stopt in the midst of his course. His heroes gathered around. A grey-haired bard advanced. "Whence are the sons of the strangers?" began the bard of song. "The children of the unhappy come to Berrathon; to the sword of carborne Uthal. He spreads no feast in his hall. The blood of strangers is on his streams. If from Selma's walls ye come, from the mossy walls of Fingal, chuse three youths to go to your king, to tell of the fall of his people. Perhaps the hero may come and pour his blood on Uthal's sword. So shall the fame of Finthormo arise, like the growing tree of the vale!"

"Never will it rise, O bard!" I said, in the pride of my wrath. "He would shrink from the presence of Fingal, whose eyes are the flames of death. The son of Comhal comes, and kings vanish before him. They are rolled together, like mist, by the breath of his rage. Shall three tell to Fingal, that his people fell? Yes! they may tell it, bard! but his people shall fall with fame!"

I stood in the darkness of my strength. Toúscar drew his sword at my side. The foe came on like a stream. The mingled sound of death arose. Man took man; shield met shield; steel mixed its beams with steel. Darts hiss through air. Spears ring on mails. Swords on broken bucklers bound. As the noise of an aged grove beneath the roaring wind, when a thousand ghosts break the trees by night, such was the din of arms! But Uthal fell beneath my sword. The sons of Berrathon fled. It was then I saw him in his beauty, and the tear hung in my eye! "Thou art fallen,[§] young tree," I said, "with all thy beauty round thee. Thou art fallen on thy plains, and the field is bare. The winds come from the desert! there is no sound in thy leaves! Lovely art thou in death, son of car-borne Larthmor."

Nina-thoma sat on the shore. She heard the sound of battle. She turned her red eyes on Lethmal, the grey-haired bard of Selma. He alone had remained on the coast, with the

[§] To mourn over the fall of their enemies, was a practice universal among the Celtic heroes. This is more agreeable to humanity than the shameful insulting of the dead, so common in Homer, and after him, servilely copied by all his imitators, (the humane Virgil not excepted,) who have been more successful in borrowing the imperfections of that great poet, than in their imitations of his beauties.

daughter of Torthóma. "Son of the times of old!" she said, "I hear the noise of death. Thy friends have met with Uthal, and the chief is low! O that I had remained on the rock, inclosed with the tumbling waves! Then would my soul be sad, but his death would not reach my ear. Art thou fallen on thy heath, O son of high Finthormo! Thou didst leave me on a rock, but my soul was full of thee. Son of high Finthormo, art thou fallen on thy heath?"

She rose pale in her tears. She saw the bloody shield of Uthal. She saw it in Ossian's hand. Her steps were distracted on the heath. She flew. She found him. She fell. Her soul came forth in a sigh. Her hair is spread on his face. My bursting tears descend. A tomb arose on the unhappy. My song of woe was heard. "Rest, hapless children of youth! Rest at the noise of that mossy stream. The virgins will see your tomb, at the chase, and turn away their weeping eyes. Your fame will be in song. The voice of the harp will be heard in your praise. The daughters of Selma shall hear it! your renown shall be in other lands. Rest, children of youth, at the noise of the mossy stream!"

Two days we remained on the coast. The heroes of Berrathon convened. We brought Larthmor to his halls. The feast of shells is

spread. The joy of the aged was great. He looked to the arms of his fathers; the arms which he left in his hall, when the pride of Uthal rose. We were renowned before Larthmor. He blessed the chiefs of Morven. He knew not that his son was low, the stately strength of Uthal! They had told, that he had retired to the woods, with the tears of grief. They had told it, but he was silent in the tomb of Rothma's heath.

On the fourth day we raised our sails, to the roar of the northern wind. Larthmor came to the coast. His bards exalted the song. The joy of the king was great. He looked to Rothma's gloomy heath: he saw the tomb of his son. The memory of Uthal rose. "Who of my heroes," he said, "lies there? he seems to have been of the kings of men. Was he renowned in my halls, before the pride of Uthal rose?" Ye are silent, sons of Berrathon! is the king of heroes low? My heart melts for thee, O Uthal! though thy hand was against thy father. O that I had remained in the cave! that my son had dwelt in Finthormo! I might have heard the tread of his feet, when he went to the chase of the boar. I might have heard his voice on the blast of my cave. Then would my soul be glad: but now darkness dwells in my halls."

Such were my deeds, son of Alpin, when the

arm of my youth was strong. Such the ^h actions of Toscar, the car-borne son of Conloch. But Toscar is on his flying cloud. I am alone at Lutha. My voice is like the last sound of the wind, when it forsakes the woods. But Ossian shall not be long alone. He sees the mist that shall receive his ghost. He beholds the mist that shall form his robe, when he appears on his hills. The sons of feeble men shall behold me, and admire the stature of the chiefs of old. They shall creep to their caves. They shall look to the sky with fear: for my steps shall be in the clouds. Darkness shall roll on my side.

Lead, son of Alpin, lead the aged to his woods. The winds begin to rise. The dark wave of the lake resounds. Bends there not a tree from Mora, with its branches bare? It bends, son of Alpin, in the rustling blast. My harp hangs on a blasted branch. The sound of its strings is mournful. Does the wind touch thee, O harp! or is it some passing ghost? It is the hand of Malvina! Bring me the harp, son of Alpin. Another song shall rise. My soul shall depart in the sound. My fathers shall hear it in their airy hall. Their dim faces shall hang, with joy, from their clouds; and their hands receive their son. The aged oak bends

^h Ossian speaks.

over the stream. It sighs with all its moss. The withered fern whistles near, and mixes, as it waves, with Ossian's hair.

Strike the harp, and raise the song: be near, with all your wings, ye winds. Bear the mournful sound away to Fingal's airy hall. Bear it to Fingal's hall, that he may hear the voice of his son: the voice of him that praised the mighty!

The blast of north opens thy gates, O king! I behold thee sitting on mist, dimly gleaming in all thine arms. Thy form now is not the terror of the valiant. It is like a watery cloud; when we see the stars behind it, with their weeping eyes. Thy shield is the aged moon: thy sword a vapour half-kindled with fire. Dim and feeble is the chief, who travelled in brightness before! But thy steps¹ are on the winds of the desert. The storms are darkening in thy hand. Thou takest the sun in thy wrath, and hidest him in thy clouds. The sons of little

¹ This description of the power of Fingal over the winds and storms, and the image of his taking the sun, and hiding him in the clouds, do not correspond with the preceding paragraph, where he is represented as a feeble ghost, and no more the TERROR OF THE VALIANT; but it agrees with the notion of the times concerning the souls of the deceased, who, it was supposed, had the command of the winds and storms, but took no concern in the affairs of men.

men are afraid. A thousand showers descend. But when thou comest forth in thy mildness; the gale of the morning is near thy course. The sun laughs in his blue fields. The grey stream winds in its vale. The bushes shake their green heads in the wind. The roes bound towards the desert.

There is a murmur in the heath! the stormy winds abate! I hear the voice of Fingal. Long has it been absent from mine ear. "Come, Ossian, come away!" he says. "Fingal has received his fame. We passed away, like flames that had shone for a season. Our departure was in renown. Though the plains of our battles are dark and silent; our fame is in the four grey stones. The voice of Ossian has been heard. The harp has been strung in Selma. Come, Ossian, come away," he says; "come, fly with thy fathers on clouds." "I come, I come; thou king of men! The life of Ossian fails. I begin to vanish on Cona. My steps are not seen in Selma. Beside the stone of Mora I shall fall asleep. The winds whistling in my grey hair, shall not awaken me. Depart on thy wings, O wind! thou canst not disturb the rest of the bard. The night is long, but his eyes are heavy. Depart, thou rustling blast."

But why art thou sad, son of Fingal? Why grows the cloud of thy soul? The chiefs of

other times are departed. They have gone without their fame. The sons of future years shall pass away. Another race shall arise. The people are like the waves of ocean: like the leaves of woody Morven, they pass away in the rustling blast, and other leaves lift their green heads on high.

Did thy beauty last, O Ryno?^k Stood the

^k Ryno, the son of Fingal, who was killed in Ireland, in the war against Swaran, was remarkable for the beauty of his person, his swiftness, and great exploits. Minvâne, the daughter of Morni, and sister to Gaul, was in love with Ryno. Her lamentation over her lover follows.

SHE blushing sad, from Morven's rocks, bends over the darkly-rolling sea. She sees the youth in all their arms. Where, Ryno, where art thou?

Our dark looks told that he was low! That pale the hero flew on clouds! That in the grass of Morven's hills, his feeble voice was heard in wind!

And is the son of Fingal fallen, on Ullin's mossy plains? Strong was the arm that vanquished him! Ah me! I am alone!

Alone I shall not be, ye winds! that lift my dark-brown hair. My sighs shall not long mix with your stream; for I must sleep with Ryno.

I see thee not, with beauty's steps, returning from the chase. The night is round Minvâne's love. Dark silence dwells with Ryno.

Where are thy dogs, and where thy bow? Thy shield that was so strong? Thy sword like heaven's descending fire? The bloody spear of Ryno?

strength of car-borne Oscar? Fingal himself departed. The halls of his fathers forgot his steps. Shalt thou then remain, thou aged bard! when the mighty have failed? But my fame shall remain, and grow like the oak of Morven; which lifts its broad head to the storm, and rejoices in the course of the wind!

I see them mixed in thy deep ship; I see them stained with blood. No arms are in thy narrow hall, O darkly-dwelling Ryno!

When will the morning come, and say, "Arise, thou king of spears! arise, the hunters are abroad. The hinds are near thee, Ryno!"

Away, thou fair-haired morning, away! the slumbering king hears thee not! The hinds bound over his narrow tomb; for death dwells round young Ryno.

But I will tread softly, my king! and steal to the bed of thy repose. Minvane will lie in silence, nor disturb the slumbering Ryno.

The maids shall seek me; but they shall not find me: they shall follow my departure with songs. But I shall not hear you, O maids! I sleep with fair-haired Ryno.

THE END.

strength of carbons Oscar's finger himself
 departed. The halls of his fathers forgot his
 steps. Shalt thou then remain thou aged bard!
 when the night have faded? But my fame
 shall remain, and grow like the oak of Norway;
 which like its proud head to the storm, and
 rejoices in the course of the wind!

I see them mixed in the deep ship, I see them stained
 with blood. No more in the narrow hall, O darkly-dwell-
 ing Bards!
 When will the morning come, and say "Adeo, non reg-
 no regis, ante, the banner we spread. The lands are now
 ours, Bards!"
 Away, then the bright morning, away the slumbering
 king's head's like gold! The birds heard not his narrow tomb;
 but death-dews found, many have we seen
 but I will weep with, my song and soul in the old
 the region. Although will be it silent, no dream the sun-
 beam lingers.
 The mists shall veil me; but they shall not find me.
 they shall hold me not separate with songs. But I shall not
 bear you O mists, I shall not be divided from you.

