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Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books

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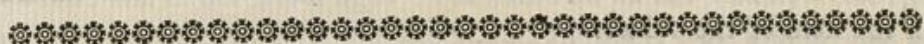
Book III.

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F I N G A L,

AN ANCIENT

E P I C P O E M.



B O O K III*.



PLEASANT are the words of the song, said Cuchullin, and lovely are the tales of other times. They are like the calm dew of the morning on the hill of roes, when the sun is faint on its side, and the lake is settled and blue in the vale. O Carril, raise again thy voice, and let me hear the song of Tura : which was sung in my halls of joy, when Fingal king of shields was there, and glowed at the deeds of his fathers.

FINGAL! thou man of battle, said Carril, early were thy deeds in arms. Lochlin was consumed in thy wrath, when thy youth strove with the beauty of maids. They smiled at the fair-blooming face of the hero; but death was in his hands. He was strong as

* The second night, since the opening story of Agandecca is introduced here with propriety, as great use is made of it in the course of the poem, and as it, in some measure, brings about the catastrophe.



the waters of Lora. His followers were like the roar of a thousand streams. They took the king of Lochlin in battle, but restored him to his ships. His big heart swelled with pride; and the death of the youth was dark in his soul.—For none ever, but Fingal, overcame the strength of the mighty Starno*.

HE sat in the hall of his shells in Lochlin's woody land. He called the gray-haired Snivan, that often sung round the circle † of Loda: when the stone of power heard his cry, and the battle turned in the field of the valiant.

Go; gray-haired Snivan, Starno said, to Ardven's sea-surrounded rocks. Tell to Fingal king of the desert; he that is the fairest among his thousands, tell him I give him my daughter, the loveliest maid that ever heaved a breast of snow. Her arms are white as the foam of my waves. Her soul is generous and mild. Let him come with his bravest heroes to the daughter of the secret hall.

SNIVAN came to Albion's windy hills; and fair-haired Fingal went. His kindled soul flew before him as he bounded on the waves of the north.

WELCOME, said the dark-brown Starno, welcome, king of rocky Morven; and ye his heroes of might; sons of the lonely isle! Three days within my halls shall ye feast; and three days pursue my boars, that your fame may reach the maid that dwells in the secret hall.

* Starno was the father of Swaran as well as Agandecca.—His fierce and cruel character is well marked in other poems concerning the times.

† This passage most certainly alludes to the religion of Lochlin, and the *stone of power* here mentioned is the image of one of the deities of Scandanavia.



THE king of snow* designed their death, and gave the feast of shells. Fingal, who doubted the foe, kept on his arms of steel. The sons of death were afraid, and fled from the eyes of the hero. The voice of sprightly mirth arose. The trembling harps of joy are strung. Bards sing the battle of heroes; or the heaving breast of love.—Ullin, Fingal's bard, was there; the sweet voice of the hill of Cona. He praised the daughter of the snow; and Morven's † high-descended chief.—The daughter of the snow overheard, and left the hall of her secret sigh. She came in all her beauty, like the moon from the cloud of the east.—Loveliness was around her as light. Her steps were like the music of songs. She saw the youth and loved him. He was the stolen sigh of her soul. Her blue eye rolled on him in secret: and she blest the chief of Morven.

THE third day with all its beams, shone bright on the wood of boars. Forth moved the dark-browed Starno; and Fingal, king of shields. Half the day they spent in the chase; and the spear of Fingal was red in the blood of Gormal.

IT was then the daughter of Starno, with blue eyes rolling in tears, came with her voice of love and spoke to the king of Morven.

FINGAL, high-descended chief, trust not Starno's heart of pride. Within that wood he has placed his chiefs; beware of the wood of death. But, remember, son of the hill, remember Agandecca: save me from the wrath of my father, king of the windy Morven!

* Starno is here poetically called the king of snow, from the great quantities of snow that fall in his dominions.

† All the North-west coast of Scotland probably went of old under the name of Morven, which signifies a ridge of very high hills.



THE youth, with unconcern, went on; his heroes by his side.
The sons of death fell by his hand; and Gormal echoed around.

BEFORE the halls of Starno the sons of the chase convened. The king's dark brows were like clouds. His eyes like meteors of night. Bring hither, he cries, Agandecca to her lovely king of Morven. His hand is stained with the blood of my people; and her words have not been in vain.—

SHE came with the red eye of tears. She came with her loose raven locks. Her white breast heaved with sighs, like the foam of the streamy Lubar. Starno pierced her side with steel. She fell like a wreath of snow that slides from the rocks of Ronan; when the woods are still, and the echo deepens in the vale.

THEN Fingal eyed his valiant chiefs, his valiant chiefs took arms. The gloom of the battle roared, and Lochlin fled or died.—Pale, in his bounding ship he closed the maid of the raven hair. Her tomb ascends on Ardven, and the sea roars round the dark dwelling of Agandecca.

BLESSED be her soul, said Cuchullin, and blessed be the mouth of the song.—Strong was the youth of Fingal, and strong is his arm of age. Lochlin shall fall again before the king of echoing Morven. Shew thy face from a cloud, O moon; light his white sails on the wave of the night. And if any strong spirit* of heaven

* This is the only passage in the poem that has the appearance of religion.—But Cuchullin's apostrophe to this spirit is accompanied with a doubt; so that it is easy to determine whether the hero meant a superior being, or the ghosts of deceased warriors, who were supposed in those times to rule the storms, and to transport themselves in a gust of wind from one country to another.



fits on that low-hung cloud; turn his dark ships from the rock,
thou rider of the storm!

SUCH were the words of Cuchullin at the sound of the mountain-
stream, when Calmar ascended the hill, the wounded son of Matha.
From the field he came in his blood. He leaned on his bending
spear. Feeble is the arm of battle! but strong the soul of the hero!

WELCOME! O son of Matha, said Connal, welcome art thou to
thy friends! Why bursts that broken sigh from the breast of him
that never feared before?

AND never, Connal, will he fear, chief of the pointed steel. My
soul brightens in danger, and exults in the noise of battle. I am of
the race of steel; my fathers never feared.

CORMAR was the first of my race. He sported through the
storms of the waves. His black skiff bounded on ocean, and travel-
led on the wings of the blast. A spirit once embroiled the night.
Seas swell and rocks resound. Winds drive along the clouds. The
lightning flies on wings of fire. He feared and came to land: then
blushed that he feared at all. He rushed again among the waves to
find the son of the wind. Three youths guide the bounding bark;
he stood with the sword unsheathed. When the low-hung vapour
passed, he took it by the curling head, and searched its dark womb
with his steel. The son of the wind forsook the air. The moon
and stars returned.

SUCH was the boldness of my race; and Calmar is like his fa-
thers. Danger flies from the uplifted sword. They best succeed
who dare.

BUT



BUT now, ye sons of green-valley'd Erin, retire from Lena's bloody heath. Collect the sad remnant of our friends, and join the sword of Fingal. I heard the sound of Lochlin's advancing arms; but Calmar will remain and fight. My voice shall be such, my friends, as if thousands were behind me. But, son of Semo, remember me. Remember Calmar's lifeless corse. After Fingal has wasted the field, place me by some stone of remembrance, that future times may hear my fame; and the mother of Calmar rejoice over the stone of my renown.

No: son of Matha, said Cuchullin, I will never leave thee. My joy is in the unequal field: and my soul increaseth in danger. Connal, and Carril of other times, carry off the sad sons of Erin; and when the battle is over, search for our pale corpses in this narrow way. For near this oak we shall stand in the stream of the battle of thousands.

O FITHIL's son, with feet of wind, fly over the heath of Lena. Tell to Fingal that Erin is intrall'd, and bid the king of Morven hasten. O let him come like the sun in a storm, when he shines on the hills of grafs.

MORNING is gray on Cromla; the sons of the sea ascend. Calmar stood forth to meet them in the pride of his kindling soul. But pale was the face of the warrior; he leaned on his father's spear. That spear which he brought from Lara's hall, when the soul of his mother was sad.—But slowly now the hero falls like a tree on the plains of Cona. Dark Cuchullin stands alone like a rock * in a

* ——— ἥντε πέτρῃ So some tall rock o'erhangs the hoary main,
 Ηλίβατος, μεγάλη, πολίης ἀλός ἐγγύς By winds assail'd, by billows beat in vain,
 ἔσσα, &c. Unmov'd it hears, above, the tempests blow,
 HOM. II. 15. And sees the watry mountains break below.

POPE.
 fandy



fandy vale. The sea comes with its waves, and roars on its hardened sides. Its head is covered with foam, and the hills are ecchoing around.—Now from the gray mist of the ocean, the white-ailed ships of Fingal appear. High is the grove of their masts as they nod, by turns, on the rolling wave.

SWARAN saw them from the hill, and returned from the sons of Erin. As ebbs the resounding sea through the hundred isles of Inistore; so loud, so vast, so immense returned the sons of Lochlin against the king of the desert hill. But bending, weeping, sad, and slow, and dragging his long spear behind, Cuchullin sunk in Cromla's wood, and mourned his fallen friends. He feared the face of Fingal, who was wont to greet him from the fields of renown.

How many lie there of my heroes! the chiefs of Inisfail! they that were chearful in the hall when the sound of the shells arose. No more shall I find their steps in the heath, or hear their voice in the chace of the hinds. Pale, silent, low on bloody beds are they who were my friends! O spirits of the lately-dead, meet Cuchullin on his heath. Converse with him on the wind, when the rustling tree of Tura's cave resounds. There, far remote, I shall lie unknown. No bard shall hear of me. No gray stone shall rise to my renown. Mourn me with the dead, O Bragela! departed is my fame.

SUCH were the words of Cuchullin when he sunk in the woods of Cromla.

FINGAL, tall in his ship, stretched his bright lance before him. Terrible was the gleam of the steel: it was like the green meteor of death, setting in the heath of Malmor, when the traveller is alone, and the broad moon is darkened in heaven.

G

THE



THE battle is over, said the king, and I behold the blood of my friends. Sad is the heath of Lena; and mournful the oaks of Cromla: the hunters have fallen there in their strength; and the son of Semo is no more.—Ryno and Fillan, my sons, found the horn of Fingal's war. Ascend that hill on the shore, and call the children of the foe. Call them from the grave of Lamdarg, the chief of other times.

BE your voice like that of your father, when he enters the battles of his strength. I wait for the dark mighty man; I wait on Lena's shore for Swaran. And let him come with all his race; for strong in battle are the friends of the dead.

FAIR Ryno flew like lightning; dark Fillan as the shade of autumn. On Lena's heath their voice is heard; the sons of ocean heard the horn of Fingal's war. As the roaring eddy of ocean returning from the kingdom of snows; so strong, so dark, so sudden came down the sons of Lochlin. The king in their front appears in the dismal pride of his arms. Wrath burns in his dark-brown face: and his eyes roll in the fire of his valour.

FINGAL beheld the son of Starno; and he remembered Agandecca.—For Swaran with the tears of youth had mourned his white-bosomed sister. He sent Ullin of the songs to bid him to the feast of shells. For pleasant on Fingal's soul returned the remembrance of the first of his loves.

ULLIN came with aged steps, and spoke to Starno's son. O thou that dwellest afar, surrounded, like a rock, with thy waves, come to the feast of the king, and pass the day in rest. To-morrow let us fight, O Swaran, and break the echoing shields.

To-



TO-DAY, said Starno's wrathful son, we break the echoing shields:
to-morrow my feast will be spread; and Fingal lie on earth.

AND to-morrow let his feast be spread, said Fingal with a smile;
for to-day, O my sons, we shall break the echoing shields.—
Ossian, stand thou near my arm. Gaul, lift thy terrible sword.
Fergus, bend thy crooked yew. Throw, Fillan, thy lance through
heaven.—Lift your shields like the darkened moon. Be your
spears the meteors of death. Follow me in the path of my fame;
and equal my deeds in battle.

As a hundred winds on Morven; as the streams of a hundred
hills; as clouds fly successive over heaven; or, as the dark ocean
assaults the shore of the desert: so roaring, so vast, so terrible the
armies mixed on Lena's echoing heath.

THE groan of the people spread over the hills; it was like the
thunder of night, when the cloud bursts on Cona; and a thousand
ghosts shriek at once on the hollow wind.

FINGAL rushed on in his strength, terrible as the spirit of Tren-
mor; when, in a whirlwind, he comes to Morven to see the chil-
dren of his pride.—The oaks resound on their hills, and the rocks
fall down before him. Bloody was the hand of my father when he
whirled the lightning of his sword. He remembers the battles of
his youth, and the field is wasted in his course.

RYNO went on like a pillar of fire.—Dark is the brow of Gaul,
Fergus rushed forward with feet of wind; and Fillan like the mist



of the hill.—Myself *, like a rock, came down, I exulted in the strength of the king. Many were the deaths of my arm; and dismal was the gleam of my sword. My locks were not then so gray; nor trembled my hands of age. My eyes were not closed in darkness; nor failed my feet in the race.

Who can relate the deaths of the people; or the deeds of mighty heroes; when Fingal, burning in his wrath, consumed the sons of Lochlin? Groans swelled on groans from hill to hill, till night had covered all. Pale, staring like a herd of deer, the sons of Lochlin convene on Lena. We sat and heard the sprightly harp at Lubar's gentle stream. Fingal himself was next to the foe; and listened to the tales of bards. His godlike race were in the song, the chiefs of other times. Attentive, leaning on his shield, the king of Morven sat. The wind whistled through his aged locks, and his thoughts are of the days of other years. Near him on his bending spear, my young, my lovely Oscar stood. He admired the king of Morven: and his actions were swelling in his soul.

Son of my son, begun the king, O Oscar, pride of youth, I saw the shining of thy sword and gloried in my race. Pursue the glory of our fathers, and be what they have been; when Trenmor lived, the first of men, and Trathal the father of heroes. They fought the battle in their youth, and are the song of bards.

O OSCAR! bend the strong in arm: but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but

* Here the poet celebrates his own actions, but he does it in such a manner that we are not displeas'd. The mention of the great actions of his youth immediately suggests to him the helpless situation of his age. We do not despise him for selfish praise, but feel his misfortunes.

like

like the gale that moves the grass to those who ask thine aid.—
So Trenmor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been.
My arm was the support of the injured; and the weak rested behind
the lightning of my steel.

OSCAR! I was young like thee, when lovely Fainafóllis came:
that sun-beam! that mild light of love! the daughter of Craca's*
king! I then returned from Cona's heath, and few were in my
train. A white-ailed boat appeared far off; we saw it like a mist
that rode on ocean's blast. It soon approached; we saw the fair.
Her white breast heaved with sighs. The wind was in her loose
dark hair: her rosy cheek had tears.

DAUGHTER of beauty, calm I said, what sigh is in that breast?
Can I, young as I am, defend thee, daughter of the sea? My sword
is not unmatched in war, but dauntless is my heart.

To thee I fly, with sighs she replied, O prince of mighty men!
To thee I fly, chief of the generous shells, supporter of the feeble
hand! The king of Craca's echoing isle owned me the sun-beam
of his race. And often did the hills of Cromala reply to the sighs of
love for the unhappy Fainafóllis. Sora's chief beheld me fair; and
loved the daughter of Craca. His sword is like a beam of light
upon the warrior's side. But dark is his brow; and tempests are in
his soul. I shun him on the rolling sea; but Sora's chief pursues.

Rest thou, I said, behind my shield; rest in peace, thou beam of
light! The gloomy chief of Sora will fly, if Fingal's arm is like his

* What the Craca here mentioned was, that it was one of the Shetland isles.—
is not, at this distance of time, easy to determine. There is a story concerning a daughter of
the king of Craca in the sixth book.

foul.



foul. In some lone cave I might conceal thee, daughter of the sea!
But Fingal never flies; for where the danger threatens, I rejoice in
the storm of spears.

I SAW the tears upon her cheek. I pitied Craca's fair.

Now, like a dreadful wave afar, appeared the ship of stormy
Borbar. His masts high-bended over the sea behind their sheets of
snow. White roll the waters on either side. The strength of
ocean sounds. Come thou, I said, from the roar of ocean, thou
rider of the storm. Partake the feast within my hall. It is the
house of strangers.

THE maid stood trembling by my side; he drew the bow: she
fell. Unerring is thy hand, I said, but feeble was the foe.

WE fought, nor weak was the strife of death. He sunk beneath
my sword. We laid them in two tombs of stones; the hapless lo-
vers of youth.

SUCH have I been in my youth, O Oscar; be thou like the
age of Fingal. Never search for the battle, nor shun it when it
comes.

FILLAN and Oscar of the dark-brown hair; ye children of the
race; fly over the heath of roaring winds; and view the sons of
Lochlin. Far off I hear the noise of their fear, like the storms of
ecchoing Cona. Go: that they may not fly my sword along the
waves of the north.—For many chiefs of Erin's race lie here on
the dark bed of death. The children of the storm are low; the
sons of ecchoing Cromla.



THE heroes flew like two dark clouds: two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts; when air's dark children come to frighten hapless men.

IT was then that Gaul *, the son of Morni, stood like a rock in the night. His spear is glittering to the stars; his voice like many streams.

SON of battle, cried the chief, O Fingal, king of shells! let the bards of many songs sooth Erin's friends to rest. And, Fingal, sheath thy sword of death; and let thy people fight. We wither away without our fame; for our king is the only breaker of shields. When morning rises on our hills, behold at a distance our deeds. Let Lochlin feel the sword of Morni's son, that bards may sing of me. Such was the custom heretofore of Fingal's noble race. Such was thine own, thou king of swords, in battles of the spear.

O SON of Morni, Fingal replied, I glory in thy fame.—Fight; but my spear shall be near to aid thee in the midst of danger. Raise, raise the voice, sons of the song, and lull me into rest. Here will Fingal lie amidst the wind of night.—And if thou, Agandecca, art near, among the children of thy land; if thou fittest on a blast of wind among the high-shrowded masts of Lochlin; come to my dreams †, my fair one, and shew thy bright face to my soul.

* Gaul, the son of Morni, was chief of a more strength than conduct in battle. He tribe that disputed long, the pre-eminence, was very fond of military fame, and here with Fingal himself. They were reduced he demands the next battle to himself.—The at last to obedience, and Gaul, from an poet, by an artifice, removes Fingal, that enemy, turned Fingal's best friend and his return may be the more magnificent. greatest hero. His character is something † The poet prepares us for the dream of like that of Ajax in the Iliad; a hero of Fingal in the next book.

MANY



MANY a voice and many a harp in tuneful sounds arose. Of Fin-
gal's noble deeds they sung, and of the noble race of the hero. And
sometimes on the lovely sound was heard the name of the now
mournful Ossian.

OFTEN have I fought, and often won in battles of the spear. But
blind, and tearful, and forlorn I now walk with little men. O Fin-
gal, with thy race of battle I now behold thee not. The wild roes
feed upon the green tomb of the mighty king of Morven.—Blest
be thy soul, thou king of swords, thou most renowned on the hills
of Cona!

FINGAL,

