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Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books

Macpherson, James

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Book IV.

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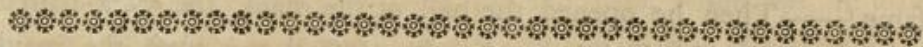
F I N G A L,

A N A N C I E N T

E P I C P O E M.



B O O K I V*.



WHO comes with her songs from the mountain, like the
bow of the showery Lena? It is the maid of the voice of
love. The white-armed daughter of Toscar. Often hast thou heard
my song, and given the tear of beauty. Dost thou come to the
battles of thy people, and to hear the actions of Oscar? When shall
I cease to mourn by the streams of the echoing Cona? My years
have passed away in battle, and my age is darkened with sorrow.

DAUGHTER of the hand of snow! I was not so mournful and
blind; I was not so dark and forlorn when Everallin loved me.

* Fingal being asleep, and the action suspended by night, the poet introduces the story of his courtship of Evirallin the daughter of Branno. The episode is necessary to clear up several passages that follow in the poem; at the same time that it naturally brings on the action of the book, which may be supposed to begin about the

H

Everallin



Everallin with the dark-brown hair, the white-bosomed love of Cormac. A thousand heroes fought the maid, she denied her love to a thousand; the sons of the sword were despised; for graceful in her eyes was Offian.

I WENT in suit of the maid to Lego's fable surge; twelve of my people were there, the sons of the streamy Morven. We came to Branno friend of strangers: Branno of the sounding mail.—From whence, he said, are the arms of steel? Not easy to win is the maid that has denied the blue-eyed sons of Erin. But blest be thou, O son of Fingal, happy is the maid that waits thee. Tho' twelve daughters of beauty were mine, thine were the choice, thou son of fame!—Then he opened the hall of the maid, the dark-haired Everallin. Joy kindled in our breasts of steel and blest the maid of Branno.

ABOVE us on the hill appeared the people of stately Cormac. Eight were the heroes of the chief; and the heath flamed with their arms. There Colla, Durra of the wounds, there mighty Toscar, and Tago, there Frestal the victorious stood; Dairo of the happy deeds, and Dala the battle's bulwark in the narrow way.—The sword flamed in the hand of Cormac, and graceful was the look of the hero.

EIGHT were the heroes of Offian; Ullin stormy son of war; Mullo of the generous deeds; the noble, the graceful Scelacha; Oglan, and Cerdal the wrathful, and Dumariccan's brows of death. And why should Ogar be the last; so wide renowned on the hills of Ardven?

OGAR met Dala the strong, face to face, on the field of heroes. The battle of the chiefs was like the wind on ocean's foamy waves.

The



The dagger is remembered by Ogar; the weapon which he loved; nine times he drowned it in Dela's side. The stormy battle turned. Three times I broke on Cormac's shield: three times he broke his spear. But, unhappy youth of love! I cut his head away.—Five times I shook it by the lock. The friends of Cormac fled:

WHOEVER would have told me, lovely maid, when then I strove in battle; that blind, forsaken, and forlorn I now should pass the night; firm ought his mail to have been, and unmatched his arm in battle.

Now* on Lena's gloomy heath the voice of music died away. The unconstant blast blew hard, and the high oak shook its leaves around me; of Everallin were my thoughts, when she, in all the light of beauty, and her blue eyes rolling in tears, stood on a cloud before my fight, and spoke with feeble voice.

O OSSIAN, rise and save my son; save Oscar prince of men, near the red oak of Lubar's stream, he fights with ochlin's sons.—She sunk into her cloud again. I clothed me with my steel. My spear supported my steps, and my rattling armour rung. I hummed, as I was wont in danger, the songs of heroes of old. Like distant thunder † Lochlin heard; they fled; my son pursued.

* The poet returns to his subject. If one could fix the time of the year in which the action of the poem happened, from the scene described here, I should be tempted to place it in autumn.—The trees shed their leaves, and the winds are variable, both which circumstances agree with that season of the year.

† Ossian gives the reader a high idea of himself. His very song frightens the ene-

my. This passage resembles one in the eighteenth Iliad, where the voice of Achilles frightens the Trojans from the body of Patroclus.

Forth march'd the chief, and distant from the crowd

High on the rampart rais'd his voice aloud.

So high his brazen voice the hero rear'd,

Hosts drop their arms and trembled as they fear'd.

POPE.

H 2

I CALLED



I CALLED him like a distant stream. My son return over Lena. No further pursue the foe, though Offian is behind thee.—He came; and lovely in my ear was Oscar's sounding steel. Why didst thou stop my hand, he said, till death had covered all? For dark and dreadful by the stream they met thy son and Fillan. They watched the terrors of the night. Our swords have conquered some. But as the winds of night pour the ocean over the white sands of Mora, so dark advance the sons of Lochlin over Lena's rustling heath. The ghosts of night shriek afar; and I have seen the meteors of death. Let me awake the king of Morven, he that smiles in danger; for he is like the sun of heaven that rises in a storm.

FINGAL had started from a dream, and leaned on Trenmor's shield; the dark-brown shield of his fathers; which they had lifted of old in the battles of their race.

MY hero had seen in his rest the mournful form of Agandecca; she came from the way of the ocean, and slowly, lonely, moved over Lena. Her face was pale like the mist of Cromla; and dark were the tears of her cheek. She often raised her dim hand from her robe; her robe which was of the clouds of the desert: she raised her dim hand over Fingal, and turned away her silent eyes.

WHY weeps the daughter of Starno, said Fingal, with a sigh? Why is thy face so pale, thou daughter of the clouds?

SHE departed on the wind of Lena; and left him in the midst of the night.—She mourned the sons of her people that were to fall by Fingal's hand.

THE



THE hero started from rest, and still beheld her in his soul.—
The sound of Oscar's steps approached. The king saw the gray
shield on his side. For the faint beam of the morning came over
the waters of Ullin.

WHAT do the foes in their fear, said the rising king of Morven?
Or fly they through ocean's foam, or wait they the battle of steel?
But why should Fingal ask? I hear their voice on the early wind.—
Fly over Lena's heath, O Oscar, and awake our friends to battle.

THE king stood by the stone of Lubar; and thrice reared his ter-
rible voice. The deer started from the fountains of Cromla; and
all the rocks shook on their hills. Like the noise of a hundred
mountain-streams, that burst, and roar, and foam: like the clouds
that gather to a tempest on the blue face of the sky; so met the sons
of the desert, round the terrible voice of Fingal. For pleasant was
the voice of the king of Morven to the warriors of his land: for often
had he led them to battle, and returned with the spoils of the foe.

COME to battle, said the king, ye children of the storm. Come
to the death of thousands. Comhal's son will see the fight.—My
sword shall wave on that hill, and be the shield of my people. But
never may you need it, warriors; while the son of Morni fights, the
chief of mighty men.—He shall lead my battle; that his fame
may rise in the song.

O YE ghosts of heroes dead! ye riders of the storm of Cromla!
receive my falling people with joy, and bring them to your hills.—
And may the blast of Lena carry them over my seas, that they may
come to my silent dreams, and delight my soul in rest.

FILLAN



FILLAN and Oscar, of the dark-brown hair! fair Ryno, with the pointed steel! advance with valour to the fight; and behold the son of Morni. Let your swords be like his in the strife: and behold the deeds of his hands. Protect the friends of your father: and remember the chiefs of old. My children, I will see you yet, though here ye should fall in Erin. Soon shall our cold, pale ghosts meet in a cloud, and fly over the hills of Cona.

Now like a dark and stormy cloud, edged round with the red lightning of heaven, and flying westward from the morning's beam, the king of hills removed. Terrible is the light of his armour, and two spears are in his hand.—His gray hair falls on the wind.—He often looks back on the war. Three bards attend the son of fame, to carry his words to the heroes.—High on Cromla's side he sat, waving the lightning of his sword, and as he waved we moved.

Joy rose in Oscar's face. His cheek is red. His eye sheds tears. The sword is a beam of fire in his hand. He came, and smiling, spoke to Ossian.

O RULER of the fight of steel! my father, hear thy son. Retire with Morven's mighty chief; and give me Ossian's fame. And if here I fall; my king, remember that breast of snow, that lonely sun-beam of my love, the white-handed daughter of Toscar. For with red cheek from the rock, and bending over the stream, her soft hair flies about her bosom as she pours the sigh for Oscar. Tell her I am on my hills a lightly-bounding son of the wind; that hereafter, in a cloud, I may meet the lovely maid of Toscar.

RAISE, Oscar, rather raise my tomb. I will not yield the fight to thee. For first and bloodiest in the war my arm shall teach



thee how to fight. But, remember, my son, to place this sword, this bow, and the horn of my deer, within that dark and narrow house, whose mark is one gray stone. Oscar, I have no love to leave to the care of my son; for graceful Evirallin is no more, the lovely daughter of Branno.

SUCH were our words, when Gaul's loud voice came growing on the wind. He waved on high the sword of his father, and rushed to death and wounds.

As waves white-bubbling over the deep come swelling, roaring on; as rocks of ooze meet roaring waves: so foes attacked and fought. Man met with man, and steel with steel. Shields found, men fall. As a hundred hammers on the son of the furnace, so rose, so rung their swords.

GAUL rushed on like a whirlwind in Ardven. The destruction of heroes is on his sword. Swaran was like the fire of the desert in the echoing heath of Gormal. How can I give to the song the death of many spears? My sword rose high, and flamed in the strife of blood. And, Oscar, terrible wert thou, my best, my greatest son! I rejoiced in my secret soul, when his sword flamed over the slain. They fled amain through Lena's heath: and we pursued and slew. As stones that bound from rock to rock; as axes in echoing woods; as thunder rolls from hill to hill in dismal broken peals; so blow succeeded to blow, and death to death, from the hand of Oscar * and mine.

* Ossian never fails to give a fine character of his beloved son. His speech to his father is that of a hero; it contains the submission due to a parent, and the warmth that becomes a young warrior. There is a propriety in dwelling here on the actions of Oscar, as the beautiful Malvina, to whom the book is addressed, was in love with that hero.

BUT



BUT Swaran closed round Morni's son, as the strength of the tide of Inistore. The king half-rose from his hill at the fight, and half-assumed the spear. Go, Ullin, go, my aged bard, begun the king of Morven. Remind the mighty Gaul of battle; remind him of his fathers. Support the yielding fight with song; for song enlivens war. Tall Ullin went, with steps of age, and spoke to the king of swords.

SON* of the chief of generous steeds! high-bounding king of spears. Strong arm in every perilous toil. Hard heart that never yields. Chief of the pointed arms of death. Cut down the foe; let no white sail bound round dark Inistore. Be thine arm like thunder. Thine eyes like fire, thy heart of solid rock. Whirl round thy sword as a meteor at night, and lift thy shield like the flame of death. Son of the chief of generous steeds, cut down the foe; destroy. —The hero's heart beat high. But Swaran came with battle. He cleft the shield of Gaul in twain; and the sons of the desert fled.

Now Fingal arose in his might, and thrice he reared his voice. Cromla answered around, and the sons of the desert stood still. — They bent their red faces to earth, ashamed at the presence of Fingal. He came like a cloud of rain in the days of the sun, when slow it rolls on the hill, and fields expect the shower. Swaran beheld the terrible king of Morven, and stopped in the midst of his course. Dark he leaned on his spear, rolling his red eyes around. Silent and tall he seemed as an oak on the banks of Lubar, which

* The war-song of Ullin varies from the rhymes, has been carried down almost to rest of the poem in the versification. It runs our own times. Several of these war-songs are extant, but the most of them are only intire'y of epithets. The custom of encouraging men in battle with extempore a group of epithets, without beauty or harmony, utterly destitute of poetical merit.



had its branches blasted of old by the lightning of heaven.—It bends over the stream, and the gray moss whistles in the wind: so stood the king. Then slowly he retired to the rising heath of Lena. His thousands pour around the hero, and the darkness of battle gathers on the hill.

FINGAL, like a beam from heaven, shone in the midst of his people. His heroes gather around him, and he sends forth the voice of his power. Raise my standards * on high,—spread them on Lena's wind, like the flames of an hundred hills. Let them sound on the winds of Erin, and remind us of the fight. Ye sons of the roaring streams, that pour from a thousand hills, be near the king of Morven: attend to the words of his power. Gaul strongest arm of death! O Oscar, of the future fights; Connal, son of the blue blades of Sora; Dermid of the dark-brown hair, and Offian king of many songs, be near your father's arm.

WE reared the sun-beam † of battle; the standard of the king. Each hero's soul exulted with joy, as, waving, it flew on the wind. It was studded with gold above, as the blue wide shell of the nightly sky. Each hero had his standard too; and each his gloomy men.

BEHOLD, said the king of generous shells, how Lochlin divides on Lena.—They stand like broken clouds on the hill, or an half consumed grove of oaks; when we see the sky through its branches, and the meteor passing behind. Let every chief among the friends

* Th' imperial ensign, which full high
advanc'd,
Shone like a meteor streaming to the
wind.

MILTON.

† Fingal's standard was distinguished by the name of *sun-beam*; probably on account of its bright colour, and its being studded with gold. To begin a battle is expressed, in old composition, by *lifting of the sun-beam*.

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of



of Fingal take a dark troop of those that frown so high; nor let a son of the echoing groves bound on the waves of Inistore.

MINE, said Gaul, be the seven chiefs that came from Lano's lake.—Let Inistore's dark king, said Oscar, come to the sword of Offian's son.—To mine the king of Inifcon, said Connal, heart of steel! Or Mudan's chief or I, said brown-haired Dermid, shall sleep on clay-cold earth. My choice, though now so weak and dark, was Terman's battling king; I promised with my hand to win the hero's dark-brown shield.—Blest and victorious be my chiefs, said Fingal of the mildest look; Swaran, king of roaring waves, thou art the choice of Fingal.

Now, like an hundred different winds that pour through many vales; divided, dark the sons of the hill advanced, and Cromla echoed around.

How can I relate the deaths when we closed in the strife of our steel? O daughter of Toscar! bloody were our hands! The gloomy ranks of Lochlin fell like the banks of the roaring Cona.—Our arms were victorious on Lena: each chief fulfilled his promise. Beside the murmur of Branno thou didst often sit, O maid; when thy white bosom rose frequent, like the down of the swan when flow the sails the lake, and sidelong winds are blowing.—Thou hast seen the sun* retire red and slow behind his cloud; night gathering

<p>* <i>Sol quoque & exoriens & cum se condit in undas Signa dabit. Solem certissima signa sequuntur, Ut quæ mane refert, & quæ surgentibus astris. Ille ubi nascentem maculis variaverit ortum Conditus in nubem, medioque refugerit orbe; Suspecti tibi sunt imbres.</i></p>	<p>Virg.</p>	<p>Above the rest the sun, who never lies, Foretels the change of weather in the skies. For if he rise, unwilling to his race, Clouds on his brow and spots upon his face; Or if thro' mists he shoots his fullen beams, Frugal of light, in loose and straggling streams, Suspect a drizzling day.</p>	<p>DRYDEN.</p>
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round



round on the mountain, while the unfrequent blast * roared in narrow vales. At length the rain beats hard; and thunder rolls in peals. Lightning glances on the rocks. Spirits ride on beams of fire. And the strength of the mountain-streams † comes roaring down the hills. Such was the noise of battle, maid of the arms of snow. Why, daughter of the hill, that tear? the maids of Lochlin have cause to weep. The people of their country fell, for bloody were the blue blades of the race of my heroes. But I am sad, forlorn, and blind; and no more the companion of heroes. Give, lovely maid, to me thy tears, for I have seen the tombs of all my friends.

It was then by Fingal's hand a hero fell, to his grief.—Gray-haired he rolled in the dust, and lifted his faint eyes to the king. And is it by me thou hast fallen, said the son of Comhal, thou friend of Agandecca! I have seen thy tears for the maid of my love in the halls of the bloody Starvo. Thou hast been the foe of the foes of my love, and hast thou fallen by my hand? Raise, Ullin, raise the grave of the son of Mathon; and give his name to the song of Agandecca; for dear to my soul hast thou been, thou darkly-dwelling maid of Ardven.

CUCHULLIN, from the cave of Cromla, heard the noise of the troubled war. He called to Connal chief of swords, and Carril of other times. The gray-haired heroes heard his voice, and took their aspen spears.

<p>* <i>Continuo ventis surgentibus aut freta ponti In:ipiunt agitata tumescere; & aridus altis Montibus audiri fragor, aut resonantia longe Littora misceri, & nemorum increbescere murmur.</i></p>	<p>Soft whispers run along the leafy wood, And mountains whistle to the murm'ring flood. DRYDEN. † — <i>ruunt de montibus amnes.</i> VIRG. The rapid rains, descending from the hills, To rolling torrents swell the creeping rills. DRYDEN.</p>
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For ere the rising winds begin to roar,
The working seas advance to wash the shore;



THEY came, and saw the tide of battle, like the crowded waves of the ocean; when the dark wind blows from the deep, and rolls the billows through the sandy vale.

CUCHULLIN kindled at the sight, and darkness gathered on his brow. His hand is on the sword of his fathers: his red-rolling eyes on the foe. He thrice attempted to rush to battle, and thrice did Connal stop him. Chief of the isle of mist, he said, Fingal subdues the foe. Seek not a part of the fame of the king; himself is like the storm.

THEN, Carril, go, replied the chief, and greet the king of Morven. When Lochlin falls away like a stream after rain, and the noise of the battle is over. Then be thy voice sweet in his ear to praise the king of swords. Give him the sword of Caithbat, for Cuchullin is worthy no more to lift the arms of his fathers.

BUT, O ye ghosts of the lonely Cromla! ye souls of chiefs that are no more! be ye the companions of Cuchullin, and talk to him in the cave of his sorrow. For never more shall I be renowned among the mighty in the land. I am like a beam that has shone, like a mist that fled away; when the blast of the morning came, and brightened the shaggy side of the hill. Connal! talk of arms no more: departed is my fame.—My sighs shall be on Cromla's wind; till my footsteps cease to be seen.—And thou, white-bosom'd Bragela, mourn over the fall of my fame; for, vanquished, I will never return to thee, thou sun-beam of Dunscaich.

FINGAL,

