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Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books

Macpherson, James

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Book VI.

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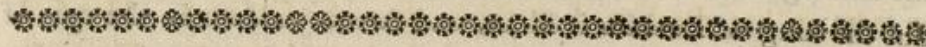
F I N G A L,

A N A N C I E N T

E P I C P O E M.



B O O K V I *.



THE clouds of night came rolling down and rest on Cromla's dark-brown steep. The stars of the north arise over the rolling of the waves of Ullin; they shew their heads of fire through the flying mist of heaven. A distant wind roars in the wood; but silent and dark is the plain of death.

STILL on the darkening Lena arose in my ears the tuneful voice of Carril. He sung of the companions of our youth, and the days of former years; when we met on the banks of Lego, and sent round the joy of the shell. Cromla, with its cloudy steeps, answered to his voice. The ghosts of those he sung came in their rustling blasts. They were seen to bend with joy towards the sound of their praise.

* This book opens with the fourth up in the poem. The scene lies in the night, and ends on the morning of the heath of Lena, and the mountain Cromla sixth day. The time of five days, five on the coast of Ulster. nights, and a part of the sixth day is taken

L

BE



BE thy soul blest, O Carril, in the midst of thy eddy winds.
O that thou wouldst come to my hall when I am alone by night!
—And thou dost come, my friend, I hear often thy light hand on
my harp; when it hangs on the distant wall, and the feeble sound
touches my ear. Why dost thou not speak to me in my grief, and
tell when I shall behold my friends? But thou passest away in thy
murmuring blast; and thy wind whistles through the gray hair
of Offian.

NOW on the side of Mora the heroes gathered to the feast. A
thousand aged oaks are burning to the wind.—The strength* of
the shells goes round. And the souls of warriors brighten with joy.
But the king of Lochlin is silent, and sorrow reddens in the eyes of
his pride. He often turned toward Lena and remembered that
he fell.

FINGAL leaned on the shield of his fathers. His gray locks slowly
waved on the wind, and glittered to the beam of night. He saw
the grief of Swaran, and spoke to the first of Bards.

RAISE, Ullin, raise the song of peace, and sooth my soul after
battle, that my ear may forget the noise of arms. And let a hun-
dred harps be near to gladden the king of Lochlin. He must depart
from us with joy.—None ever went sad from Fingal. Oscar! the

* By the strength of the shell is meant the liquor the heroes drunk: of what kind it was, cannot be ascertained at this distance of time. The translator has met with several ancient poems that mention waxlights and wine as common in the halls of Fingal. The names of both are borrowed from the Latin, which plainly shews that our ancestors had them from the Romans, if they had them at all. The Caledonians in their frequent incursions to the province might become acquainted with those conveniencies of life, and introduce them into their own country, among the booty which they carried from South Britain.

lightning



lightning of my sword is against the strong in battle; but peaceful it lies by my side when warriors yield in war.

TRENMOR *, said the mouth of the songs, lived in the days of other years. He bounded over the waves of the north: companion of the storm. The high rocks of the land of Lochlin, and its groves of murmuring sounds appeared to the hero through the mist;—he bound his white-bosomed sails.—Trenmor pursued the boar that roared along the woods of Gormal. Many had fled from its presence; but the spear of Trenmor slew it.

THREE chiefs that beheld the deed, told of the mighty stranger. They told that he stood like a pillar of fire in the bright arms of his valour. The king of Lochlin prepared the feast, and called the blooming Trenmor. Three days he feasted at Gormal's windy towers; and got his choice in the combat.

THE land of Lochlin had no hero that yielded not to Trenmor. The shell of joy went round with songs in praise of the king of Morven; he that came over the waves, the first of mighty men.

Now when the fourth gray morn arose, the hero launched his ship; and walking along the silent shore waited for the rushing wind. For loud and distant he heard the blast murmuring in the grove.

COVERED over with arms of steel a son of the woody Gormal appeared. Red was his cheek and fair his hair. His skin like the snow of Morven. Mild rolled his blue and smiling eye when he spoke to the king of swords.

* Trenmor was great grandfather to Fingal. The story is introduced to facilitate the dismissal of Swaran.



STAY, Trenmor, stay thou first of men, thou hast not conquered Lonval's son. My sword has often met the brave. And the wise shun the strength of my bow.

THOU fair-haired youth, Trenmor replied, I will not fight with Lonval's son. Thine arm is feeble, sun-beam of beauty. Retire to Gormal's dark-brown hinds.

BUT I will retire, replied the youth, with the sword of Trenmor; and exult in the sound of my fame. The virgins shall gather with smiles around him who conquered Trenmor. They shall sigh with the sighs of love, and admire the length of thy spear; when I shall carry it among thousands, and lift the glittering point to the sun.

THOU shalt never carry my spear, said the angry king of Morven.—Thy mother shall find thee pale on the shore of the echoing Gormal; and, looking over the dark-blue deep, see the sails of him that slew her son.

I WILL not lift the spear, replied the youth, my arm is not strong with years. But with the feathered dart, I have learned to pierce a distant foe. Throw down that heavy mail of steel; for Trenmor is covered all over.—I first, will lay my mail on earth.—Throw now thy dart, thou king of Morven.

HE saw the heaving of her breast. It was the sister of the king.—She had seen him in the halls of Gormal; and loved his face of youth.—The spear dropt from the hand of Trenmor: he bent his red cheek to the ground, for he had seen her like a beam of light

that



that meets the sons of the cave, when they revisit the fields of the sun, and bend their aching eyes.

CHIEF of the windy Morven, begun the maid of the arms of snow ; let me rest in thy bounding ship, far from the love of Corlo. For he, like the thunder of the desert, is terrible to Inibaca. He loves me in the gloom of his pride, and shakes ten thousand spears.

REST thou in peace, said the mighty Trenmor, behind the shield of my fathers. I will not fly from the chief, though he shakes ten thousand spears.

THREE days he waited on the shore ; and sent his horn abroad. He called Corlo to battle from all his echoing hills. But Corlo came not to battle. The king of Lochlin descended. He feasted on the roaring shore ; and gave the maid to Trenmor.

KING of Lochlin, said Fingal, thy blood flows in the veins of thy foe. Our families met in battle, because they loved the strife of spears. But often did they feast in the hall ; and send round the joy of the shell.—Let thy face brighten with gladness, and thine ear delight in the harp. Dreadful as the storm of thine ocean, thou hast poured thy valour forth ; thy voice has been like the voice of thousands when they engage in battle. Raise, to-morrow, thy white sails to the wind, thou brother of Agandecca. Bright as the beam of noon she comes on my mournful soul. I have seen thy tears for the fair one, and spared thee in the halls of Starno ; when my sword was red with slaughter, and my eye full of tears for the maid.—Or dost thou chuse the fight ? The combat which thy fathers gave to Trenmor is thine : that thou mayest depart renowned like the sun setting in the west.

KING



KING of the race of Morven, said the chief of the waves of Lochlin; never will Swaran fight with thee, first of a thousand heroes! I have seen thee in the halls of Starvo, and few were thy years beyond my own.—When shall I, I said to my soul, lift the spear like the noble Fingal? We have fought heretofore, O warrior, on the side of the shaggy Malmor; after my waves had carried me to thy halls, and the feast of a thousand shells was spread. Let the bards send him who overcame to future years, for noble was the strife of heathy Malmor.

BUT many of the ships of Lochlin have lost their youths on Lena. Take these, thou king of Morven, and be the friend of Swaran. And when thy sons shall come to the mossy towers of Gormal; the feast of shells shall be spread, and the combat offered on the vale.

NOR ship, replied the king, shall Fingal take, nor land of many hills. The desert is enough to me with all its deer and woods. Rise on thy waves again, thou noble friend of Agandecca. Spread thy white sails to the beam of the morning, and return to the echoing hills of Gormal.

BLEST be thy soul, thou king of shells, said Swaran of the dark-brown shield. In peace thou art the gale of spring. In war the mountain-storm. Take now my hand in friendship, thou noble king of Morven.

LET thy bards mourn those who fell. Let Erin give the sons of Lochlin to earth; and raise the mossy stones of their fame. That the children of the north hereafter may behold the place where their fathers fought. And some hunter may say, when he leans on a



mossy tomb, here Fingal and Swaran fought, the heroes of other years. Thus hereafter shall he say, and our fame shall last for ever.

SWARAN, said the king of the hills, to-day our fame is greatest. We shall pass away like a dream. No sound will be in the fields of our battles. Our tombs will be lost in the heath. The hunter shall not know the place of our rest. Our names may be heard in the song, but the strength of our arms will cease.

O OSSIAN, Carril, and Ullin, you know of heroes that are no more. Give us the song of other years. Let the night pass away on the sound, and morning return with joy.

WE gave the song to the kings, and a hundred harps accompanied our voice. The face of Swaran brightened like the full moon of heaven, when the clouds vanish away, and leave her calm and broad in the midst of the sky.

IT was then that Fingal spoke to Carril the chief of other times. Where is the son of Semo; the king of the isle of mist? has he retired, like the meteor of death, to the dreary cave of Tura?

CUCHULLIN, said Carril of other times, lies in the dreary cave of Tura. His hand is on the sword of his strength. His thoughts on the battles which he lost. Mournful is the king of spears, for he has often been victorious. He sends the sword of his war to rest on the side of Fingal. For, like the storm of the desert, thou hast scattered all his foes. Take, O Fingal, the sword of the hero; for his fame is departed like mist when it flies before the rustling wind of the vale.

No:



No : replied the king, Fingal shall never take his sword. His arm is mighty in war ; and tell him his fame shall never fail. Many have been overcome in battle, that have shone afterwards like the sun of heaven.

O SWARAN, king of the resounding woods, give all thy grief away.—The vanquished, if brave, are renowned ; they are like the sun in a cloud when he hides his face in the south, but looks again on the hills of grass.

GRUMAL was a chief of Cona. He fought the battle on every coast. His soul rejoiced in blood ; his ear in the din of arms. He poured his warriors on the sounding Craca ; and Craca's king met him from his grove ; for then within the circle of Brumo * he spoke to the stone of power.

FIERCE was the battle of the heroes, for the maid of the breast of snow. The fame of the daughter of Craca had reached Grumal at the streams of Cona ; he vowed to have the white-bosomed maid, or die on the echoing Craca. Three days they strove together, and Grumal on the fourth was bound.

FAR from his friends they placed him in the horrid circle of Brumo ; where often, they said, the ghosts of the dead howled round the stone of their fear. But afterwards he shone like a pillar of the light of heaven. They fell by his mighty hand, and Grumal had his fame.

* This passage alludes to the religion of the king of Craca. See a note on a similar subject in the third book.

RAISE,



RAISE, ye bards of other times, raise high the praise of heroes ;
that my soul may settle on their fame ; and the mind of Swaran cease
to be sad.

THEY lay in the heath of Mora ; the dark winds rustle over the
heroes.—A hundred voices at once arose, a hundred harps were
strung ; they sung of other times, and the mighty chiefs of for-
mer years.

WHEN now shall I hear the bard ; or rejoice at the fame of my
fathers ? The harp is not strung on Morven ; nor the voice of music
raised on Cona. Dead with the mighty is the bard ; and fame is in
the desert no more.

MORNING trembles with the beam of the east, and glimmers on
gray-headed Cromla. Over Lena is heard the horn of Swaran, and
the sons of the ocean gather around.—Silent and sad they mount
the wave, and the blast of Ullin is behind their sails. White, as the
mist of Morven, they float along the sea.

CALL, said Fingal, call my dogs, the long-bounding sons of the
chace. Call white-breasted Bran ; and the surly strength of Luath.
—Fillan, and Ryno—but he is not here ; my son rests on the bed
of death. Fillan and Fergus, blow my horn, that the joy of the
chace may arise ; that the deer of Cromla may hear and start at the
lake of roes.

THE shrill sound spreads along the wood. The sons of heathy
Cromla arise.—A thousand dogs fly off at once, gray-bounding
M through



through the divided heath. A deer fell by every dog, and three by the white-breasted Bran. He brought them, in their flight, to Fingal, that the joy of the king might be great.

ONE deer fell at the tomb of Ryno; and the grief of Fingal returned. He saw how peaceful lay the stone of him who was the first at the chace.—No more shalt thou rise, O my son, to partake of the feast of Cromla. Soon will thy tomb be hid, and the grass grow rank on thy grave. The sons of the feeble shall pass over it, and shall not know that the mighty lie there.

OSSIAN and Fillan, fons of my strength, and Gaul king of the blue blades of war, let us ascend the hill to the cave of Tura, and find the chief of the battles of Erin.—Are these the walls of Tura, gray and lonely they rise on the heath? The king of shells is sad, and the halls are desolate. Come let us find the king of swords, and give him all our joy.

BUT is that Cuchullin, O Fillan, or a pillar of smoke on the heath? The wind of Cromla is on my eyes, and I distinguish not my friend.

FINGAL! replied the youth, it is the son of Semo. Gloomy and sad is the hero; his hand is on his sword. Hail to the son of battle, breaker of the shields!

HAIL to thee, replied Cuchullin, hail to all the fons of Morven. Delightful is thy presence, O Fingal, it is like the sun on Cromla; when the hunter mourns his absence for a season, and sees him be-



tween the clouds. Thy sons are like stars that attend thy course, and give light in the night.

IT is not thus thou hast seen me, O Fingal, returning from the wars of the desert; when the kings of the world * had fled, and joy returned to the hill of hinds.

MANY are thy words, Cuchullin, said Connan † of the small renown. Thy words are many, son of Semo, but where are thy deeds in arms? Why did we come, over the ocean, to aid thy feeble sword? Thou flyest to thy cave of sorrow, and Connan fights thy battles; Resign to me these arms of light; yield them, thou son of Erin.

No hero, replied the chief, ever fought the arms of Cuchullin; and had a thousand heroes fought them it were in vain, thou gloomy youth. I fled not to the cave of sorrow, as long as Erin's warriors lived.

YOUTH of the feeble arm, said Fingal, Connan, say no more. Cuchullin is renowned in battle, and terrible over the desert. Often have I heard thy fame, thou stormy chief of Inisfail. Spread now thy white sails for the isle of mist, and see Bragela leaning on her rock. Her tender eye is in tears, and the winds lift her long hair from her heaving breast. She listens to the winds of night to hear

* This is the only passage in the poem, wherein the wars of Fingal against the Romans are alluded to:—The Roman emperor is distinguished in old composition by the title of *king of the world*.

† Connan was of the family of Morni. He is mentioned in several other poems, and always appears with the same character. The poet passed him over in silence till now, and his behaviour here deserves no better usage.



the voice of thy rowers *; to hear the song of the sea, and the sound of thy distant harp.

AND long shall she listen in vain; Cuchullin shall never return. How can I behold Bragela to raise the sigh of her breast? Fingal, I was always victorious in the battles of other spears!

AND hereafter thou shalt be victorious, said Fingal king of shells. The fame of Cuchullin shall grow like the branchy tree of Cromla. Many battles await thee, O chief, and many shall be the wounds of thy hand.

BRING hither, Oscar, the deer, and prepare the feast of shells; that our souls may rejoice after danger, and our friends delight in our presence.

WE sat, we feasted, and we sung. The soul of Cuchullin rose. The strength of his arm returned; and gladness brightened on his face.

ULLIN gave the song, and Carril raised the voice. I, often, joined the bards, and sung of battles of the spear.—Battles! where I often fought; but now I fight no more. The fame of my former actions is ceased; and I sit forlorn at the tombs of my friends.

THUS they passed the night in the song; and brought back the morning with joy. Fingal arose on the heath, and shook his glittering spear in his hand.—He moved first toward the plains of Lena, and we followed like a ridge of fire.

* The practice of singing when they row northwest coast of Scotland and the isles. It deceives time, and inspirits the rowers.

SPREAD



SPREAD the sail, said the king of Morven, and catch the winds that pour from Lena.—We rose on the wave with songs, and rushed, with joy, through the foam of the ocean*.

* It is allowed by the best critics that an epic poem ought to end happily. This rule, in its most material circumstances, is observed by the three most deservedly celebrated poets, Homer, Virgil, and Milton; yet, I know not how it happens, the conclusions of their poems throw a melancholy damp on the mind. One leaves his reader at a funeral; another at the untimely death of a hero; and a third in the solitary scenes of an unpeopled world.

Ως οὐγ' ἀμφίεπον ταφον Ἑκτόρος ἱππο-
δαμοιο. HOMER.

Such honours Ilion to her hero paid,
And peaceful slept the mighty Hector's
shade. POPE.

—*Ferrum adverso sub pectore condit
Fervidus. Ast illi solvuntur frigore membra,
Vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.*

VIRGIL.

He rais'd his arm aloft; and at the word
Deep in his bosom drove the shining sword.
The streaming blood distain'd his arms
around,

And the disdainful soul came rushing thro'
the wound. DRYDEN.

They, hand in hand, with wand'ring steps
and slow,

Through Eden took their solitary way.

MILTON.

COMALA:



...the wind, and catch the wind
that does turn lanes.—We rode on the wave with range, and
O wind, wind, through the foam of the ocean!

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...the foam of the ocean
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