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Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books

Macpherson, James

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The War of Caros: a Poem.

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T H E

W A R of C A R O S* :

A P O E M.

BRING, daughter of Toscar, bring the harp; the light of the song rises in Ossian's soul. It is like the field, when darkness covers the hills around, and the shadow grows slowly on the plain of the sun.

I BEHOLD my son, O Malvina, near the mossy rock of Crona †; but it is the mist ‡ of the desert tinged with the beam of the west: Lovely is the mist that assumes the form of Oscar! turn from it, ye winds, when ye roar on the side of Ardven.

WHO comes towards my son, with the murmur of a song? His staff is in his hand, his gray hair loose on the wind. Surly joy

* Caros is probably the noted usurper party under the command of Oscar the son of Ossian. This battle is the foundation of the present poem, which is addressed to Carausius, by birth a Menapian, who assumed the purple in the year 284; and, seizing on Britain, defeated the emperor Maximian Herculus in several naval engagements, which gives propriety to his being called in this poem *the king of ships*. Malvina the daughter of Toscar.

† Crona is the name of a small stream which runs into the Carron. On its banks is the scene of the preceding dramatic poem.

‡ Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke.

SOLOMON'S Song.

lightens



lightens his face; and he often looks back to Caros. It is Ryno* of the song, he that went to view the foe.

WHAT does Caros king of ships, said the son of the now mournful Ossian? spreads he the wings † of his pride, bard of the times of old?

HE spreads them, Oscar, replied the bard, but it is behind his gathered heap ‡. He looks over his stones with fear, and beholds thee terrible, as the ghost of night that rolls the wave to his ships.

Go, thou first of my bards, says Oscar, and take the spear of Fingal. Fix a flame on its point, and shake it to the winds of heaven. Bid him, in songs, to advance, and leave the rolling of his wave. Tell to Caros that I long for battle; and that my bow is weary of the chace of Cona. Tell him the mighty are not here; and that my arm is young.

HE went with the murmur of his song. Oscar reared his voice on high. It reached his heroes on Ardven, like the noise of a cave ||; when the sea of Togorma rolls before it; and its trees meet the roaring winds.—They gather round my son like the streams of the hill; when, after rain, they roll in the pride of their course.

RYNO came to the mighty Caros, and struck his flaming spear. Come to the battle of Oscar, O thou that fittest on the rolling of waters. Fingal is distant far; he hears the songs of his bards in

* Ryno is often mentioned in the ancient poetry.—He seems to have been a bard, of the first rank, in the days of Fingal.

† The Roman eagle.

‡ Agricola's wall which Carausius repaired.

|| —As when the hollow rocks retain The sound of blustering winds.—

MILTON.

Morven:



Morven : and the wind of his hall is in his hair. His terrible spear is at his side ; and his shield that is like that darkened moon. Come to the battle of Oscar ; the hero is alone.

HE came not over the streamy Carun* ; the bard returned with his song. Gray night grows dim on Crona. The feast of shells is spread. A hundred oaks burn to the wind, and faint light gleams over the heath. The ghosts of Ardven pass through the beam, and shew their dim and distant forms. Comala † is half-unseen on her meteor ; and Hidallan is fullen and dim, like the darkened moon behind the mist of night.

WHY art thou sad ? said Ryno ; for he alone beheld the chief. Why art thou sad, Hidallan, hast thou not received thy fame ? The songs of Ossian have been heard, and thy ghost has brightened in the wind, when thou didst bend from thy cloud to hear the song of Morven's bard.

AND do thine eyes behold the hero, said Oscar, like the dim meteor of night ? Say, Ryno, say, how fell the chief that was so renowned in the days of our fathers ?——His name remains on the rocks of Cona ; and I have often seen the streams of his hills.

FINGAL, replied the bard, had driven Hidallan from his wars. The king's soul was sad for Comala, and his eyes could not behold Hidallan.

* The river Carron.

† This is the scene of Comala's death, which is the subject of the dramatic poem. —The poet mentions her in this place, in

order to introduce the sequel of Hidallan's story, who, on account of her death, had been expelled from the wars of Fingal.

O

LONELY,



LONELY, sad along the heath he slowly moved with silent steps. His arms hang disordered on his side. His hair flies loose from his helmet. The tear is in his down-cast eyes; and the sigh half-silent in his breast.

THREE days he strayed unseen, alone, before he came to Lamor's halls: the mossy halls of his fathers, at the stream of Balva*. — There Lamor sat alone beneath a tree; for he had sent his people with Hidallan to war. The stream ran at his feet, and his gray head rested on his staff. Sightless are his aged eyes. He hums the song of other times.—The noise of Hidallan's feet came to his ear: he knew the tread of his son.

Is the son of Lamor returned; or is it the sound of his ghost? Hast thou fallen on the banks of Carun, son of the aged Lamor? Or, if I hear the sound of Hidallan's feet; where are the mighty in the war? where are my people, Hidallan, that were wont to return with their echoing shields?—Have they fallen on the banks of Carun?

No: replied the fighting youth, the people of Lamor live. They are renowned in battle, my father; but Hidallan is renowned no more. I must sit alone on the banks of Balva, when the roar of the battle grows.

BUT thy fathers never sat alone, replied the rising pride of Lamor; they never sat alone on the banks of Balva, when the roar of battle rose.—Dost thou not behold that tomb? My eyes discern

* This is perhaps that small stream, tivar in Stirlingshire. Balva signifies a still retaining the name of Balva, which *silent stream*; and Glentivar, *the sequestered* runs through the romantic valley of Glens vale.



it not; there rests the noble Garmállon who never fled from war.
—Come, thou renowned in battle, he says, come to thy father's
tomb.—How am I renowned, Garmállon, for my son has fled
from war?

KING of the streamy Balva! said Hidallan with a sigh, why dost
thou torment my soul? Lamor, I never feared.—Fingal was sad for
Comala, and denied his wars to Hidallan; go to the gray streams
of thy land, he said, and moulder like a leafless oak, which the
winds have bent over Balva, never more to grow.

AND must I hear, Lamor replied, the lonely tread of Hidallan's
feet? When thousands are renowned in battle, shall he bend over
my gray streams? Spirit of the noble Garmállon! carry Lamor to
his place; his eyes are dark; his soul is sad; and his son has lost
his fame.

WHERE, said the youth, shall I search for fame to gladden the
soul of Lamor? From whence shall I return with renown, that the
found of my arms may be pleasant in his ear?—If I go to the
chace of hinds, my name will not be heard.—Lamor will not feel
my dogs, with his hands, glad at my arrival from the hill. He will
not enquire of his mountains, or of the dark-brown deer of his
desarts.

I MUST fall, said Lamor, like a leafless oak: it grew on a rock,
but the winds have overturned it.—My ghost will be seen on
my hills, mournful for my young Hidallan. Will not ye, ye mists, as
ye rise, hide him from my fight?—My son!—go to Lamor's
hall: there the arms of our fathers hang.—Bring the sword of Gar-
mállon;—he took it from a foe.

C O M E

O 2 I

H E



HE went and brought the sword with all its studded thongs.—
He gave it to his father. The gray-haired hero felt the point with
his hand.—

MY son!—lead me to Garmállon's tomb : it rises beside that rust-
ling tree. The long grass is withered ;—I heard the breeze whist-
ling there.—A little fountain murmurs near, and sends its water to
Balva. There let me rest ; it is noon : and the sun is on our fields.

HE led him to Garmállon's tomb. Lamor pierced the side of his
son.—They sleep together : and their ancient halls moulder on
Balva's banks.—Ghosts are seen there at noon : the valley is silent,
and the people shun the place of Lamor.

MOURNFUL is thy tale, said Oscar, son of the times of old!—
My soul sighs for Hidallan ; he fell in the days of his youth. He
flies on the blast of the desert, and his wandering is in a foreign
land.—

SONS of the echoing Morven ! draw near to the foes of Fingal.
Send the night away in songs ; and watch the strength of Caros.
Oscar goes to the people of other times ; to the shades of silent Ard-
ven ; where his fathers sit dim in their clouds, and behold the future
war.—And art thou there, Hidallan, like a half-extinguished meteor ?
Come to my fight, in thy sorrow, chief of the roaring Balva !

THE heroes move with their songs.—Oscar slowly ascends the
hill.—The meteors of night set on the heath before him. A distant
torrent faintly roars.—Unfrequent blasts rush through aged oaks.
The half-enlightened moon sinks dim and red behind her hill.—
Feeble voices are heard on the heath.—Oscar drew his sword.



COME, said the hero, O ye ghosts of my fathers! ye that fought against the kings of the world!—Tell me the deeds of future times; and your converse in your caves; when you talk together and behold your sons in the fields of the valiant.

TRENMOR came, from his hill, at the voice of his mighty son.—A cloud, like the steed of the stranger, supported his airy limbs. His robe is of the mist of Lano, that brings death to the people. His sword is a green meteor half-extinguished. His face is without form, and dark. He sighed thrice over the hero: and thrice the winds of the night roared around. Many were his words to Oscar: but they only came by halves to our ears: they were dark as the tales of other times, before the light of the song arose. He slowly vanished, like a mist that melts on the sunny hill.

IT was then, O daughter of Toscar, my son begun first to be sad. He foresaw the fall of his race; and, at times, he was thoughtful and dark; like the sun* when he carries a cloud on his face; but he looks afterwards on the hills of Cona.

OSCAR passed the night among his fathers, gray morning met him on the banks of Carun.

A GREEN vale surrounded a tomb which arose in the times of old. Little hills lift their head at a distance; and stretch their old trees to the wind. The warriors of Caros sat there, for they had passed the stream by night. They appeared, like the trunks of aged pines, to the pale light of the morning.

OSCAR stood at the tomb, and raised thrice his terrible voice. The rocking hills echoed around: the starting roes bounded away.

* ———caput obscura nitidum ferrugine texit.

VIRG,

And



And the trembling ghosts of the dead fled, shrieking on their clouds.
So terrible was the voice of my son, when he called his friends.

A THOUSAND spears rose around; the people of Caros rose.—Why, daughter of Toscar, why that tear? My son, though alone, is brave. Oscar is like a beam of the sky; he turns around and the people fall. His hand is like the arm of a ghost, when he stretches it from a cloud: the rest of his thin form is unseen: but the people die in the vale.

MY son beheld the approach of the foe; and he stood in the silent darkness of his strength.—“Am I alone, said Oscar, in the midst of a thousand foes?—Many a spear is there!—many a darkly-rolling eye!—Shall I fly to Ardven?—But did my fathers ever fly!—The mark of their arm is in a thousand battles.—Oscar too will be renowned.—Come, ye dim ghosts of my fathers, and behold my deeds in war!—I may fall; but I will be renowned like the race of the echoing Morven*.”

HE stood, growing in his place, like the flood of the narrow vale.
The battle came, but they fell: bloody was the sword of Oscar.

THE noise reached his people at Crona; they came like a hundred streams. The warriors of Caros fled, and Oscar remained like a rock left by the ebbing sea.

* This passage is very like the soliloquy of Ulysses upon a similar occasion.

ὦ μοι ἐγὼ, τί πάθω; μέγα μὲν κακὸν,
αἰεὶ φέβομαι,

Πληθὺν τερψήσας· τὸ δὲ ριζιον αἰκεν ἄλω
Μῦθος· &c.

HOM. II. II.

What farther subterfuge, what hopes remain?
What shame, inglorious if I quit the plain?

What danger, singly if I stand the ground,
My friends all scatter'd, all the foes around?
Yet wherefore doubtful? let this truth
suffice;

The brave meets danger, and the coward flies:
To die or conquer proves a hero's heart,

And knowing this, I know a soldier's part.

POPE.

Now

Now dark and deep, with all his steeds, Caros rolled his might along: the little streams are lost in his course; and the earth is rocking round.—Battle spreads from wing to wing: ten thousand swords gleam at once in the sky.—But why should Ossian sing of battles?—For never more shall my steel shine in war. I remember the days of my youth with sorrow; when I feel the weakness of my arm. Happy are they who fell in their youth, in the midst of their renown!—They have not beheld the tombs of their friend: or failed to bend the bow of their strength.—Happy art thou, O Oscar, in the midst of thy rushing blast. Thou often goest to the fields of thy fame, where Caros fled from thy lifted sword.

DARKNESS comes on my soul, O fair daughter of Toscar, I behold not the form of my son at Carun; nor the figure of Oscar on Crona. The rustling winds have carried him far away; and the heart of his father is sad.

BUT lead me, O Malvina, to the fount of my woods, and the roar of my mountain streams. Let the chace be heard on Cona; that I may think on the days of other years.—And bring me the harp, O maid, that I may touch it when the light of my soul shall arise.—Be thou near, to learn the song; and future times shall hear of Ossian.

THE sons of the feeble hereafter will lift the voice on Cona; and, looking up to the rocks, say, “Here Ossian dwelt.” They shall admire the chiefs of old, and the race that are no more: while we ride on our clouds, Malvina, on the wings of the roaring winds. Our voices shall be heard, at times, in the desert; and we shall sing on the winds of the rock.

THE

