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Fingal, An Ancient Epic Poem, In Six Books

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The Battle of Lora: A Poem.

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T H E

BATTLE of LORA:

A P O E M*.

SON of the distant land, who dwellest in the secret cell! do I hear the sounds of thy grove? or is it thy voice of songs?—The torrent was loud in my ear, but I heard a tuneful voice; dost thou praise the chiefs of thy land; or the spirits † of the wind?—But, lonely dweller of the rock! look over that heathy plain: thou seest green tombs, with their rank, whistling grafs; with their stones

* This poem is compleat; nor does it appear from tradition, that it was introduced, as an episode, into any of Ossian's great works.—It is called, in the original, *Duan a Chuldich*, or the *Culdee's poem*, because it was addressed to one of the first Christian missionaries, who were called, from their retired life, Culdees, or *sequestered persons*.—The story bears a near resemblance to that which was the foundation of the Iliad. Fingal, on his return from Ireland, after he had expelled Swaran from that kingdom, made a feast to all his heroes: he forgot to invite Ma-ronnan and Aldo, two chiefs, who had not been along with him on his expedition. They resented his neglect; and went over to Er-

ragon king of Sora, a country of Scandinavia, the declared enemy of Fingal. The valour of Aldo soon gained him a great reputation in Sora: and Lorma the beautiful wife of Erragon fell in love with him.—He found means to escape with her, and to come to Fingal, who resided then in Selma on the western coast.—Erragon invaded Scotland, and was slain in battle by Gaul the son of Morni, after he had rejected terms of peace offered him by Fingal.—In this war Aldo fell, in a single combat, by the hands of his rival Erragon; and the unfortunate Lorma afterwards died of grief.

† The poet alludes to the religious hymns of the Culdees.

of



of mossy heads: thou seest them, son of the rock, but Ossian's eyes have failed.

A MOUNTAIN-STREAM comes roaring down and sends its waters round a green hill: four mossy stones, in the midst of withered grass, rear their heads on the top: two trees, which the storms have bent, spread their whistling branches around.—This is thy dwelling, Erragon*; this thy narrow house: the sound of thy shells have been long forgot in Sora: and thy shield is become dark in thy hall.—Erragon, king of ships! chief of distant Sora! how hast thou fallen on our mountains †! How is the mighty low!

SON of the secret cell! dost thou delight in songs? Hear the battle of Lora; the sound of its steel is long since past. So thunder on the darkened hill roars and is no more. The sun returns with his silent beams: the glittering rocks, and green heads of the mountains smile.

THE bay of Cona received our ships ‡, from Ullin's rolling waves: our white sheets hung loose to the masts: and the boisterous winds roared behind the groves of Morven.—The horn of the king is sounded, and the deer start from their rocks. Our arrows flew in the woods; the feast of the hill is spread. Our joy was great on our rocks, for the fall of the terrible Swaran.

* Erragon, or Ferg-thonn, signifies *the rage of the waves*; probably a poetical name given him by Ossian himself; for he goes by the name of Annir in tradition.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

2 SAM. ii. 25.

† The beauty of Israel is slain on thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!

‡ This was at Fingal's return from his war against Swaran.

2 SAM. ii. 19.

Two



Two heroes were forgot at our feast; and the rage of their bosoms burned. They rolled their red eyes in secret: the sigh bursts from their breasts. They were seen to talk together, and to throw their spears on earth. They were two dark clouds, in the midst of our joy; like pillars of mist on the settled sea: it glitters to the sun, but the mariners fear a storm.

RAISE my white sails, said Ma-ronnan, raise them to the winds of the west; let us rush, O Aldo, through the foam of the northern wave. We are forgot at the feast: but our arms have been red in blood. Let us leave the hills of Fingal, and serve the king of Sora.—His countenance is fierce, and the war darkens round his spear. Let us be renowned, O Aldo, in the battles of echoing Sora.

THEY took their swords and shields of thongs; and rushed to Lumar's founding bay. They came to Sora's haughty king, the chief of bounding steeds.—Erragon had returned from the chase: his spear was red in blood. He bent his dark face to the ground: and whistled as he went.—He took the strangers to his feasts: they fought and conquered in his wars.

ALDO returned with his fame towards Sora's lofty walls.—From her tower looked the spouse of Erragon, the humid, rolling eyes of Lorma.—Her dark-brown hair flies on the wind of ocean: her white breast heaves, like snow on heath; when the gentle winds arise, and slowly move it in the light. She saw young Aldo, like the beam of Sora's setting sun. Her soft heart sighed: tears filled her eyes; and her white arm supported her head.

THREE days she sat within the hall, and covered grief with joy.—On the fourth she fled with the hero, along the rolling sea.—They came to Cona's mossy towers, to Fingal king of spears.

Q

ALDO



ALDO of the heart of pride! said the rising king of Morven, shall I defend thee from the wrath of Sora's injured king? who will now receive my people into their halls, or give the feast of strangers, since Aldo, of the little soul, has carried away the fair of Sora? Go to thy hills, thou feeble hand, and hide thee in thy caves; mournful is the battle we must fight, with Sora's gloomy king.—Spirit of the noble Trenmor! When will Fingal cease to fight? I was born in the midst of battles*, and my steps must move in blood to my tomb. But my hand did not injure the weak, my steel did not touch the feeble in arms.—I behold thy tempests, O Morven, which will overturn my halls; when my children are dead in battle, and none remains to dwell in Selma. Then will the feeble come, but they will not know my tomb: my renown is in the song: and my actions shall be as a dream to future times.

HIS people gathered around Erragon, as the storms round the ghost of night; when he calls them from the top of Morven, and prepares to pour them on the land of the stranger.—He came to the shore of Cona, and sent his bard to the king; to demand the combat of thousands; or the land of many hills.

FINGAL sat in his hall with the companions of his youth around him. The young heroes were at the chace, and far distant in the desert. The gray-haired chiefs talked of other times, and of the actions of their youth; when the aged Narthmor † came, the king of streamy Lora.

THIS is no time, begun the chief, to hear the songs of other years: Erragon frowns on the coast, and lifts ten thousand swords. Gloomy

* Comhal the Father of Fingal was slain in battle, against the tribe of Morni, the very day that Fingal was born; so that he may, with propriety, be said to have been born in the midst of battles.

† Neart-mór, great strength. Lora, noisy.



is the king among his chiefs! he is like the darkened moon, amidst the meteors of night.

COME, said Fingal, from thy hall, thou daughter of my love; come from thy hall, Bosmina*, maid of streamy Morven! Narthmor, take the steeds † of the strangers, and attend the daughter of Fingal: let her bid the king of Sora to our feast, to Selma's shaded wall.—Offer him, O Bosmina, the peace of heroes, and the wealth of generous Aldo: our youths are far distant, and age is on our trembling hands.

SHE came to the host of Erragon, like a beam of light to a cloud.—In her right hand shone an arrow of gold: and in her left a sparkling shell, the sign of Morven's peace.

ERRAGON brightened in her presence as a rock, before the sudden beams of the sun; when they issue from a broken cloud, divided by the roaring wind.

SON of the distant Sora, begun the mildly blushing maid, come to the feast of Morven's king, to Selma's shaded walls. Take the peace of heroes, O warrior, and let the dark sword rest by thy side.—And if thou chusest the wealth of kings, hear the words of the generous Aldo.—He gives to Erragon an hundred steeds, the children of the rein; an hundred maids from distant lands; an hundred hawks with fluttering wing, that fly across the sky. An hundred girdles ‡ shall also be thine, to bind high-bosomed women; the friends of the

* Bos-mhina, *soft and tender hand*. She was the youngest of Fingal's children. Roman province, which seems to be intimated in the phrase of the *steeds of strangers*.

† These were probably horses taken in the incursions of the Caledonians into the
‡ Sanctified girdles, till very lately, were kept in many families in the north of Scotland;



the births of heroes, and the cure of the sons of toil.—Ten shells studded with gems shall shine in Sora's towers: the blue water trembles on their stars, and seems to be sparkling wine.—They gladdened once the kings of the world *, in the midst of their echoing halls. These, O hero, shall be thine; or thy white-bosomed spouse.—Lorma shall roll her bright eyes in thy halls; though Fingal loves the generous Aldo:—Fingal!—who never injured a hero, though his arm is strong.

SOFT voice of Cona! replied the king, tell him, that he spreads his feast in vain.—Let Fingal pour his spoils around me; and bend beneath my power. Let him give me the swords of his fathers, and the shields of other times; that my children may behold them in my halls, and say, “ These are the arms of Fingal.”

NEVER shall they behold them in thy halls, said the rising pride of the maid; they are in the mighty hands of heroes who never yielded in war.—King of the echoing Sora! the storm is gathering on our hills. Dost thou not foresee the fall of thy people, son of the distant land?

SHE came to Selma's silent halls; the king beheld her down-cast eyes. He rose from his place, in his strength, and shook his aged locks.—He took the sounding mail of Trenmor, and the dark-brown shield of his fathers. Darkness filled Selma's hall, when he stretched his hand to his spear:—the ghosts of thousands were near, and

land; they were bound about women in labour, and were supposed to alleviate their pains, and to accelerate the birth. They were impressed with several mystical figures, and the ceremony of binding them about the woman's waist, was accompanied with words and gestures which shewed the custom to have come originally from the druids.

* The Roman emperors. These shells were some of the spoils of the province.

forefaw



forefaw the death of the people. Terrible joy rofe in the face of the aged heroes : they rufhed to meet the foe ; their thoughts are on the actions of other years : and on the fame of the tomb.

Now the dogs of the chace appeared at Trathal's tomb : Fingal knew that his young heroes followed them, and he ftopt in the midft of his courfe.—Oscar appeared the firft ;—then Morni's fon, and Nemi's race :—Fercuth * fhewed his gloomy form : Dermid fpread his dark hair on the wind. Offian came the laft, O fon of the rock †, I hummed the fong of other times : my fpear fupported my fteps over the little freams, and my thoughts were of mighty men. Fingal ftruck his boffy fhield ; and gave the difmal fign of war ; a thoufand fwords ‡, at once unfheathed, gleam on the waving heath. Three gray-haired fons of the fong raife the tuneful, mournful voice.—Deep and dark with founding fteps, we rufh, a gloomy ridge, along : like the fhower of a ftorm when it pours on the narrow vale.

THE king of Morven fat on his hill : the fun-beam || of battle flew on the wind : the companions of his youth are near, with all their waving locks of age.—Joy rofe in the hero's eyes when he beheld his fons in war ; when he faw them amidft the lightning of fwords, and mindful of the deeds of their fathers.—Erragon came on, in his ftrength, like the roar of a winter ftream : the battle falls in his courfe, and death is at his fide.

* Fear-cuth, the fame with Fergus *the man of the word*, or a commander of an army. Of mighty Cherubim ; the fudden blaze Far round illumin'd hell.

† The poet addreffes himfelf to the Culdee.

MILTON.

‡ He fpake ; and to confirm his words out-flew.

Millions of flaming fwords, drawn from the

|| I have obferved in a former note, that the ftandard of Fingal was called the fun-beam from its being fludded with ftones and gold.



Who comes, said Fingal, like the bounding roe, like the hart of echoing Cona? His shield glitters on his side; and the clang of his armour is mournful.—He meets with Erragon in the strife!—Behold the battle of the chiefs!—it is like the contending of ghosts in a gloomy storm.—But fallest thou, son of the hill, and is thy white bosom stained with blood? Weep, unhappy Lorma, Aldo is no more.

The king took the spear of his strength; for he was sad for the fall of Aldo: he bent his deathful eyes on the foe; but Gaul met the king of Sora.—Who can relate the fight of the chiefs?—The mighty stranger fell.

Sons of Cona! Fingal cried aloud, stop the hand of death.—Mighty was he that is now so low! and much is he mourned in Sora! The stranger will come towards his hall, and wonder why it is silent. The king is fallen, O stranger, and the joy of his house is ceased.—Listen to the sound of his woods: perhaps his ghost is there; but he is far distant, on Morven, beneath the sword of a foreign foe.

Such were the words of Fingal, when the bard raised the song of peace; we stopped our uplifted swords, and spared the feeble foe. We laid Erragon in that tomb; and I raised the voice of grief: the clouds of night came rolling down, and the ghost of Erragon appeared to some.—His face was cloudy and dark; and an half-formed sigh is in his breast.—Blest be thy soul, O king of Sora! thine arm was terrible in war!

Lorma sat, in Aldo's hall, at the light of a flaming oak: the night came, but he did not return; and the soul of Lorma is sad.—What detains thee, hunter of Cona? for thou didst promise to return.



return.—Has the deer been distant far; and do the dark winds sigh, round thee, on the heath? I am in the land of strangers, where is my friend, but Aldo? Come from thy echoing hills, O my best beloved!

HER eyes are turned toward the gate, and she listens to the rustling blast. She thinks it is Aldo's tread, and joy rises in her face:—but sorrow returns again, like a thin cloud on the moon.—And thou wilt not return, my love? Let me behold the face of the hill. The moon is in the east. Calm and bright is the breast of the lake! When shall I behold his dogs returning from the chace? When shall I hear his voice, loud and distant on the wind? Come from thy echoing hills, hunter of woody Cona!

HIS thin ghost appeared, on a rock, like the watry beam of the moon, when it rushes from between two clouds, and the midnight shower is on the field.—She followed the empty form over the heath, for she knew that her hero fell.—I heard her approaching cries on the wind, like the mournful voice of the breeze, when it sighs on the grass of the cave.

SHE came, she found her hero: her voice was heard no more: silent she rolled her sad eyes; she was pale as a watry cloud, that rises from the lake, to the beam of the moon.

FEW were her days on Cona: she sunk into the tomb: Fingal commanded his bards; and they sung over the death of Lorma. The daughters* of Morven mourned her for one day in the year, when the dark winds of autumn returned.

* The daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

JUDGES xi. 40.

SON



Son of the distant land *, thou dwellest in the field of fame : O let thy song rise, at times, in the praise of those that fell : that their thin ghosts may rejoice around thee ; and the soul of Lorna come on a moon-beam †, when thou liest down to rest, and the moon looks into thy cave. Then shalt thou see her lovely ; but the tear is still on her cheek.

* The poet addresses himself to the near the window of my rest ; when my
Culdee. thoughts are of peace ; and the din of arms

† Be thou on a moon-beam, O Morna, is over. FINGAL, B. I.

CONLATH

