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The poems of Ossian

in two volumes ; to which are prefixed dissertations on the æra and
poems of Ossian

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A R G U M E N T

TO BOOK I.

CAIRBAR, the son of Borbar-duthul, lord of Atha in Connaught, the most potent chief of the race of the Fir-bolg, having murdered, at Temora, the royal palace, Cormac, the son of Artho, the young king of Ireland, usurped the throne. Cormac was lineally descended from Conar, the son of Trenmor, the great grandfather of Fingal, king of those Caledonians who inhabited the western coast of Scotland. Fingal resented the behaviour of Cairbar, and resolved to pass over into Ireland with an army, to re-establish the royal family on the Irish throne. Early intelligence of his designs coming to Cairbar, he assembled some of his tribes in Ulster, and at the same time ordered his brother Cathmor to follow him speedily with an army, from Temora. Such was the situation of affairs when the Caledonian invaders appeared on the coast of Ulster.

The poem opens in the morning. Cairbar is represented as retired from the rest of the army, when one of his scouts brought him news of the landing of Fingal. He assembles a council of his chiefs. Foldath, the chief of Moma, haughtily despises the enemy; and is reprimanded warmly by Malthos. Cairbar, after hearing their debate, orders a feast to be prepared; to which, by his bard Olla, he invites Oscar, the son of Ossian; resolving to pick a quarrel with that hero, and so have some pretext for killing him. Oscar came to the feast; the quarrel happened; the followers of both fought; and Cairbar and Oscar fell by mutual wounds. The noise of the battle reached Fingal's army. The king came on, to the relief of Oscar, and the Irish fell back to the army of Cathmor, who was advanced to the banks of the river Lubar, on the heath of Moi-lena. Fingal, after mourning over his grandson, ordered Ullin, the chief of his bards, to carry his body to Morven, to be there interred. Night coming on, Althan, the son of Conachar, relates to the king the particulars of the murder of Cormac. Fillan, the son of Fingal, is sent to observe the motions of Cathmor by night, which concludes the action of the first day. The scene of this book is a plain, near the hill of Mora, which rose on the borders of the heath of Moi-lena, in Ulster.

TEMORA:

AN EPIC POEM.

BOOK I.

THE blue waves of Erin roll in light. The mountains are covered with day. Trees shake their dusky heads, in the breeze. Grey torrents pour their noisy streams. Two green hills, with aged oaks, surround a narrow plain. The blue course of a stream is there. On its banks stood Cairbar^m of Atha. His spear supports the king: the red eye of his fear is sad. Cormac rises in his soul, with all his ghastly wounds. The grey form of the youth appears in darkness. Blood pours from his airy side. Cairbar thrice threw his spear on earth. Thrice

^m Cairbar, the son of Borbar-duthul, was descended lineally from Lathon, the chief of the Fir-bolg, the first colony who settled in the south of Ireland. The Cael were in possession of the northern coast of that kingdom, and the first monarchs of Ireland were of their race. Hence arose those differences between the two nations, which terminated, at last, in the murder of Cormac, and the usurpation of Cairbar, lord of Atha, who is mentioned in this place.

he stroked his beard. His steps are short. He often stops. He tosses his sinewy arms. He is like a cloud in the desert, varying its form to every blast. The valleys are sad around, and fear, by turns, the shower! The king, at length, resumed his soul. He took his pointed spear. He turned his eye to Moi-lena. The scouts of blue ocean came. They came with steps of fear, and often looked behind. Cairbar knew that the mighty were near! He called his gloomy chiefs.

The sounding steps of his warriors came. They drew, at once, their swords. There Mor-lathⁿ stood with darkened face. Hidalla's long hair sighs in the wind. Red-haired Cormar bends on his spear, and rolls his sidelong-looking eyes. Wild is the look of Malthos, from beneath two shaggy brows. Foldath stands, like an oozy rock, that covers its dark sides

ⁿ Mór-lath, *great in the day of battle*. Hidalla', *mildly-looking hero*. Cor-mar, *expert at sea*. Málth-os, *slow to speak*. Foldath, *generous*.

Foldath, who is here strongly marked, makes a great figure in the sequel of the poem. His fierce, uncompromising character is sustained throughout. He seems, from a passage in the second book, to have been Cairbar's greatest confidant, and to have had a principal hand in the conspiracy against Cormac, king of Ireland. His tribe was one of the most considerable of the race of the Fir-bolg.

with foam. His spear is like Slimora's fir, that meets the wind of heaven. His shield is marked with the strokes of battle. His red eye despises danger. These, and a thousand other chiefs, surrounded the king of Erin, when the scout of ocean came, Mor-annal,^o from streamy Moilena. His eyes hang forward from his face. His lips trembling pale!

"Do the chiefs of Erin stand," he said, "silent as the grove of evening? Stand they, like a silent wood, and Fingal on the coast? Fingal, who is terrible in battle; the king of streamy Morven!" "Hast thou seen the warrior?" said Cairbar, with a sigh. "Are his heroes many on the coast? Lifts he the spear of battle? Or comes the king in peace?" "In peace he comes not, king of Erin! I have seen his forward spear.^p It is a meteor of death. The blood of thousands is on its steel. He came first to the shore, strong in the grey hair of age. Full rose

^o Mór-annal, *strong breath*; a very proper name for a scout.

^p Mor-annal here alludes to the particular appearance of Fingal's spear. If a man upon his first landing in a strange country, kept the point of his spear forward, it denoted in those days, that he came in a hostile manner, and accordingly he was treated as an enemy: if he kept the point behind him, it was a token of friendship, and he was immediately invited to the feast, according to the hospitality of the times.

his sinewy limbs, as he strode in his might. That sword is by his side, which gives no second^a wound. His shield is terrible, like the bloody moon, ascending through a storm. Then came Ossian, king of songs. Then Morni's son, the first of men. Connal leaps forward on his spear. Dermid spreads his dark-brown locks. Fillan bends his bow, the young hunter of streamy Moruth. But who is that before them, like the terrible course of a stream? It is the son of Ossian, bright between his locks! His long hair falls on his back. His dark brows are half-inclosed in steel. His sword hangs loose on his side. His spear glitters as he moves. I fled from his terrible eyes, king of high Temora!"

"Then fly, thou feeble man;" said Foldath's gloomy wrath. "Fly to the grey streams of thy land, son of the little soul! Have not I seen that Oscar? I beheld the chief in war. He is of the mighty in danger: but there are others who lift the spear. Erin has many sons as brave. King of Temora of groves, let Foldath meet him in his strength. Let me stop this

^a This was the famous sword of Fingal, made by Luno, a smith of Lochlin, and after him poetically called the *son of Luno*: it is said of this sword, that it killed a man at every stroke; and that Fingal never used it but in times of the greatest danger.

mighty stream. My spear is covered with blood. My shield is like the wall of Tura!"

"Shall Foldath^r alone meet the foe!" replied the dark-browed Malthos. "Are they not on our coast, like the waters of many streams? Are not these the chiefs who vanquished Swaran, when the sons of green Erin fled? Shall Foldath meet their bravest hero? Foldath of the heart of pride! Take the strength of the people, and let Malthos come. My sword is red with slaughter, but who has heard my words?"^s

"Sons of green Erin," said Hidalla,^t "let not Fingal hear your words. The foe might rejoice, and his arm be strong in the land. Ye are brave, O warriors! Ye are tempests in war. Ye are like storms, which meet the rocks without fear, and overturn the woods. But let us move in our strength, slow as a gathered cloud! Then shall the mighty tremble; the spear shall

^r The opposite characters of Foldath and Malthos are strongly marked in subsequent parts of the poem. They appear always in opposition. The feuds between their families, which were the source of their hatred to one another, are mentioned in other poems.

^s That is, Who has heard my vaunting? He intended the expression as a rebuke to the self-praise of Foldath.

^t Hidalla was the chief of Clonra, a small district on the banks of the lake of Lego. The beauty of his person, his eloquence and genius for poetry, are afterwards mentioned.

fall from the hand of the valiant. We see the cloud of death, they will say, while shadows fly over their face. Fingal will mourn in his age. He shall behold his flying fame. The steps of his chiefs will cease in Morven. The moss of years shall grow in Selma."

Cairbar heard their words, in silence, like the cloud of a shower: it stands dark on Cromla, till the lightning bursts its side. The valley gleams with heaven's flame; the spirits of the storm rejoice. So stood the silent king of Temora: at length his words broke forth. "Spread the feast on Moi-lena. Let my hundred bards attend. Thou, red-haired Olla, take the harp of the king. Go to Oscar, chief of swords. Bid Oscar to our joy. To-day we feast and hear the song: to-morrow break the spears! Tell him that I have raised the tomb of "Cathol; that bards gave his friend to the winds. Tell him that Cairbar has heard of his fame, at

"Cathol, the son of Maronnan, or Moran, was murdered by Cairbar, for his attachment to the family of Cormac. He had attended Oscar to the *war of Inis-thona*, where they contracted a great friendship for one another. Oscar, immediately after the death of Cathol, had sent a formal challenge to Cairbar, which he prudently declined, but conceived a secret hatred against Oscar, and had before-hand contrived to kill him at the feast, to which he here invites him.

the stream of resounding Carun.^x ^y Cathmor, my brother, is not here. He is not here with his thousands, and our arms are weak. Cathmor is a foe to strife at the feast! His soul is bright as that sun! But Cairbar must fight with Oscar, chiefs of woody Temora! His words for Cathol were many: the wrath of Cairbar burns. He shall fall on Moi-lena. My fame shall rise in blood."

Their faces brightened round with joy. They spread over Moi-lena. The feast of shells is

^x He alludes to the battle of Oscar against Caros, *king of ships*; who is supposed to be the same with Carausius the usurper.

^y Cathmor, *great in battle*; the son of Borbar-duthul, and brother of Cairbar, king of Ireland, had, before the insurrection of the Fir-bolg, passed over into Inis-huna, supposed to be a part of South Britain, to assist Connor, king of that place, against his enemies. Cathmor was successful in the war, but, in the course of it, Connor was either killed, or died a natural death. Cairbar, upon intelligence of the designs of Fingal to dethrone him, had dispatched a messenger for Cathmor, who returned into Ireland a few days before the opening of the poem.

Cairbar here takes advantage of his brother's absence, to perpetrate his ungenerous designs against Oscar; for the noble spirit of Cathmor, had he been present, would not have permitted the laws of that hospitality, for which he was so renowned himself, to be violated. The brothers form a contrast: we do not detest the mean soul of Cairbar more than we admire the disinterested and generous mind of Cathmor.

prepared. The songs of bards arise. The chiefs of Selma heard their joy.² We thought that mighty Cathmor came. Cathmor, the friend of strangers! the brother of red-haired Cairbar.

² Fingal's army heard the joy that was in Cairbar's camp. The character given of Cathmor is agreeable to the times. Some, through ostentation, were hospitable; and others fell naturally into a custom handed down by their ancestors. But what marks strongly the character of Cathmor, is his aversion to praise; for he is represented to dwell in a wood, to avoid the thanks of his guests; which is still a higher degree of generosity than that of Axylus in Homer: for the poet does not say, but the good man might, at the head of his own table, have heard with pleasure the praise bestowed on him by the people he entertained.

No nation in the world carried hospitality to a greater length than the ancient Scots. It was even infamous, for many ages, in a man of condition, to have the door of his house shut at all, *LEST*, as the bards express it, *THE STRANGER SHOULD COME AND BEHOLD HIS CONTRACTED SOUL*. Some of the chiefs were possessed of this hospitable disposition to an extravagant degree; and the bards, perhaps upon a private account, never failed to recommend it in their eulogiums. *Cean uia' na dai'* or *the point to which all the roads of the strangers lead*, was an invariable epithet given by them to the chiefs: on the contrary, they distinguished the inhospitable by the title of *the cloud which the strangers shun*. This last, however, was so uncommon, that in all the old poems I have ever met with, I found but one man branded with this ignominious appellation; and that, perhaps, only founded upon a private quarrel, which subsisted between him and the patron of the bard who wrote the poem.

Their souls were not the same. The light of heaven was in the bosom of Cathmor. His towers rose on the banks of Atha; seven paths led to his halls. Seven chiefs stood on the paths, and called the stranger to the feast! But Cathmor dwelt in the wood, to shun the voice of praise!

Olla came with his songs. Oscar went to Cairbar's feast. Three hundred warriors strode along Moi-lena of the streams. The grey dogs bounded on the heath: their howling reached afar. Fingal saw the departing hero. The soul of the king was sad. He dreaded Cairbar's gloomy thoughts, amid the feast of shells. My son raised high the spear of Cormac. An hundred bards met him with songs. Cairbar concealed, with smiles, the death that was dark in his soul. The feast is spread. The shells resound. Joy brightens the face of the host. But it was like the parting beam of the sun, when he is to hide his red head in a storm!

Cairbar rises in his arms. Darkneſs gathers on his brow. The hundred harps cease at once. The clang^a of shields is heard. Far distant on

^a When a chief was determined to kill a person already in his power, it was usual to signify that his death was intended, by the sound of a shield struck with the blunt end of a spear; at the same time that a bard at a distance raised the *death song*.

the heath Olla raised a song of woe. My son knew the sign of death; and rising, seized his spear. "Oscar," said the dark-red Cairbar, "I behold the spear^b of Erin. The spear of Temora^c glitters in thy hand, son of woody Morven! It was the pride of an hundred^d kings. The death of heroes of old. Yield it, son of Ossian, yield it to car-borne Cairbar!"

"Shall I yield," Oscar replied, "the gift of Erin's injured king; the gift of fair-haired Cormac, when Oscar scattered his foes? I came to Cormac's halls of joy, when Swaran fled from Fingal. Gladness rose in the face of youth. He gave the spear of Temora. Nor did he give it to the feeble: neither to the weak in soul. The darkness of thy face is no storm to me: nor are thine eyes the flame of death. Do I fear thy clanging shield? Tremble I at Olla's

^b Cormac, the son of Arth, had given the spear, which is here the foundation of the quarrel, to Oscar, when he came to congratulate him upon Swaran's being expelled from Ireland.

^c *Ti'-mór-i*, the house of the great king, the name of the royal palace of the supreme kings of Ireland.

^d *Hundred* here is an indefinite number, and is only intended to express a great many. It was probably the hyperbolic phrases of bards that gave the first hint to the Irish Senachies to place the origin of their monarchy in so remote a period as they have done.

song? No: Cairbar, frighten the feeble; Oscar is a rock!"

"Wilt thou not yield the spear?" replied the rising pride of Cairbar. "Are thy words so mighty, because Fingal is near? Fingal, with aged locks, from Morven's hundred groves! He has fought with little men. But he must vanish before Cairbar, like a thin pillar of mist before the winds of Atha!"^e "Were he who fought with little men, near Atha's haughty chief; Atha's chief would yield green Erin to avoid his rage! Speak not of the mighty, O Cairbar! Turn thy sword on me. Our strength is equal: but Fingal is renowned! the first of mortal men!"

Their people saw the darkening chiefs. Their crowding steps are heard around. Their eyes roll in fire. A thousand swords are half-un-sheathed. Red-haired Olla raised the song of battle. The trembling joy of Oscar's soul arose: the wonted joy of his soul when Fingal's horn was heard. Dark as the swelling wave of ocean before the rising winds, when it bends its head near the coast, came on the host of Cairbar!

Daughter of Toscar!^f why that tear? He is

^e Atha, *shallow river*: the name of Cairbar's seat in Con-naught.

^f Malvina, the daughter of Toscar, to whom is addressed

not fallen yet. Many were the deaths of his arm, before my hero fell!

Behold they fall before my son, like groves in the desert; when an angry ghost rushes through night, and takes their green heads in his hand! Morlath falls. Maronnan dies. Conachar trembles in his blood! Cairbar shrinks before Oscar's sword! He creeps in darkness behind a stone. He lifts the spear in secret: he pierces my Oscar's side! He falls forward on his shield: his knee sustains the chief. But still his spear is in his hand. See gloomy Cairbar^g falls! The steel pierced his forehead, and

that part of the poem which related to the death of Oscar her lover.

^g The Irish historians place the death of Cairbar in the latter end of the third century: they say, he was killed in battle against Oscar, the son of Ossian, but deny that he fell by his hand.

It is, however, certain, that the Irish bards disguise, in some measure, this part of their history. An Irish poem on this subject, which, undoubtedly, was the source of their information concerning the battle of Gabhra, where Cairbar fell, is just now in my hands. As a translation of the poem (which, though evidently no very ancient composition, does not want poetical merit) would extend this note to too great a length, I shall only give the story of it in brief, with some extracts from the original Irish.

Oscar, says the Irish bard, was invited to a feast at Temora, by Cairbar, king of Ireland. A dispute arose between the two heroes, concerning the exchange of spears, which was

divided his red hair behind. He lay, like a shattered rock, which Cromla shakes from its shaggy side; when the green-vallied Erin shakes its mountains, from sea to sea!

usually made, between the guests and their host, upon such occasions. In the course of their altercation, Cairbar said, in a boastful manner, that he would hunt on the hills of Albion, and carry the spoils of it into Ireland, in spite of all the efforts of its inhabitants. The original words are;

Briathar buan sin; Briathar buan
A bheireadh an Cairbre rua',
Gu tuga' se sealg, agus creach
A h' ALBIN an la'r na mhaireach.

Oscar replied, that the next day he himself would carry into Albion the spoils of the five provinces of Ireland; in spite of the opposition of Cairbar.

Briathar eile an aghai' sin
A bheirea' an t' Oscar, og, calma
Gu'n tugadh sealg agus creach
Do dh' ALBIN an la'r na mhaireach, &c.

Oscar, in consequence of his threats, began to lay waste Ireland; but as he returned with the spoil into Ulster, through the narrow pass of Gabhra (*Caoil ghen Ghabhra*) he was met by Cairbar, and a battle ensued, in which both the heroes fell by mutual wounds. The bard gives a very curious list of the followers of Oscar, as they marched to battle. They appear to have been five hundred in number, commanded, as the poet expresses it, by *five heroes of the blood of kings*. This poem mentions Fingal as arriving from Scotland before Oscar died of his wounds.

But never more shall Oscar rise! He leans on his bossy shield. His spear is in his terrible hand. Erin's sons stand distant and dark. Their shouts arise, like crowded streams. *Moi-lena* echoes wide. Fingal heard the sound. He took the spear of Selma. His steps are before us on the heath. He spoke the words of woe. "I hear the noise of war. Young Oscar is alone. Rise, sons of Morven: join the hero's sword!"

Ossian rushed along the heath. Fillan bounded over *Moi-lena*. Fingal strode in his strength. The light of his shield is terrible. The sons of Erin saw it far distant. They trembled in their souls. They knew that the wrath of the king arose: and they foresaw their death. We first arrived. We fought. Erin's chiefs withstood our rage. But when the king came, in the sound of his course, what heart of steel could stand? Erin fled over *Moi-lena*. Death pursued their flight. We saw Oscar on his shield. We saw his blood around. Silence darkened every face. Each turned his back and wept. The king strove to hide his tears. His grey beard whistled in the wind. He bends his head above the chief. His words are mixed with sighs.

"Art thou fallen, O Oscar! in the midst of thy course? the heart of the aged beats over thee! He sees thy coming wars! The wars which

ought to come he sees! They are cut off from thy fame! When shall joy dwell at Selma? When shall grief depart from Morven? My sons fall by degrees: Fingal is the last of his race. My fame begins to pass away. Mine age will be without friends. I shall sit a grey cloud in my hall. I shall not hear the return of a son, in his sounding arms. Weep, ye heroes of Morven! never more shall Oscar rise!"

And they did weep, O Fingal! Dear was the hero to their souls. He went out to battle, and the foes vanished. He returned, in peace, amidst their joy. No father mourned his son slain in youth: no brother, his brother of love. They fell, without tears, for the chief of the people is low! Bran^h is howling at his feet: gloomy Luäth is sad; for he had often led them to the chase; to the bounding roe of the desert!

When Oscar saw his friends around, his heaving breast arose. "The groans," he said, "of aged chiefs; the howling of my dogs; the sudden bursts of the song of grief; have melted Oscar's soul. My soul, that never melted before. It was like the steel of my sword. Oisian, carry me to my hills! Raise the stones of my renown. Place the horn of a deer: place

^h Bran was one of Fingal's dogs. Bran signifies a *mountain-stream*.

my sword by my side. The torrent hereafter may raise the earth: the hunter may find the steel, and say, "This has been Oscar's sword; the pride of other years!" "Fallest thou, son of my fame! shall I never see thee, Oscar! When others hear of their sons, shall I not hear of thee? The moss is on thy four grey stones. The mournful wind is there. The battle shall be fought without thee. Thou shalt not pursue the dark-brown hinds. When the warrior returns from battles, and tells of other lands; "I have seen a tomb," he will say, "by the roaring stream; the dark dwelling of a chief. He fell by car-borne Oscar, the first of mortal men." I, perhaps, shall hear his voice. A beam of joy will rise in my soul."

Night would have descended in sorrow, and morning returned in the shadow of grief. Our chiefs would have stood, like cold dropping rocks, on Moi-lena, and have forgot the war; did not the king disperse his grief, and raise his mighty voice. The chiefs, as new-awakened from dreams, lift up their heads around.

"How long on Moi-lena shall we weep? How long pour in Erin our tears? The mighty will not return. Oscar shall not rise in his strength. The valiant must fall in their day, and be no more known on their hills. Where are our fathers, O warriors! the chiefs of the

times of old? They have set like stars that have shone. We only hear the sound of their praise. But they were renowned in their years: the terror of other times. Thus shall we pass away, in the day of our fall. Then let us be renowned when we may; and leave our fame behind us, like the last beams of the sun, when he hides his red head in the west. The traveller mourns his absence, thinking of the flame of his beams. Ullin, my aged bard! take thou the ship of the king. Carry Oscar to Selma of harps. Let the daughters of Morven weep. We must fight in Erin, for the race of fallen Cormac. The days of my years begin to fail. I feel the weakness of my arm. My fathers bend from their clouds, to receive their grey-hair'd son. But, before I go hence, one beam of fame shall rise. My days shall end, as my years begun, in fame. My life shall be one stream of light to bards of other times!"

Ullin rais'd his white sails. The wind of the south came forth. He bounded on the waves towards Selma. I remained in my grief, but my words were not heard. The feast is spread on Moi-lena. An hundred heroes reared the tomb of Cairbar. No song is raised over the chief. His soul had been dark and bloody. The bards remembered the fall of Cormac! what could they say in Cairbar's praise?

Night came rolling down. The light of an hundred oaks arose. Fingal sat beneath a tree. Old Althan¹ stood in the midst. He told the tale of fallen Cormac. Althan, the son of Conachar, the friend of car-borne Cuthullin. He dwelt with Cormac in windy Temora, when Semo's son fell at Lego's stream. The tale of Althan was mournful. The tear was in his eye when he spoke.

^k "The setting sun was yellow on ¹Dora. Grey evening began to descend. Temora's woods shook with the blast of the unconstant wind. A cloud gathered in the west. A red star looked from behind its edge. I stood in the wood alone. I saw a ghost on the darkening air! His stride extended from hill to hill. His shield was dim on his side. It was the son of Semo. I knew the warrior's face. But he passed away in his blast; and all was dark around! My soul was sad. I went to the hall of shells. A thousand lights arose. The hun-

¹ Althan, the son of Conachar, was the chief bard of Arth, king of Ireland. After the death of Arth, Althan attended his son Cormac, and was present at his death. He had made his escape from Cairbar, by the means of Cathmor, and, coming to Fingal, related, as here, the death of his master Cormac.

^k Althan speaks.

¹ Doira, *the woody side of a mountain*; it is here a hill in the neighbourhood of Temora.

dred bards had strung the harp. Cormac stood in the midst, like the morning star, when it rejoices on the eastern hill, and its young beams are bathed in showers. Bright and silent is its progress aloft, but the cloud, that shall hide it, is near! The sword of Artho^m was in the hand of the king. He looked with joy on its polished studs: thrice he attempted to draw it, and thrice he failed: his yellow locks are spread on his shoulders; his cheeks of youth are red. I mourned over the beam of youth, for he was soon to set!

“Althan!” he said, with a smile, “didst thou behold my father? Heavy is the sword of the king; surely his arm was strong. O that I were like him in battle, when the rage of his wrath arose! then would I have met, with Cuthullin, the car-borne son of Cantéla! But years may come on, O Althan! and my arm be strong. Hast thou heard of Semo’s son, the ruler of high Temora? He might have returned with his fame. He promised to return to-night. My bards wait him with songs. My feást is spread in the hall of kings.”

“I heard Cormac in silence. My tears began to flow. I hid them with my aged locks. The king perceived my grief. “Son of Cona-

^m Arth, or Artho, the father of Cormac, king of Ireland.

char!" he said, "is the son of Semoⁿ low? Why bursts the sigh in secret? Why descends the tear? Comes the car-borne Torlath? Comes the sound of red-haired Cairbar? They come! for I behold thy grief. Mossy Tura's chief is low! Shall I not rush to battle? But I cannot lift the spear! O had mine arm the strength of Cuthullin, soon would Cairbar fly; the fame of my fathers would be renewed; and the deeds of other times!"

"He took his bow. The tears flow down, from both his sparkling eyes. Grief saddens round. The bards bend forward, from their hundred harps. The lone blast touched their trembling strings. The sound^o is sad and low! A voice is heard at a distance, as of one in grief. It was Carril of other times, who came from dark Slimora.^p He told of the fall of Cuthullin. He told of his mighty deeds. The people were scattered round his tomb. Their arms lay on

ⁿ Cuthullin is called the king of Tura, from a castle of that name on the coast of Ulster, where he dwelt, before he undertook the management of the affairs of Ireland, in the minority of Cormac.

^o That prophetic sound, mentioned in other poems, which the harps of the bards emitted before the death of a person worthy and renowned. It is here an omen of the death of Cormac, which soon after followed.

^p Slimora, a hill in Connaught, near which Cuthullin was killed.

the ground. They had forgot the war, for he, their fire, was seen no more!

“But who,” said the soft-voiced Carril, “who come like bounding roes? Their stature is like young trees in the valley, growing in a shower! Soft and ruddy are their cheeks! Fearless souls look forth from their eyes! Who but the sons of Usnoth,^q chief of streamy Etha? The people rise on every side, like the strength of an half-extinguished fire, when the winds come, sudden, from the desert, on their rustling wings. Sudden glows the dark brow of the hill; the passing mariner lags on his winds. The sound of Caithbat’s^r shield was heard. The

^q Usnoth, chief of Etha, a district on the western coast of Scotland, had three sons, Nathos, Althos, and Ardan, by Slis-sáma, the sister of Cuthullin. The three brothers, when very young, were sent over to Ireland by their father, to learn the use of arms under their uncle, whose military fame was very great in that kingdom. They had just arrived in Ulster when the news of Cuthullin’s death arrived. Nathos, the eldest of the three brothers, took the command of Cuthullin’s army, and made head against Cairbar, the chief of Atha. Cairbar having, at last, murdered young king Cormac, at Temora, the army of Nathos shifted sides, and the brothers were obliged to return into Ulster, in order to pass over into Scotland. The sequel of their mournful story is related at large in the poem of Dar-thula.

^r Caithbat was grandfather to Cuthullin; and his shield was made use of to alarm his posterity to the battles of the family.

warriors saw Cuthullin^s in Nathos. So rolled his sparkling eyes! his steps were such on the heath! Battles are fought at Lego. The sword of Nathos prevails. Soon shalt thou behold him in thy halls, king of Temora of groves!"

"Soon may I behold the chief!" replied the blue-eyed king. "But my soul is sad for Cuthullin. His voice was pleasant in mine ear. Often have we moved, on Dora, to the chase of the dark-brown hinds. His bow was unerring on the hills. He spoke of mighty men. He told of the deeds of my fathers. I felt my rising joy. But sit thou at the feast, O Carril! I have often heard thy voice. Sing in praise of Cuthullin. Sing of Nathos of Etha!"^t

"Day rose on Temora, with all the beams of the east. Crathin came to the hall, the son of old Gelláma."^u "I behold," he said, "a cloud in the desert, king of Erin! a cloud it seemed at first, but now a crowd of men! One strides before them in his strength. His red hair flies in wind. His shield glitters to the beam of the east. His spear is in his hand." "Call him to the feast of Temora," replied the brightening king. "My hall is the house of strangers, son

^s That is, they saw a manifest likeness between the person of Nathos and Cuthullin.

^t Nathos, the son of Usnoth. ^u Geal-lamha, *white-handed*.

of generous Gelláma! It is perhaps the chief of Etha, coming in all his renown. Hail *mighty stranger! Art thou of the friends of Cormac? But, Carril, he is dark and unlovely. He draws his sword. Is that the son of Usnoth, bard of the times of old?"

"It is not the son of Usnoth!" said Carril. "It is Cairbar, thy foe. Why comest thou in thy arms to Temora? chief of the gloomy brow. Let not thy sword rise against Cormac! Whither dost thou turn thy speed?" He passed on in darkness. He seized the hand of the king. Cormac foresaw his death; the rage of his eyes arose. "Retire, thou chief of Atha! Nathos comes with war. Thou art bold in Cormac's hall, for his arm is weak." The sword entered the side of the king. He fell in the halls of his fathers. His fair hair is in the dust. His blood is smoaking round.

"Art thou fallen in thy halls?"^γ said Carril. "O son of noble Artho! The shield of Cuthullin was not near. Nor the spear of thy father. Mournful are the mountains of Erin, for the chief of the people is low! Blest be thy soul, O Cormac! Thou art darkened in thy youth."

* From this expression, we understand, that Cairbar had entered the palace of Temora, in the midst of Cormac's speech.

^γ Althan speaks.

“His words came to the ear of Cairbar. He closed^z us in the midst of darkness. He feared to stretch his sword to the bards,^a though his soul was dark. Long we pined alone! At length the noble Cathmor^b came. He heard our voice from the cave. He turned the eye of his wrath on Cairbar.

“Brother of Cathmor,” he said, “how long wilt thou pain my soul? Thy heart is a rock. Thy thoughts are dark and bloody! But thou art the brother of Cathmor; and Cathmor shall shine in thy war. But my soul is not like thine; thou feeble hand in fight! The light of my bosom is stained with thy deeds. Bards will not sing of my renown: they may say, “Cathmor was brave, but he fought for gloomy Cairbar.” They will pass over my tomb in silence. My fame shall not be heard. Cairbar! loose the bards. They are the sons of future times. Their voice shall be heard in other

^z That is, himself and Carril, as it afterwards appears.

^a The persons of the bards were so sacred, that even he, who had just murdered his sovereign, feared to kill them.

^b Cathmor appears the same disinterested hero upon every occasion. His humanity and generosity were unparalleled: in short, he had no fault, but too much attachment to so bad a brother as Cairbar. His family connexion with Cairbar prevails, as he expresses it, over every other consideration, and makes him engage in a war, of which he does not approve.

years; after the kings of Temora have failed." We came forth at the words of the chief. We saw him in his strength. He was like thy youth, O Fingal! when thou first didst lift the spear. His face was like the plain of the sun, when it is bright. No darkness travelled over his brow. But he came with his thousands, to aid the red-haired Cairbar. Now he comes to revenge his death, O king of woody Morven!"

"Let Cathmor come," replied the king. "I love a foe so great. His soul is bright. His arm is strong. His battles are full of fame. But the little soul is a vapour that hovers round the marshy lake. It never rises on the green hill, lest the winds should meet it there. Its dwelling is in the cave; it sends forth the dart of death! Our young heroes, O warriors! are like the renown of our fathers. They fight in youth. They fall. Their names are in song. Fingal is amid his darkening years. He must not fall, as an aged oak, across a secret stream. Near it are the steps of the hunter, as it lies beneath the wind. "How is that tree fallen?" he says, and, whistling, strides along. Raise the song of joy, ye bards of Morven! Let our souls forget the past. The red stars look on us from clouds, and silently descend. Soon shall the grey beam of the morning rise, and shew us the foes of Cormac. Fillan! my son, take

thou the spear of the king. Go to Mora's dark-brown side. Let thine eyes travel over the heath. Observe the foes of Fingal: observe the course of generous Cathmor. I hear a distant sound, like falling rocks in the desert. But strike thou thy shield, at times, that they may not come through night, and the fame of Morven cease. I begin to be alone, my son. I dread the fall of my renown!"

The voice of bards arose. The king leaned on the shield of Trenmor. Sleep descended on his eyes. His future battles arose in his dreams. The host are sleeping around. Dark-haired Filan observes the foe. His steps are on a distant hill. We hear, at times, his clanging shield.