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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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Temora, Book IV.

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TEMORA:

AN EPIC POEM.

BOOK IV.

A R G U M E N T

TO BOOK IV.

THE second night continues. Fingal relates, at the feast, his own first expedition into Ireland, and his marriage with Ros-crána, the daughter of Cormac, king of that island. The Irish chiefs convene in the presence of Cathmor. The situation of the king described. The story of Sulmalla, the daughter of Conmor, king of Inis-huna, who, in the disguise of a young warrior, had followed Cathmor to the war. The sullen behaviour of Foldath, who had commanded in the battle of the preceding day, renews the difference between him and Malthos; but Cathmor, interposing, ends it. The chiefs feast, and hear the song of Fonar the bard. Cathmor retires to rest, at a distance from the army. The ghost of his brother Cairbar appears to him in a dream; and obscurely foretels the issue of the war. The soliloquy of the king. He discovers Sulmalla. Morning comes. Her soliloquy closes the book.

TEMORA:

AN EPIC POEM.

BOOK IV.

“BENEATH^x an oak,” said the king, “I sat on Selma’s streamy rock, when Connal rose, from the sea, with the broken spear of Duthcaron. Far distant stood the youth. He turned away his eyes. He remembered the steps of his father, on his own green hills. I darkened in my place. Dusky thoughts flew over my soul. The kings of Erin rose before me. I half-un-sheathed the sword. Slowly approached the chiefs. They lifted up their silent eyes. Like a ridge of clouds, they wait for the bursting forth of my voice. My voice was, to them, a wind from heaven, to roll the mist away.

^x This episode has an immediate connexion with the story of Connal and Duthcaron, in the latter end of the third book. Fingal, sitting beneath an oak, near the palace of Selma, discovers Connal just landed from Ireland. The danger which threatened Cormac, king of Ireland, induces him to sail immediately to that island. The story is introduced, by the king, as a pattern for the future behaviour of Fillan, whose rashness in the preceding battle is reprimanded.

“ I bade my white sails to rise, before the roar of Cona’s wind. Three hundred youths looked, from their waves, on Fingal’s bossy shield. High on the mast it hung, and marked the dark-blue sea. But when night came down, I struck, at times, the warning boss: I struck, and looked on high, for fiery-haired ^y Ul-Erin. Nor absent was the star of heaven. It travelled red between the clouds. I pursued the lovely beam, on the faint-gleaming deep. With morning, Erin rose in mist. We came in the bay of Moi-lena, where its blue waters tumbled, in the bosom of echoing woods. Here Cormac, in his secret hall, avoids the strength of Colc-ulla. Nor he alone avoids the foe. The blue eye of Ros-crána is there: Ros-crána, ^z white-handed maid, the daughter of the king!

“ Grey, on his pointless spear, came forth the aged steps of Cormac. He smiled, from his

^y Ul-Erin, *the guide to Ireland*; a star known by that name in the days of Fingal, and very useful to those who sailed by night from the Hebrides, or Caledonia, to the coast of Ulster.

^z Ros-crána, *the beam of the rising sun*; she was the mother of Ossian. The Irish bards relate strange fictions concerning this princess. Their stories, however, concerning Fingal, if they mean him by *Fion Mac-Comnal*, are so inconsistent, and notoriously fabulous, that they do not deserve to be mentioned; for they evidently bear, along with them, the marks of late invention.

waving locks; but grief was in his soul. He saw us few before him, and his sigh arose. "I see the arms of Trenmor," he said; "and these are the steps of the king. Fingal! thou art a beam of light to Cormac's darkened soul. Early is thy fame, my son: but strong are the foes of Erin. They are like the roar of streams in the land; son of car-borne Comhal!" "Yet they may be rolled^a away," I said, in my rising soul. "We are not of the race of the feeble, king of blue-shielded hosts! Why should fear come amongst us, like a ghost of night? The soul of the valiant grows, when foes increase in the field. Roll no darkness, king of Erin, on the young in war."

"The bursting tears of the king came down. He seized my hand in silence. "Race of the daring Trenmor!" at length he said, "I roll no cloud before thee. Thou burnest in the fire of thy fathers. I behold thy fame. It marks thy course in battle, like a stream of light. But wait the coming of Cairbar;^b my son must join

^a Cormac had said that the foes were *like the roar of streams*, and Fingal continues the metaphor. The speech of the young hero is spirited, and consistent with that sedate intrepidity which eminently distinguishes his character throughout.

^b Cairbar, the son of Cormac, was afterwards king of Ireland. His reign was short. He was succeeded by his son

thy sword. He calls the sons of Erin, from all their distant streams."

"We came to the hall of the king, where it rose in the midst of rocks, on whose dark sides were the marks of streams of old. Broad oaks bend around with their moss. The thick birch is waving near. Half-hid, in her shady grove, Ros-crána raises the song. Her white hands move on the harp. I beheld her blue-rolling eyes. She was like a spirit^c of heaven, half-folded in the skirt of a cloud!"

Artho, the father of that Cormac who was murdered by Cairbar, the son of Borbar-duthul. Cairbar, the son of Cormac, long after his son Artho was grown to man's estate, had, by his wife Beltanno, another son, whose name was Ferad-Artho. He was the only one remaining of the race of Conar, the first king of Ireland, when Fingal's expedition against Cairbar, the son of Borbar-duthul, happened. See more of Ferad-Artho in the eighth book.

^c The attitude of Ros-crána is illustrated by this simile; for the ideas of those times, concerning the spirits of the deceased, were not so gloomy and disagreeable, as those of succeeding ages. The spirits of women, it was supposed, retained that beauty, which they possessed while living, and transported themselves, from place to place, with that gliding motion, which Homer ascribes to the gods. The descriptions which poets, less ancient than Ossian, have left us of those beautiful figures, that appeared sometimes on the hills, are elegant and picturesque. They compare them to the *rainbow on streams* or the *gilding of sun-beams on the hills*.

A chief who lived three centuries ago, returning from the

“Threeé days we feasted at Moi-lena. She rises bright in my troubled soul. Cormac beheld me dark. He gave the white-bosomed maid. She comes with bending eye, amid the wandering of her heavy locks. She came! Straight the battle roared. Colc-ulla appeared: I took my spear. My sword rose, with my people, against the ridgy foe. Alnecma fled. Colc-ulla fell. Fingal returned with fame.

“Renowned is he, O Fillan, who fights in the strength of his host. The bard pursues his steps, through the land of the foe. But he who fights alone; few are his deeds to other times! He shines, to-day, a mighty light. To-morrow,

war, understood that his wife or mistress was dead. A bard introduces him speaking the following soliloquy, when he came within sight of the place where he had left her at his departure.

“My soul darkens in sorrow. I behold not the smoak of my hall. No grey dog bounds at my streams. Silence dwells in the valley of trees.

“Is that a rainbow on Crunath? It flies: and the sky is dark. Again thou movest, bright, on the heath; thou sunbeam clothed in a shower! Hah! it is she, my love! her gliding course on the bosom of winds!”

In succeeding times the beauty of Ros-crána passed into a proverb; and the highest compliment that could be paid to a woman, was to compare her person with *the daughter of Cormac*.

'S tu fein an Ros-crána.
Sìol Chormac na n'ìoma lan.

he is low. One song contains his fame. His name is on ONE dark field. He is forgot; but where his tomb sends forth the tufted grass."

Such are the words of Fingal, on Mora of the roes. Three bards, from the rock of Cornul, pour down the pleasing song. Sleep descends, in the sound, on the broad-skirted host. Carril returned, with the bards, from the tomb of Dun-lora's chief. The voice of morning shall not come to the dusky bed of Duthcaron. No more shalt thou hear the tread of roes around thy narrow house!

As roll the troubled clouds, round a meteor of night, when they brighten their sides with its light, along the heaving sea: so gathers Erin around the gleaming form of Cathmor. HE, tall in the midst, careless lifts, at times, his spear; as swells or falls the sound of Fonar's distant harp. Near^d him leaned, against a

^d In order to illustrate this passage, I shall give here, the history on which it is founded, as I have gathered it from tradition. The nation of the Fir-bolg, who inhabited the south of Ireland, being originally descended from the Belgæ, who possessed the south and south-west coast of Britain, kept up, for many ages, an amicable correspondence with their mother-country, and sent aid to the British Belgæ, when they were pressed by the Romans or other new comers from the continent. Connor, king of Inis-huna, (that part of South Britain which is over-against the Irish coast,) being attacked, by what enemy is not mentioned, sent for aid to Cairbar, lord

rock, Sul-malla^e of blue eyes, the white-bosomed daughter of Conmor, king of Inis-huna. To his aid came blue-shielded Cathmor, and rolled his foes away. Sul-malla beheld him stately in the hall of feasts. Nor careless rolled the eyes of Cathmor on the long-haired maid!

The third day arose, when Fithil^f came, from Erin of the streams. He told of the lift-

of Atha, the most potent chief of the Fir-bolg. Cairbar dispatched his brother Cathmor to the assistance of Conmor. Cathmor, after various vicissitudes of fortune, put an end to the war, by the total defeat of the enemies of Inis-huna, and returned in triumph to the residence of Conmor. There, at a feast, Sulmalla, the daughter of Conmor, fell desperately in love with Cathmor, who, before her passion was disclosed, was recalled to Ireland by his brother Cairbar, upon the news of the intended expedition of Fingal, to re-establish the family of Conar on the Irish throne. The wind being contrary, Cathmor remained, for three days, in a neighbouring bay, during which time Sulmalla disguised herself in the habit of a young warrior, and came to offer him her service in the war: Cathmor accepted of the proposal, sailed for Ireland, and arrived in Ulster a few days before the death of Cairbar.

^e Sul-malla, *slowly-rolling eyes*. Caon-mór, *mild and tall*. Inis-huna, *green island*.

^f Fithil, *an inferior bard*. It may either be taken here for the proper name of a man, or in the literal sense, as the bards were the heralds and messengers of those times. Cathmor, it is probable, was absent, when the rebellion of his brother Cairbar, and the assassination of Cormac, king of Ireland, happened. Cathmor and his followers had only arrived from Inis-huna, three days before the death of Cairbar, which suffi-

ing up of the shield^g in Selma: he told of the danger of Cairbar. Cathmor raised the sail at Cluba; but the winds were in other lands. Three days he remained on the coast, and turned his eyes on Conmor's halls. He remembered the daughter of strangers, and his sigh arose. Now when the winds awaked the wave: from the hill came a youth in arms; to lift the sword with Cathmor, in his echoing fields. It was the white-armed Sulmalla. Secret she dwelt beneath her helmet. Her steps were in the path of the king: on him her blue eyes rolled

ciently clears his character from any imputation of being concerned in the conspiracy with his brother.

^g The ceremony which was used by Fingal, when he prepared for an expedition, is related thus in tradition: A bard, at midnight, went to the hall where the tribes feasted upon solemn occasions, raised the *war-song*, and thrice called the spirits of their deceased ancestors to come, *on their clouds*, to behold the actions of their children. He then fixed the *shield of Trenmor*, on a tree on the rock of Selma, striking it, at times, with the blunt end of a spear, and singing the war song between. Thus he did, for three successive nights, and, in the mean time, messengers were dispatched to call together the tribes; or, to use an ancient expression, *to call them from all their streams*. This phrase alludes to the situation of the residences of the clans, which were generally fixed in valleys, where the torrents of the neighbouring mountains were collected into one body, and became *large streams*, or rivers. *The lifting up of the shield*, was the phrase for beginning a war.

with joy, when he lay by his roaring streams. But Cathmor thought that, on Lumon, she still pursued the roes. He thought, that fair on a rock, she stretched her white hand to the wind; to feel its course from Erin, the green dwelling of her love. He had promised to return, with his white-bosomed sails. The maid is near thee, O Cathmor! leaning on a rock.

The tall forms of the chiefs stand around; all but dark-browed Foldath.^h He leaned against a distant tree, rolled into his haughty soul. His bushy hair whistles in wind. At times, bursts the hum of a song. He struck the tree, at length, in wrath; and rushed before the king! Calm and stately, to the beam of the oak, arose the form of young Hidalla. His hair falls round his blushing cheek, in wreaths of waving light. Soft was his voice in Clon-ra,ⁱ in the valley of his fathers. Soft was his voice when he touched the harp, in the hall, near his roaring streams!

^h The surly attitude of Foldath is a proper preamble to his after-behaviour. Chaffed with the disappointment of the victory which he promised himself, he becomes passionate and overbearing. The quarrel which succeeds between him and Malthos, is introduced to raise the character of Cathmor, whose superior worth shines forth, in his manly manner of ending the difference between the chiefs.

ⁱ Claon-rath, *winding field*. The *th* are seldom pronounced audibly in the Galic language.

“King of Erin,” said Hidalla, “now is the time to feast. Bid the voice of bards arise. Bid them roll the night away. The soul returns, from song, more terrible to war. Darkness settles on Erin. From hill to hill bend the skirted clouds. Far and grey, on the heath, the dreadful strides of ghosts are seen: the ghosts of those who fell, bend forward to their song. Bid, O Cathmor! the harps to rise, to brighten the dead, on their wandering blasts.”

“Be all the dead forgot,” said Foldath’s bursting wrath. “Did not I fail in the field? Shall I then hear the song? Yet was not my course harmless in war. Blood was a stream around my steps. But the feeble were behind me. The foe has escaped from my sword. In Clon-ra’s vale touch thou the harp. Let Dura answer to the voice of Hidalla. Let some maid look from the wood, on thy long, yellow locks. Fly from Lubar’s echoing plain. This is the field of heroes!”

“King of Erin,”^k Malthos said; “it is THINE to lead in war. THOU art a fire to our eyes, on the dark-brown field. Like a blast THOU hast past over hosts. THOU hast laid them low in blood. But who has heard THY words, return-

^k This speech of Malthos is, throughout, a severe reprimand to the blustering behaviour of Foldath.

ing from the field? The wrathful delight in death: their remembrance rests on the wounds of their spear. Strife is folded in THEIR thoughts: THEIR words are ever heard. Thy course, chief of Moma, was like a troubled stream. The dead were rolled on thy path: but others also lift the spear. WE were not feeble behind thee; but the foe was strong."

Cathmor beheld the rising rage, and bending forward of either chief: for, half-unsheathed, they held their swords, and rolled their silent eyes. Now would they have mixed in horrid fray, had not the wrath of Cathmor burned. He drew his sword: it gleamed through night, to the high-flaming oak. "Sons of pride," said the king, "allay your swelling souls. Retire in night. Why should MY rage arise? Should I contend with both in arms? It is no time for strife! Retire, ye clouds at my feast. Awake my soul no more."

They sunk from the king on either side; like¹ two columns of morning mist, when the

¹ This comparison is favourable to the superiority of Cathmor over his two chiefs. I shall illustrate this passage with another from a fragment of an ancient poem just now in my hands. "As the sun is above the vapours, which his beams have raised; so is the soul of the king above the sons of fear. They roll dark below him; he rejoices in the robe of his beams. But when feeble deeds wander on the soul of the king, he is a

sun rises between them, on his glittering rocks. Dark is their rolling on either side; each towards its reedy pool!

Silent sat the chiefs at the feast. They look, at times, on Atha's king, where he strode, on his rock, amid his settling soul. The host lie, along the field. Sleep descends on Moi-lena. The voice of Fonar ascends alone, beneath his distant tree. It ascends in the praise of Cathmor, son of Larthon^m of Lumon. But Cathmor did not hear his praise. He lay at the roar of

darkened sun rolled along the sky: the valley is sad below: flowers wither beneath the drops of the night."

^m Lear-thon, *sea-wave*, the name of the chief of that colony of the Fir-bolg, which first migrated into Ireland. Larthon's first settlement in that country is related in the seventh book. He was the ancestor of Cathmor; and is here called *Larthon of Lumon*, from a high hill of that name in Inis-huna, the ancient seat of the Fir-bolg. The character of Cathmor is preserved. He had mentioned, in the first book, the aversion of that chief to praise, and we find him here, lying at the side of a stream, that the noise of it might drown the voice of Fonar, who, according to the custom of the times, sung his eulogium in his *evening song*. Though other chiefs, as well as Cathmor, might be averse to hear their own praise, we find it the universal policy of the times, to allow the bards to be as extravagant as they pleased in their encomiums on the leaders of armies, in the presence of their people. The vulgar, who had no great ability to judge for themselves, received the characters of their princes entirely upon the faith of their bards.

a stream. The rustling breeze of night flew over his whistling locks.

His brother came to his dreams, half-seen from his low-hung cloud. Joy rose darkly in his face. He had heard the song of ⁿ Carril. A blast sustained his dark-skirted cloud; which he seized in the bosom of night, as he rose, with his fame, towards his airy hall. Half-mixed with the noise of the stream, he poured his feeble words.

“ Joy meet the soul of Cathmor. His voice was heard on Moi-lena. The bard gave his song to Cairbar. He travels on the wind. My form is in my father’s hall, like the gliding of a terrible light, which darts across the desert, in a stormy night. No bard shall be wanting at thy tomb, when thou art lowly laid. The sons

ⁿ Carril, the son of Kinfena, by the orders of Ossian, sung the funeral elegy at the tomb of Cairbar. See the second book towards the end. In all these poems, the visits of ghosts to their living friends, are short, and their language obscure, both which circumstances tend to throw a solemn gloom on these supernatural scenes. Towards the latter end of the speech of the ghost of Cairbar, he foretels the death of Cathmor, by enumerating those signals, which, according to the opinion of the times, preceded the death of a person renowned. It was thought that the ghosts of deceased bards sung, for three nights preceding the death (near the place where his tomb was to be raised) round an unsubstantial figure which represented the body of the person who was to die.

of song love the valiant. Cathmor, thy name is a pleasant gale. The mournful sounds arise! On Lubar's field there is a voice! Louder still, ye shadowy ghosts! The dead were full of fame! Shrilly swells the feeble sound. The rougher blast alone is heard! Ah! soon is Cathmor low!" Rolled into himself he flew, wide on the bosom of winds. The old oak felt his departure, and shook its whistling head. Cathmor starts from rest. He takes his deathful spear. He lifts his eyes around. He sees but dark-skirted night.

"It^o was the voice of the king," he said. "But now his form is gone. Unmarked is your path in the air, ye children of the night. Often, like a reflected beam, are ye seen in the desert wild: but ye retire in your blasts, before our steps approach. Go then, ye feeble race! Knowledge with you there is none! Your joys are weak, and like the dreams of our rest, or the light-winged thought, that flies across the soul. Shall Cathmor soon be low? Darkly laid in his narrow house; where no morning comes,

^o The soliloquy of Cathmor suits the magnanimity of his character. Though staggered at first with the prediction of Cairbar's ghost, he soon comforts himself with the agreeable prospect of his future renown; and, like Achilles, prefers a short and glorious life, to an obscure length of years in retirement and ease.

with her half-opened eyes? Away, thou shade!
to fight is mine! All further thought away! I
rush forth, on eagle's wings, to seize my beam
of fame. In the lonely vale of streams, abides
the narrow^p soul. Years roll on, seasons re-
turn, but he is still unknown. In a blast comes
cloudy death, and lays his grey head low. His
ghost is folded in the vapour of the fenny field.
Its course is never on hills, nor mossy vales of

^p An indolent and unwarlike life was held in extreme contempt. Whatever a philosopher may say, in praise of quiet and retirement, I am far from thinking, but they weaken and debase the human mind. When the faculties of the soul are not exerted, they lose their vigour, and low and circumscribed notions take the place of noble and enlarged ideas. Action, on the contrary, and the vicissitudes of fortune which attend it, call forth, by turns, all the powers of the mind, and, by exercising, strengthen them. Hence it is, that in great and opulent states, when property and indolence are secured to individuals, we seldom meet with that strength of mind which is so common in a nation not far advanced in civilization. It is a curious, but just observation, that great kingdoms seldom produce great characters; which must be altogether attributed to that indolence and dissipation, which are the inseparable companions of too much property and security. Rome, it is certain, had more real great men within it, when its power was confined within the narrow bounds of Latium, than when its dominion extended over all the known world; and one petty state of the Saxon heptarchy had, perhaps, as much genuine spirit in it, as the two British kingdoms united. As a state, we are much more powerful than our ancestors, but we should lose by comparing individuals with them.

wind. So shall not Cathmor depart. No boy in the field was he, who only marks the bed of roes, upon the echoing hills. My issuing forth was with kings. My joy in dreadful plains: where broken hosts are rolled away, like seas before the wind."

So spoke the king of Alnecma, brightening in his rising soul. Valour, like a pleasant flame, is gleaming within his breast. Stately is his stride on the heath! The beam of east is poured around. He saw his grey host on the field, wide-spreading their ridges in light. He rejoiced, like a spirit of heaven, whose steps come forth on the seas, when he beholds them peaceful round, and all the winds are laid. But soon he awakes the waves, and rolls them large to some echoing shore.

On the rushy bank of a stream, slept the daughter of Inis-huna. The helmet had fallen from her head. Her dreams were in the lands of her fathers. *THERE* morning is on the field. Grey streams leap down from the rocks. The breezes, in shadowy waves, fly over the rushy fields. *THERE* is the sound that prepares for the chase. *THERE* the moving of warriors from the hall. But tall above the rest is seen the hero of streamy Atha. He bends his eye of love on Sulmalla, from his stately steps. *SHE* turns, with pride, her face away, and careless bends the bow.

Such were the dreams of the maid, when Cathmor of Atha came. He saw her fair face before him, in the midst of her wandering locks. He knew the maid of Lumon. What should Cathmor do? His sighs arise. His tears come down. But straight he turns away. "This is no time, king of Atha, to awake thy secret soul. The battle is rolled before thee, like a troubled stream."

He struck that warning boss,⁹ wherein dwelt the voice of war. Erin rose around him, like the sound of eagle-wing. Sulmalla started from sleep, in her disordered locks. She seized the helmet from earth. She trembled in her place. "Why should they know in Erin of the daughter of Inis-huna?" She remembered the race of kings. The pride of her soul arose! Her steps are behind a rock, by the blue-winding stream of a vale;^r where dwelt the dark-brown hind, ere yet the war arose. Thither came the voice of Cathmor, at times, to Sulmalla's ear. Her

⁹ In order to understand this passage, it is necessary to look to the description of Cathmor's shield in the seventh book. This shield had seven principal bosses, the sound of each of which, when struck with a spear, conveyed a particular order from the king to his tribes. The sound of one of them, as here, was the signal for the army to assemble.

^r This was not the valley of Lona, to which Sulmalla afterwards retired.

soul is darkly sad. She pours her words on wind.

“The dreams of Inis-huna departed. They are dispersed from my soul. I hear not the chase in my land. I am concealed in the skirt of war. I look forth from my cloud. No beam appears to light my path. I behold my warrior low; for the broad-shielded king is near, he that overcomes in danger, Fingal from Selma of spears! Spirit of departed Conmor! are thy steps on the bosom of winds? Comest thou, at times, to other lands, father of sad Sulmalla? Thou dost come! I have heard thy voice at night; while yet I rose on the wave to Erin of the streams. The ghost of fathers, they^s say,

^s Conmor, the father of Sulmalla, was killed in that war, from which Cathmor delivered Inis-huna. Lormar his son, succeeded Conmor. It was the opinion of the times, when a person was reduced to a pitch of misery which could admit of no alleviation, that the ghost of his ancestors *called his soul away*. This supernatural kind of death, was called *the voice of the dead*; and is believed by the superstitious vulgar to this day.

There is no people in the world, perhaps, who give more universal credit to apparitions, and the visits of the ghosts of the deceased to their friends, than the ancient Scots. This is to be attributed as much, at least, to the situation of the country they possess, as to that credulous disposition which distinguishes an unenlightened people. As their business was feeding of cattle, in dark and extensive deserts, so their journeys

call away the souls of their race, while they behold them lonely in the midst of woe. Call me, my father, away! When Cathmor is low on earth; then shall Sulmalla be lonely in the midst of woe!

lay over wide and unfrequented heaths, where, often, they were obliged to sleep in the open air, amidst the whistling of winds, and roar of water-falls. The gloominess of the scenes around them was apt to beget that melancholy disposition of mind, which most readily receives impressions of the extraordinary and supernatural kind. Falling asleep in this gloomy mood, and their dreams being disturbed by the noise of the elements around, it is no matter of wonder, that they thought they heard the *voice of the dead*. This *voice of the dead*, however, was, perhaps, no more than a shriller whistle of the winds in an old tree, or in the chinks of a neighbouring rock. It is to this cause I ascribe those many and improbable tales of ghosts, which we meet with in the Highlands; for, in other respects, we do not find that the inhabitants are more credulous than their neighbours.

