The poems of Ossian

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

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Fingal, Book II.

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FINGAL,

AN ANCIENT EPIC POEM.

BOOK II.

ARGUMENT

TO BOOK II.

The ghost of Crugal, one of the Irish heroes who was killed in battle, appearing to Connal, foretells the defeat of Cuthullin in the next battle; and earnestly advises him to make peace with Swaran. Connal communicates the vision; but Cuthullin is inflexible; from a principle of honour he would not be the first to sue for peace; and he resolved to continue the war. Morning comes; Swaran proposes dishonourable terms to Cuthullin; which are rejected. The battle begins, and is obstinately fought for some time, until, upon the flight of Grumal, the whole Irish army gave way. Cuthullin and Connal cover their retreat. Carril leads them to a neighbouring hill, whither they are soon followed by Cuthullin himself, who descries the fleet of Fingal making towards the coast; but, night coming on, he lost sight of it again. Cuthullin, dejected after his defeat, attributes his ill success to the death of Ferda, his friend, whom he had killed some time before. Carril, to shew that ill success did not always attend those who innocently killed their friends, introduces the episode of Comal and Galvina.

FINGAL,

AN ANCIENT EPIC POEM.

IN SIX BOOKS.

BOOK II.

CONNAL[r] lay by the sound of the mountain-stream, beneath the aged tree. A stone, with its moss, supported his head. Shrill through the heath of Lena, he heard the voice of night. At distance from the heroes he lay; the son of the sword feared no foe! The hero beheld, in his rest, a dark-red stream of fire rushing down from the hill. Crugal sat upon the beam, a chief who fell in fight. He fell by the hand of Swaran, striving in the battle of heroes. His face is like the beam of the setting moon. His robes are of the clouds of the hill. His eyes are two decaying flames. Dark is the wound

[r] The scene here described will appear natural to those who have been in the highlands of Scotland. The poet removes him to a distance from the army, to add more horror to the description of Crugal's ghost, by the loneliness of the place.

of his breast! "Crugal," said the mighty Connal, "son of Dedgal, famed on the hill of hinds! Why so pale and sad, thou breaker of the shields? Thou hast never been pale for fear. What disturbs the departed Crugal?" Dim, and in tears, he stood, and stretched his pale hand over the hero. Faintly he raised his feeble voice, like the gale of the reedy Lego!

"My spirit, Connal, is on my hills: my corse on the sands of Erin. Thou shalt never talk with Crugal, nor find his lone steps in the heath. I am light as the blast of Cromla. I move like the shadow of mist! Connal, son of Colgar, I see a cloud of death: it hovers dark over the plains of Lena. The sons of green Erin must fall. Remove from the field of ghosts." Like the darkened moon he retired, in the midst of the whistling blast. "Stay," said the mighty Connal, "stay, my dark-red friend. Lay by that beam of heaven, son of the windy Cromla! What cave is thy lonely house? What green-headed hill the place of thy repose? Shall we not hear thee in the storm? In the noise of the mountain-stream? When the feeble sons of the wind come forth, and, scarcely seen, pass over the desert?"

The soft-voiced Connal rose, in the midst of his sounding arms. He struck his shield above Cuthullin. The son of battle waked. "Why,"

said the ruler of the car, "comes Connal through my night? My spear might turn against the sound; and Cuthullin mourn the death of his friend. Speak, Connal; son of Colgar, speak! thy counsel is the sun of heaven!" "Son of Semo!" replied the chief, "the ghost of Crugal came from his cave. The stars dim-twinkled through his form. His voice was like the sound of a distant stream. He is a messenger of death! He speaks of the dark and narrow house! Sue for peace, O chief of Erin! or fly over the heath of Lena."

"He spoke to Connal," replied the hero, "though stars dim-twinkled through his form! Son of Colgar, it was the wind that murmured across thy ear. Or if it was the form[s] of Crugal, why didst thou not force him to my sight? Hast thou inquired where is his cave? The house of that son of wind? My sword might find that voice, and force his knowledge from Crugal. But small is his knowledge, Connal; he was here to-day. He could not have gone beyond our hills! who could tell him there of

[s] The poet teaches us the opinions that prevailed in his time concerning the state of separate souls. From Connal's expression, "That the stars dim-twinkled through the form of Crugal," and Cuthullin's reply, we may gather that they both thought the soul was material: something like the εἴδωλον of the ancient Greeks.

our fall?" "Ghosts fly on clouds, and ride on winds," said Connal's voice of wisdom. "They rest together in their caves, and talk of mortal men."

"Then let them talk of mortal men; of every man but Erin's chief. Let me be forgot in their cave. I will not fly from Swaran. If fall I must, my tomb shall rise, amidst the fame of future times. The hunter shall shed a tear on my stone; sorrow shall dwell round the high-bosomed Bragéla. I fear not death; to fly I fear! Fingal has seen me victorious! Thou dim phantom of the hill, shew thyself to me! come on thy beam of heaven, shew me my death in thine hand; yet I will not fly, thou feeble son of the wind! Go, son of Colgar, strike the shield. It hangs between the spears. Let my warriors rise to the sound, in the midst of the battles of Erin. Though Fingal delays his coming with the race of his stormy isles; we shall fight, O Colgar's son, and die in the battle of heroes!"

The sound spreads wide. The heroes rise, like the breaking of a blue-rolling wave. They stood on the heath, like oaks with all their branches round them; when they echo to the stream of frost, and their withered leaves are rustling to the wind! High Cromla's head of clouds is grey. Morning trembles on the half-

enlightened ocean. The blue mist swims slowly by, and hides the sons of Inis-fail!

"Rise, ye," said the king of the dark-brown shields, "ye that came from Lochlin's waves. The sons of Erin have fled from our arms; pursue them over the plains of Lena! Morla, go to Cormac's hall. Bid them yield to Swaran; before his people sink to the tomb; and silence spread over his isle." They rose rustling like a flock of sea-fowl, when the waves expel them from the shore. Their sound was like a thousand streams that meet in Cona's vale, when, after a stormy night, they turn their dark eddies beneath the pale light of the morn.

As the dark shades of autumn fly over hills of grass: so gloomy, dark, successive, came the chiefs of Lochlin's echoing woods. Tall as the stag of Morven, moved stately before them the king. His shining shield is on his side, like a flame on the heath at night; when the world is silent and dark, and the traveller sees some ghost sporting in the beam! Dimly gleam the hills around, and shew indistinctly their oaks! A blast from the troubled ocean removed the settled mist. The sons of Erin appear, like a ridge of rocks on the coast; when mariners, on shores unknown, are trembling at veering winds!

"Go, Morla, go," said the king of Lochlin,

"offer peace to these! Offer the terms we give to kings, when nations bow down to our swords. When the valiant are dead in war; when virgins weep on the field!" Tall Morla came, the son of Swarth; and stately strode the youth along! He spoke to Erin's blue-eyed chief, among the lesser heroes. "Take Swaran's peace," the warrior spoke, "the peace he gives to kings, when nations bow to his sword. Leave Erin's streamy plains to us, and give thy spouse and dog. Thy spouse, high-bosom'd heaving fair! Thy dog, that overtakes the wind! Give these to prove the weakness of thine arm: live then beneath our power!"

"Tell Swaran, tell that heart of pride, Cuthullin never yields. I give him the dark-rolling sea; I give his people graves in Erin. But never shall a stranger have the pleasing sun-beam of my love. No deer shall fly on Lochlin's hills, before swift-footed Luäth." "Vain ruler of the car," said Morla, "wilt thou then fight the king? The king whose ships of many groves could carry off thine isle! So little is thy green hilled Erin to him who rules the stormy waves!" "In words I yield to many, Morla. My sword shall yield to none. Erin shall own the sway of Cormac, while Connal and Cuthullin live! O Connal, first of mighty men, thou hear'st the words of Morla. Shall thy thoughts

then be of peace, thou breaker of the shields? Spirit of fallen Crugal! why didst thou threaten us with death? The narrow house shall receive me, in the midst of the light of renown. Exalt, ye sons of Erin, exalt the spear, and bend the bow: rush on the foe in darkness, as the spirits of stormy nights!"

Then dismal, roaring, fierce, and deep, the gloom of battle poured along; as mist that is rolled on a valley, when storms invade the silent sun-shine of heaven! Cuthullin moves before in arms, like an angry ghost before a cloud; when meteors inclose him with fire; when the dark winds are in his hand. Carril, far on the heath, bids the horn of battle sound. He raises the voice of song, and pours his soul into the minds of the brave.

"Where," said the mouth of the song, "where is the fallen Crugal? He lies forgot on earth; the hall of shells[t] is silent. Sad is the spouse of Crugal! She is a stranger[u] in the hall of her grief. But who is she, that, like a sun-beam, flies before the ranks of the foe? It is

[t] The ancient Scots, as well as the present Highlanders, drunk in shells; hence it is that we so often meet, in the old poetry, with *chief of shells*, and *the halls of shells*.

[u] Crugal had married Degrena but a little time before the battle, consequently she may with propriety be called a stranger in the hall of her grief.

Degrena,* lovely fair, the spouse of fallen Crugal. Her hair is on the wind behind. Her eye is red: her voice is shrill. Pale, empty is thy Crugal now! His form is in the cave of the hill. He comes to the ear of rest; he raises his feeble voice; like the humming of the mountain-bee; like the collected flies of the eve! But Degrena falls like a cloud of the morn; the sword of Lochlin is in her side. Cairbar, she is fallen, the rising thought of thy youth. She is fallen, O Cairbar! the thought of thy youthful hours!"

Fierce Cairbar heard the mournful sound. He rushed along like ocean's whale. He saw the death of his daughter: he roared in the midst of thousands. His spear met a son of Lochlin! battle spreads from wing to wing! As a hundred winds in Lochlin's groves; as fire in the pines of a hundred hills; so loud, so ruinous, so vast, the ranks of men are hewn down. Cuthullin cut off heroes like thistle; Swaran wasted Erin. Curach fell by his hand; Cairbar of the bossy shield! Morglan lies in lasting rest! Ca-olt trembles as he dies! His white breast is stained with blood; his yellow hair stretched in the dust of his native land! He often had spread the feast where he fell. He often there had raised the voice of the harp: when his dogs

* Deo-gréna signifies *a sun-beam.*

leapt round for joy; and the youths of the chase prepared the bow!

Still Swaran advanced, as a stream, that bursts from the desert. The little hills are rolled in its course; the rocks are half-sunk by its side! But Cuthullin stood before him like a hill, that catches the clouds of heaven. The winds contend on its head of pines; the hail rattles on its rocks. But, firm in its strength, it stands, and shades the silent vale of Cona! so Cuthullin shaded the sons of Erin, and stood in the midst of thousands. Blood rises like the fount of a rock, from panting heroes around. But Erin falls on either wing, like snow in the day of the sun.

"O sons of Erin," said Grumal, "Lochlin conquers on the field. Why strive we as reeds against the wind? Fly to the hill of dark-brown hinds." He fled like the stag of Morven; his spear is a trembling beam of light behind him. Few fled with Grumal, chief of the little soul: they fell in the battle of heroes, on Lena's echoing heath. High on his car of many gems, the chief of Erin stood. He slew a mighty son of Lochlin, and spoke, in haste, to Connal. "O Connal, first of mortal men; thou hast taught this arm of death! Though Erin's sons have fled, shall we not fight the foe? Carril, son of other times, carry my friends to that bushy hill.

Here, Connal, let us stand, like rocks, and save our flying friends."

Connal mounts the car of gems. They stretch their shields, like the darkened moon, the daughter of the starry skies, when she moves, a dun circle through heaven; and dreadful change is expected by men. Sithfadda panted up the hill; and Sronnal, haughty steed. Like waves behind a whale, behind them rushed the foe. Now on the rising side of Cromla stood Erin's few sad sons; like a grove through which the flame had rushed, hurried on by the winds of the stormy night; distant, withered, dark they stand, with not a leaf to shake in the gale.

Cuthullin stood beside an oak. He rolled his red eye in silence, and heard the wind in his bushy hair; the scout of ocean came; Moran, the son of Fithil. "The ships," he cried, "the ships of the lonely isles! Fingal comes, the first of men, the breaker of the shields! The waves foam before his black prows! His masts with sails are like groves in clouds!" "Blow," said Cuthullin, "blow ye winds that rush along my isle of mist. Come to the death of thousands, O king of resounding Selma! Thy sails, my friend, are to me the clouds of the morning; thy ships the light of heaven; and thou thyself a pillar of fire that beams on the world by night.

O Connal, first of men! how pleasing, in grief, are our friends! But the night is gathering around! Where now are the ships of Fingal? Here let us pass the hours of darkness; here wish for the moon of heaven."

The winds come down on the woods. The torrents rush from the rocks. Rain gathers round the head of Cromla. The red stars tremble between the flying clouds. Sad, by the side of a stream, whose sound is echoed by a tree, sad by the side of a stream, the chief of Erin sits. Connal, son of Colgar, is there; and Carril of other times. "Unhappy is the hand of Cuthullin," said the son of Semo, "unhappy is the hand of Cuthullin, since he slew his friend! Ferda, son of Damman, I loved thee as myself!"

"How, Cuthullin, son of Semo! how fell the breaker of the shields? Well I remember," said Connal, "the son of the noble Damman. Tall and fair, he was like the rainbow of heaven." "Ferda from Albion came, the chief of a hundred hills. In Muri's[y] hall he learned the sword, and won the friendship of Cuthullin. We moved to the chase together: one was our bed in the heath!

"Deugala was the spouse of Cairbar, chief of the plains of Ullin. She was covered with

[y] A place in Ulster.

the light of beauty, but her heart was the house of pride. She loved that sun-beam of youth, the son of noble Damman. "Cairbar," said the white-armed Deugala, "give me half of the herd. No more I will remain in your halls. Divide the herd, dark Cairbar!" "Let Cuthullin," said Cairbar, "divide my herd on the hill. His breast is the seat of justice. Depart, thou light of beauty!" I went and divided the herd. One snow-white bull remained. I gave that bull to Cairbar. The wrath of Deugala rose!

"Son of Damman," begun the fair, "Cuthullin hath pained my soul. I must hear of his death, or Lubar's stream shall roll over me. My pale ghost shall wander near thee, and mourn the wound of my pride. Pour out the blood of Cuthullin, or pierce this heaving breast." "Deugala," said the fair-haired youth, "how shall I slay the son of Semo? He is the friend of my secret thoughts. Shall I then lift the sword?" She wept three days before the chief; on the fourth he said he would fight. "I will fight my friend, Deugala! but may I fall by his sword! Could I wander on the hill alone? Could I behold the grave of Cuthullin?" We fought on the plain of Muri. Our swords avoid a wound. They slide on the helmets of steel; or sound on the slippery shields. Deugala was near with a smile, and said to the son of Damman: "Thine

arm is feeble, sun-beam of youth! Thy years are not strong for steel. Yield to the son of Semo. He is a rock on Malmor."

"The tear is in the eye of youth. He faltering said to me: "Cuthullin, raise thy bossy shield. Defend thee from the hand of thy friend. My soul is laden with grief: for I must slay the chief of men!" I sighed as the wind in the cleft of a rock. I lifted high the edge of my steel. The sun-beam of battle fell: the first of Cuthullin's friends! Unhappy is the hand of Cuthullin since the hero fell!"

"Mournful is thy tale, son of the car," said Carril of other times. "It sends my soul back to the ages of old, to the days of other years. Often have I heard of Comal, who slew the friend he loved; yet victory attended his steel: the battle was consumed in his presence!

"Comal was a son of Albion; the chief of an hundred hills! His deer drunk of a thousand streams. A thousand rocks replied to the voice of his dogs. His face was the mildness of youth. His hand the death of heroes. One was his love, and fair was she! the daughter of mighty Conloch. She appeared like a sun-beam among women. Her hair was the wing of the raven. Her dogs were taught to the chase. Her bow-string sounded on the winds. Her soul was fixed on Comal. Often met their eyes of love.

Their course in the chase was one. Happy were their words in secret. But Grumal loved the maid, the dark chief of the gloomy Ardven. He watched her lone steps in the heath; the foe of unhappy Comal!

"One day, tired of the chase, when the mist had concealed their friends, Comal and the daughter of Conloch met, in the cave of Ronan. It was the wonted haunt of Comal. Its sides were hung with his arms. A hundred shields of thongs were there; a hundred helms of sounding steel. "Rest here," he said, "my love, Galbina: thou light of the cave of Ronan! A deer appears on Mora's brow. I go; but I will soon return." "I fear," she said, "dark Grumal, my foe: he haunts the cave of Ronan. I will rest among the arms; but soon return, my love."

"He went to the deer of Mora. The daughter of Conloch would try his love. She clothed her fair sides with his armour; she strode from the cave of Ronan! He thought it was his foe. His heart beat high. His colour changed; and darkness dimmed his eyes. He drew the bow. The arrow flew. Galbina fell in blood! He run with wildness in his steps: he called the daughter of Conloch. No answer in the lonely rock. "Where art thou, O my love?" He saw, at length, her heaving heart, beating around the

arrow he threw. "O Conloch's daughter, is it thou!" He sunk upon her breast! The hunters found the hapless pair. He afterwards walked the hill: but many and silent were his steps round the dark dwelling of his love. The fleet of the ocean came. He fought; the strangers fled. He searched for death along the field. But who could slay the mighty Comal! He threw away his dark-brown shield. An arrow found his manly breast. He sleeps with his loved Galbina, at the noise of the sounding surge! Their green tombs are seen by the mariner, when he bounds on the waves of the north."