

"Euboeic."

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UNGERVYLE SOCIETY



No. VI.

Fragments of Ancient Poetry:

(JAMES MACPHERSON'S FIRST OSSIANIC PUBLICATION)

1760.



"You, O Books, are the Golden Vessels of the Temple ;
burning lamps to be held in the hand."

RICHARD AUNGERVYLE.

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"I N V E N I R E."

Fragments of Ancient Poetry

COLLECTED IN THE

HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND,

AND TRANSLATED FROM THE

Gaelic or Erse Language.

1760

Being a reprint of the first Ossianic publication of

JAMES MACPHERSON.

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E. M. G.



ORIGINAL PREFACE.

THE public may depend on the following Fragments as genuine remains of Ancient Scottish Poetry. The date of their composition cannot be exactly ascertained. Tradition, in the country where they were written, refers them to an era of the most remote antiquity; and this tradition is supported by the spirit and strain of the poems themselves; which abound with those ideas, and paint those manners, that belong to the most early state of society. The diction too, in the original, is very obsolete; and differs widely from the style of such Poems as have been written in the same language two or three centuries ago. They were certainly composed before the establishment of Clanship in the northern part of *Scotland*, which is itself very ancient, for had clans been then formed and known, they must have made a considerable figure in the work of a Highland Bard; whereas there is not the least mention of them in these Poems. It is remarkable that there are found in them no allusions to the Christian religion or worship; indeed, few traces of religion of any kind. One circumstance seems to prove them to be coeval with the very infancy of Christianity in *Scotland*. In a Fragment of the same Poems, which the Translator has seen, a Culdee or Monk is represented as desirous of taking down from the mouth of *Oscian*, who is the principal personage in several of the following Fragments, his warlike achievements and those of his family.

But *Oscian* treats the Monk and his religion with disdain, telling him, that the deeds of such great men were subjects too high to be recorded by him, or by any of his religion. A full proof that Christianity was not as yet established in the country.

Though the Poems now published appear as detached pieces in this collection, there is ground to believe that most of them were episodes of a greater work which related to the wars of *Fingal*. Concerning this hero innumerable traditions remain, to this day, in the Highlands of *Scotland*. The story of *Oscian*, his son, is so generally known, that to describe one in whom the race of a great family ends, it has passed into a Proverb, "*Oscian*, the last of the Heroes."

There can be no doubt that these Poems are to be ascribed to the Bards, a race of men well known to have continued through many ages in *Ireland* and the north of *Scotland*. Every chief or great man had in his family a Bard or Poet, whose office it was to record in verse the illustrious actions of that family. By the succession of these Bards, such Poems were handed down from race to race; some in manuscript but more by oral tradition, and tradition, in a country so free of intermixture with foreigners, and among a people so strongly attached to the memory of their ancestors, has preserved many of them, in a great measure, uncorrupted to this day.

They are not set to music, or sung. The versification in the original is simple, and to such as understand the language, very smooth and beautiful. Rhyme is seldom used. But the cadence, and the length of the line varied, so as to suit the sense. The translation is extremely literal. Even the arrangement of the words in the original has been imitated, to which must be imputed some inversions in the style, that otherwise would not have been chosen.

Of the poetical merit of these Fragments nothing shall here be said. Let the public judge, and pronounce. It is believed that by a careful inquiry, many more remains of ancient genius, no less valuable than those now given to the world, might be found in the same country where these have been collected. In particular there is reason to hope that one work of considerable length, and which deserves to be styled an heroic poem, might be recovered and translated, if encouragement were given to such an undertaking. The subject is, an invasion of *Ireland* by *Swarthan*, King of *Lochlyn*; which is the name of *Denmark* in the *Erse* language. *Cuchulaid*, the General or Chief of the Irish Tribes, upon intelligence of the invasion, assembles his Forces; Councils are held; and battles fought. But after several unsuccessful engagements, the *Irish* are forced to submit. At length, *Fingal*, King of *Scotland*, called in this Poem, "The Desert of the Hills," arrives with his ships to assist *Cuchulaid*. He expels the Danes from the Country; and returns home victorious. This Poem is held to be of greater antiquity than any of the rest that are preserved: and the author speaks of himself as present in the expedition of *Fingal*. The three last Poems in the collection are Fragments which the Translator obtained of this Epic Poem: and though very imperfect, they were judged not unworthy of being inserted. If the whole were recovered, it might throw considerable light upon the Scottish and Irish Antiquities.



Fragment K.

Shirlic. Vinvela.

VINVELA.



Y love is a Son of the Hill. He pursues the flying deer. His gray dogs are panting around him; his Bow-string sounds in the wind. Whether by the Fount of the Rock, or by the stream of the mountain thou liest; when the Rushes are nodding with the Wind, and the Mist is flying over thee, let me approach my love unperceived, and see him from the Rock. Lonely I saw thee first by the aged oak of *Branno*; thou wert returning tall from the chace; the fairest among thy friends.

SHIRLIC.

What voice is that I hear? That voice like the Summer-wind.— I sit not by the nodding Rushes; I hear not the Fount of the Rock. Afar, *Vinvela*, afar I go to the Wars of *Fingal*. My dogs attend me no more. No more I tread the Hill. No more I tread the Hill. No more from on high I see thee, fair morning, by the stream of the Plain; bright as the Bow of Heaven; as the Moon on the Western Wave.

VINVELA.

Then thou art gone, O *Shirlic*! and I am alone on the Hill. The deer are seen on the brow; void of fear they graze along. No more they dread the wind; no more the rustling tree. The Hunter is far removed; he is in the field of graves. Strangers! Sons of the Waves! spare my lovely *Shirlic*.

SHIRLIC.

If fall I must in the Field, raise high my grave, *Vinvela*. Grey stones, and heaped up earth, shall mark me to future times. When

the Hunter shall sit by the mound, and produce his food at noon, "Some Warrior rests here," he will say; and my fame shall live in his praise. Remember me, *Vinvela*, when low on earth I lie!

VINVELA.

Yes!—I will remember thee—indeed my *Shilric* will fall. What shall I do my love! when thou art gone for ever! Through these Hills I will go at noon: I will go through the silent Heath. There I will see the Place of thy Rest, returning from the chace. Indeed my *Shilric* will fall; but I will remember him.

Fragment K.



SIT by the mossy Fountain; on the Top of the Hill of Winds. One tree is rustling above me. Dark Waves roll over the Heath. The Lake is troubled below. The deer descend from the Hill. No Hunter at a distance is seen; no whistling Cowherd is nigh. It is mid-day but all is silent. Sad are my thoughts alone. Didst thou appear, oh my love, a Wanderer on the Heath! Thy Hair floating on the Wind behind thee; Thy Bosom heaving on the sight; Thine Eyes full of Tears for thy friends, whom the mist of the Hill had concealed! Thee I would comfort, my Love, and bring thee to thy Father's house.

But it is she that there appears, like a beam of Light on the Heath! Bright as the Moon in Autumn, as the Sun in a Summer-storm, comest thou, lovely maid, over Rocks, over Mountains to me?—She speaks: but how weak her voice! like the Breeze in the Reeds of the Pool. Hark!

Returnest thou safe from the War; Where are thy friends, my love? I heard and mourned thee, *Shilric*!

Yes, my fair, I return; but I alone of my race. Thou shalt see them no more: their Graves I raised on the plain. But why art thou on the desert Hill? Why on the Heath, alone?

Alone I am, O *Shilric!* Alone in the Winter House. With grief for thee I expired. *Shilric*, I am pale in the Tomb.

She fleets, she sails away; as grey mist before the wind!—And wilt thou not stay, my Love? Stay and behold my tears? Fair thou appearest, my Love! fair thou wast, when alive!

By the mossy fountain I will sit; on the Top of the Hill of Winds. When mid-day is silent around, converse, O my Love, with me! come on the wings of the Gale! on the Blast of the mountain, come! Let me hear thy voice, as thou passest, when mid-day is silent around.

Fragment III.



VENING is grey on the Hills. The North Wind resounds through the Woods. White Clouds rise on the sky: the thin-wavering snow descends. The River howls afar, along its winding course. Sad, by a hollow rock, the grey-hair'd *Carryl* sat. Dry fern waves over his head; his seat is in an aged birch. Clear to the roaring winds he lifts his voice of woe.

Tossed on the wavy ocean is he, the hope of the Isles; *Malcolm*, the support of the poor; Foe to the proud in Arms! Why hast thou left us behind? Why live we to mourn thy Fate? We might have heard, with thee, the voice of the deep; have seen the oozy Rock.

Sad on the sea beat shore thy spouse looketh for thy return. The time of thy promise is come; the night is gathering around. But no white sail is on the sea; no voice but the blustering Winds. Low is the soul of the war; wet are the Locks of Youth! By the foot of some Rock thou liest; washed by the waves as they come. Why, ye winds, did ye bear him on the Desert Rock? Why, ye waves, did ye roll over him?

But oh ! What voice is that ? Who rides on the meteor of fire ! Green are his airy Limbs. It is he, it is the Ghost of *Malcolm* ! Rest, lovely soul, rest on the rock ; and let me hear thy voice. He is gone, like a dream of the night. I see him through the trees. Daughter of *Reynold* ! he is gone. Thy spouse shall return no more. No more shall his hounds come from the hill, Forerunners of their Master. No more from the distant Rock his voice greet thine ear. Silent is he in the deep, unhappy daughter of *Reynold* !

I will sit by the stream of the Plain. Ye Rocks ! hang over my head. Hear my voice, ye Trees ! as ye bend on the shaggy Hill. My voice shall preserve the praise of him, the Hope of the Isles.

Fragment IV.

Connal, Crimora.

CRIMORA.



WHO cometh from the hill, like a cloud tinged with the beam of the West ? Whose voice is that, loud as the Wind, but pleasant as the harp of *Carryl* ? It is my love in the light of steel ; but sad is his darkened brow. Live the mighty race of *Fingal* ? or what disturbst my my *Connal* ?

CONNAL.

They live. I saw them return from the Chace like a stream of light. The Sun was on their shields : Like a Ridge of Fire they descended the Hill. Loud is the voice of the Youth ; the war, my Love, is near. To-morrow the enormous *Dargo* comes to try the Force of our race. The race of *Fingal* he defies, the race of Battle and wounds.

CRIMORA.

Connal, I saw his sails like grey mist on the sable Wave. They slowly came to Land. *Connal*, many are the warriors of *Dargo* !

CONNAL.

Bring me thy Father's shield ; the Iron Shield of *Rinval* ; that shield like the full-moon when it is darkened in the sky.

CRIMORA.

That shield I bring, O *Connal* ; but it did not defend my Father. By the spear of *Gauror* he fell. Thou mayest fall, O *Connal* !

CONNAL.

Fall indeed I may : But raise my tomb, *Crimora*. Some stones, a mound of Earth, shall keep my memory. Bend thy red eye over my Tomb, and beat thy breast of sighs. Though fair thou art, my Love, as the Light ; more pleasant than the Gale of the hill ; yet I will not stay. Raise my tomb, *Crimora*.

CRIMORA.

Then give me those arms of Light ; that sword and that spear of Steel. I shall meet *Dargo* with thee, and aid my lovely *Connal*. Farewell, ye rocks of *Ardren* ! ye Deer ! and ye streams of the Hill ! —We shall return no more. Our tombs are distant far.

Fragment V.



UTUMN is dark on the mountains ; grey mist rests on the hills. The whirlwind is heard on the Earth. Dark rolls the river through the narrow Plain. A tree stands alone on the Hill, and marks the grave of *Connal*. The leaves whirl round with the wind, and strew the graves of the dead. At Times are seen here the Ghosts of the deceased, when the musing Hunter alone stalks slowly over the Heath. Appear in thy armour of Light, thou Ghost of the mighty *Connal* ! Shine, near thy Tomb, *Crimora* ! like a Moon-beam from a cloud.

Who can reach the source of thy Race, O *Connal* ? and who recount thy Fathers ? Thy Family grew like an oak on the mountain,

which meeteth the wind with its lofty head. But now it is torn from the Earth. Who shall supply the Place of *Connal*?

Here was the din of arms; and here the groans of the dying. Mournful are the wars of *Fingal*! O *Connal*! it was here thou didst fall. Thine arm was like a storm; thy sword a beam of the sky; thy height a rock on the Plain; thine eyes a furnace of Fire. Louder than a storm was thy voice, when thou confoundedst the Field. Warriors fell by thy sword, as the Thistle by the staff of a boy.

Dargo the mighty came on, like a cloud of Thunder. His brows were contracted and dark. His eyes like two caves in a Rock. Bright rose their swords on each side: dire was the clang on their steel.

The daughter of *Rinval* was near; *Crimora*, bright in the armour of man; her hair loosed behind, her bow in her hand. She followed the youth to the war, *Connal* her much beloved. She drew the string on *Dargo*; but erring pierced her *Connal*. He falls like an oak on the Plain; like a Rock from the shaggy hill. What shall she do, hapless maid!--He bleeds; her *Connal* dies. All the night long she cries, and all the day, O *Connal*, my Love, and my friend! With Grief the sad mourner died.

Fragment V.



ON of the noble *Fingal*, *Oscian*, Prince of men! What tears run down the cheeks of Age? What shades thy mighty soul?

Memory, son of *Alpin*, memory wounds the aged. Of former times are my Thoughts; my Thoughts are of the noble *Fingal*. The race of the King return into my mind, and wound me with remembrance.

One day, returned from the sport of the mountains, from pursuing the Sons of the Hill, we covered this Heath with our youth. *Fingal* the mighty was here, and *Oscur*, my son, Great in war. Fair on our sight from the sea, at once, a virgin came. Her breast was like the snow of one night. Her cheek like the Bud of the Rose. Mild was her blue rolling eye : but sorrow was big in her heart.

Fingal renowned in war ! she cries, Sons of the King, preserve me ! Speak secure, replies the King, Daughter of Beauty, speak : our ear is open to all : our swords redress the injured. I fly from *Ullin*, she cries, from *Ullin* famous in war. I fly from the embrace of him who would debase my blood. *Cremor*, the friend of men was, my Father ; *Cremor* the Prince of *Inverne*.

Fingal's younger sons arose ; *Carryl* expert in the Bow ; *Fillan* beloved of the fair ; and *Fergus* first in the Race.—Who from the farthest Lochlyn ? who to the seas of *Molochasquir* ? Who dares hurt the maid whom the Sons of *Fingal* guard ? Daughter of Beauty, rest secure, rest in peace, thou fairest of Women.

Far in the Blue distance of the deep, some spot appeared like the Back of the Ridge-Wave. But soon the ship increased on our sight. The hand of *Ullin* drew her to Land. The mountains trembled as he moved. The Hills shook at his steps. Dire rattled his armour around him. Death and destruction were in his Eyes. His stature like the oak of *Morven*. He moved in the lightning of steel.

Our warriors fell before him, like the Field before the reapers. *Fingal's* three sons he bound. He plunged his sword into the Fair-one's breast. She fell as a wreath of Snow before the Sun of spring. Her Bosom heaved in death ; her soul came forth in Blood.

Oscur my son came down ; the mighty in battle descended. His armour rattled as thunder ; and the lightning of his eyes was terrible. There was the clashing of swords ; there was the voice of steel. They struck and they thrust ; they digged for death with their swords. But Death was distant far, and delayed to come. The sun began to decline ; and the Cow herd thought of Home. Then *Oscur's* keen

steel found the heart of *Ullin*. He fell like a Mountain-Oak covered over with glistening Frost : he shone like a Rock on the Plain. Here the daughter of Beauty lieth ; and here the bravest of men. Here one day ended the Fair and the Valiant. Here rest the pursuer and the pursued.

Son of *Alpin* ! the Woes of the aged are many : their tears are for the past. This raised my sorrow, Warrior ; memory awaked my grief. *Oscur* my son was brave ; but *Oscur* is now no more. Thou hast heard my grief, O son of *Alpin* ; forgive the tears of the aged.

Fragment VII.



WHY openest thou the Spring of my grief, O son of *Alpin*, inquiring how *Oscur* fell? My eyes are blind with Tears ; but memory beams on my heart. How can I relate the mournful death of the head of the people ! Prince of the Warriors, *Oscur*, my son, shall I see thee no more.

He fell as the moon in a storm ; as the sun in the midst of his course, when clouds rise from the waste of the waves, when the blackness of the storm inwraps the Rocks of *Ardanidder*. I, like an ancient oak on *Morven*, I mouldered alone in my place. The blast hath lopped my Branches away ; and I tremble at the wings of the north. Prince of the Warriors, *Oscur*, my son ! shall I see thee no more !

Dermid and *Oscur* were one ; they reaped the battle together. Their Friendship was strong as their steel ; and Death walked between them to the Field. They came on the Foe like two Rocks falling from the Brows of *Ardren*. Their Swords were stained with the blood of the valiant : Warriors fainted at their names. Who was a match for *Oscur* ! but *Dermid* ? and who for *Dermid*, but *Oscur* ?

They killed mighty *Dargo* in the field ; *Dargo* before invincible. His daughter was fair as the Morn ; Mild as the beam of

night. Her eyes, like two stars in a shower ; Her breath the gale of Spring ; Her breasts as the new-fallen snow floating on the Moving Heath. The warriors saw her, and loved ; Their souls were fixed on the maid. Each loved her, as his Fame ; each must possess her or die. But her soul was fixed on *Oscur* ; my son was the youth of her love. She forgot the Blood of her Father ; and loved the hand that slew him.

Son of *Oscian*, said *Dermid*, I love ; O *Oscur*, I love this maid. But her soul cleaveth unto thee ; and nothing can heal *Dermid*. Here pierce this bosom, *Oscur* ; relieve me, my Friend, with thy sword.

My sword, Son of *Mornny*, shall never be stained with the blood of *Dermid*.

Who then is worthy to slay me, O *Oscur*, Son of *Oscian* ? Let not my life pass away unknown- Let none but *Oscur* slay me. Send me with Honour to the Grave, and let my Death be renowned.

Dermid, make use of thy sword ; Son of *Mornny*, wield thy steel. Would that I fell with thee ! that my death came from the hand of *Dermid*.

They fought by the brook of the mountain, by the streams of *Branno*. Blood tinged the silvery stream, and flowed round the mossy stones. *Dermid* the Graceful fell : fell, and smiled in Death.

And Fallest thou, Son of *Mornny* ; fallest thou by *Oscur*'s hand ! *Dermid*, invincible in War, thus do I see thee fall ! He went, and returned to the Maid whom he loved ; returned, but she perceived his grief.

Why that Gloom, Son of *Oscian* ? what shades thy mighty soul ?

Though once renowned for the Bow, O Maid, I have lost my fame. Fixed on a Tree by the brook of the Hill, is the shield of *Gormur* the Brave, whom in Battle I slew. I have wasted the day in vain, nor could my arrow pierce it.

Let me try, Son of *Oscian*, the skill of Dargo's daughter. My Hands were taught the Bow ; My Father delighted in my skill.

She went. He stood behind the shield. Her arrow flew and pierced his breast.*

Blessed be that hand of snow, and blessed thy bow of Yew ! I fall resolved on Death. And who but the Daughter of *Dargo* was worthy to slay me ; Lay me in the earth. my fair one ; Lay me by the side of *Dermid*.

Oscur ! I have the Blood, the soul of the mighty *Dargo*. Well pleased I can meet death. My sorrow I can end thus.—She pierced her white Bosom with steel. She fell ; she trembled ; and died.

By the Brook of the Hill their graves are laid ; a Birch's unequal shade covers their Tomb. Often on their green earthen Tombs the sons of the Mountain feed, when Mid-day is all in Flames, and silence is over all the Hills.

Fragment VIII.

BY the side of a rock on the Hill, beneath the aged Trees, old *Oscian* sat on the moss, the last of the race of *Fingal*. Sightless are his aged eyes ; his beard is waving in the wind. Dull through the leafless Trees he heard the voice of the North. Sorrow revived in his soul. He began and lamented the dead.

* Nothing was held by the ancient *Highlanders* more essential to their glory, than to die by the hand of some person worthy or renowned. This was the occasion of *Oscur's* contriving to be slain by his mistress, now that he was weary of life. In those Early Times, Suicide was utterly unknown among that people, and no traces of it are found in the old Poetry. Whence the Translator suspects that the account that follows of the Daughter of *Dargo* killing herself to be the interpolation of some later bard,



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