Dr. Stuart

A Mr Donald

Leper Poems of Ossian


THE ROYAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

SOME

OF OSSIAN'S

LESSER POEMS,

RENDERED INTO VERSE;

WITH

A PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE,

IN ANSWER TO

Mr. LAING's

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL DISSERTATION

ON THE

ANTIQUITY OF OSSIAN'S POEMS.

BY ARCHIBALD M'DONALD.

The Harp in Selma was not idly strung,
And long shall last the themes our Poet sung!
BERRATHON, *page* 283.

Liverpool,

PRINTED BY J. M'CREERY;
SOLD BY T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, STRAND, LONDON.
1805.

TO

THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE HUMBLY DEDICATED,

AS A PUBLIC TRIBUTE

FOR THE INTEREST THEY HAVE TAKEN

IN ASCERTAINING

THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE POEMS

OF

THE IMMORTAL BARD OF CALEDONIA,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Seel-Street, Liverpool,
July 1st. 1805.

ERRATA IN THE PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

P. 33, *note*, *l.* 7, *for* list, *read* lies—*p.* 55, *l.* 19, *after* found, *insert a full stop*—*p.* 85, *l.* 22, *for* is, *read* are—*p.* 140, *l.* 5, *for* any, *read* my —*p.* 142, *l.* 2, *for* had reached, *read* had never reached—*p.* 169, *l.* 15, *for* were more, *read* were others more.

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

IT was not until the following versions were ready for the press, that I understood the authenticity of Ossian's poems was violently opposed by Mr. Laing, who some time since published a portion of Scottish history. Having been formerly engaged in that controversy, I was curious to see what farther could be urged by that writer on the subject. Upon examination, I found his arguments were chiefly grounded on the difference between the refined sentiments of the Celtic heroes, and the ferocious manners usually affixed to a period and people we are accustomed to consider barbarous. To this he adds the impossi-

bility of these compositions being handed down, for so many ages, without orthography. Then, without taking any notice of the proofs adduced in favour of their authenticity, he brings some objections from the history, traditions, and manners of the middle ages.

After having, as he imagines, completely deprived the poems of all pretensions to antiquity, he then gives an account of their real origin, which, he pretends, cannot be remote, on account of the many modern terms they contain, and the similarity of numberless passages to the writings of ancient and modern poets. At last, he would persuade us, that M'Pherson was not only the author, but moreover, publicly avowed it.

As to the assertion that the Highlanders, in Ossian's days, were barbarians, I have only to observe, there is no reason to believe they were more so than the inhabitants of other countries, whom the Greeks, and after them, the Romans, stigmatized

matized with that appellation. Yet, with all the boasted superiority of these people, it would not be difficult to prove, that some whom they affected to contemn, equalled, if not surpassed them in civilization. Of this number were the Hebrews, who, not inferior in polity, far excelled them in morality, and made a much more early figure in literature. Their great Lawgiver, a thousand years before any historian appeared in Greece, wrote an account of the creation of the world.—He tells us who were the immediate descendants of the first man.—Gives a succinct relation of them, and their posterity, down to the flood, a period of one thousand six hundred and fifty years.—After which, he records the transactions of Noah and his sons till their dispersion. This event was soon followed by the call of Abraham, the great progenitor of the Jewish people, to whose affairs the sacred Penman chiefly confines his narration, till they were delivered from the captivity of Egypt, which took place eight hundred and fifty-seven years after the deluge.

Joshua, who, on the death of Moses, put the Israelites in possession of the Holy Land, continued their history; which, by others, was carried down to the reigns of David and Solomon, the two most powerful kings that ever governed Judea, and in whose days, that nation arrived at its summit of greatness and prosperity.

All that we know, for certain, of the rest of mankind till that period, and nearly five hundred years after, comes only from scripture relation. Herodotus is the first profane historian with whom we are acquainted. He travelled over many countries, particularly Asia and Egypt. Of these, as far as in his power, he has collected the transactions; and however defective his details, from that time, the fables of demigods and heroes have given way to genuine facts.

The northern regions being peopled the last, were proportionably longer in establishing governments and salutary laws; and many centuries elapsed before we find any

any notice taken of them. There is reason, however, to believe, they were not much behind the rest in knowledge and civilization. Before they journeyed north, the human race had made some progress in the arts. Poetry and music were known. The manner of working metals had been likewise discovered. All this they carried with them, in a greater or less degree of perfection; and as they spread and grew more numerous, states were formed, and rulers appointed. These governed according to certain customs and statutes, which, if not perfect, had a great similarity to those of other nations. Greece and Italy were happy in having early historians. Had the transactions of these northern countries been as faithfully recorded, there can be no doubt but they would have afforded details equally interesting.

It has long been a subject of regret, that the inventors of the fine arts have, by time, been deprived of the reputation due to their ingenuity. Of the many realms which pretend to their birth, Egypt seems

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to possess the earliest claim. Yet, like the Nile, which enriches that country, while they have diffused pleasure and utility over other kingdoms, their source is consigned to doubt and obscurity. Even those who were the first contrivers of letters, cannot, with any certainty, be ascertained. Bibliander ascribes them to Adam. Josephus, St. Ireneus, and others, to Enoch. Philo attributes them to Abraham. Eusebius, Clemens Alexandrinus, Cornelius Agrippa, with some others, to Moses; but the invention must clearly have been before his time. Many give the honour of it to the Ethiopians; others to the Egyptians or Chinese. The latter, however, used a number of marks, the meaning of which, from their multiplicity, it is impossible to acquire without a vast expense of time and trouble. The former are well known to have employed hieroglyphics; and this slow and imperfect mode of conveying ideas, may possibly have given rise to the formation of letters.

Every alphabet consists of a number of

of figures, to which are affixed a different sound, shape, and use. It is pretended that Abraham formed the Syriac and Chaldee; Moses the Hebrew; the Phœnicians those of the Greeks, brought into that country by Cadmus; Nicostra is thought to have invented the Roman, and Ulphilas those of the Goths.

It is evident, however, that the Goths, long before Ulphilas, even while involved in the thickest darkness of Paganism, had a knowledge of letters. This appears from many ancient inscriptions on stones, found in all the northern regions. These characters are called Runic: and from a specimen given in a note by the intelligent translator of Mallet's Northern Antiquities, differ widely from the common Gothic. Nor have their form, order, names, or numbers, any similarity with the Roman or Greek alphabets: and if they any way assisted Ulphilas, he was obliged to add divers letters to express foreign words and sounds, which those confined characters could not supply.

When

When Wormius wrote, the translation of Ulphilas was supposed to be irrevocably lost; but some years after, in the Abbey of Werden, in Westphalia, was found a very curious fragment of what is believed to be his identical version, written in the Mæsogothic language, and exhibiting the characters used by that Prelate. These are so very remote from the Runic, that we may safely allow him the honour of inventing them, without derogating from the antiquity of the others. This fragment is now preserved in the library of Upsal, and is famous among the northern literati, under the name of the *Codex Argenteus*, or Silver Book.

It contains at present only the four gospels, and these mutilated. Ulphilas, who was bishop of the Goths settled in Mæsia and Thrace, had, as it is supposed, translated the whole of the Bible, but these are all that remain. The leaves are of vellum, of a violet colour; all the letters silver, except the initials, which are gold. They are all capitals, and appear not to have been

been written with a pen, but stamped or imprinted with hot metal types,* in the same manner as book-binders letter the backs of books. So that if the copyist, instead of stamping one, had but thought of combining three or four of these letters together, he might have hit upon the admirable invention of printing.

The *Codex Argenteus* has been several times printed. First, by Junius, in 1665, and by the learned Mr. Lye, at Oxford, in 1775. Another fragment of this curious version (containing part of the epistle to the Romans,) has been since discovered in the Wolfenbuttle library, and republished some years ago, in 4to. by the Rev. F. A. Knitell, arch-deacon of Wolfenbuttle.

It is true, that Michaelis, and one or two other learned men,† have opposed the current

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* See this fully proved in some late curious tracts of several Swedish literati. Vol. ii. p. 355.

† See the Latin Dissertation at the end of Chamberlayn's Oratio Dominica, &c. Amst: 1714, 4to.

current opinion, that the *silver book* contains part of Ulphilas's Gothic version, and have offered arguments to prove that it is rather a venerable fragment of some very ancient Francic Bible. But they have been confuted by Knitell and others; and the Gothic claim has been further confirmed by a curious relic of the same language, lately discovered in Italy, plainly written by one of the same Goths, being evidently of their time.

The invention of letters, like most other human discoveries, was, probably, accidental. The Rev. Mr. Edward Davies, curate of Olveston, Gloucestershire, in his Celtic Researches, a work lately published, thinks it arose originally from symbols, and tells us the old Welsh and Irish letters are named from different trees.* Though he is of opinion the Druids were in possession of this knowledge from the remotest antiquity, he, nevertheless, makes it appear, that

* See his ingenious conjectures on this subject, *sect.* viii. *p.* 289.

that they were not the original inventors, but merely religious observers of the system. It is remarkable, that the names of many letters in the Hebrew, Greek, and Irish alphabets, are nearly allied. Take for instances the following:

Hebrew.	*Greek.*	*Irish.*
Aleph	Alpha	Ailim
Beth	Beta	Beith
Heth	Eta	Eadha
Jod	Iota	Idho
Nun	Nun	Nion
Resh	Rho	Ruis, &c.

This resemblance demonstrates their descent from one original parent language; which similarity in the names, as well as in the formation of the letters, cannot be attributed to mere chance.

If, as some have surmised, the use of letters was taught by Adam or Enoch, this knowledge at the dispersion, would be carried away by those of mankind who moved north, as well as those who proceeded to the

the east, the south, or west of Babel. And supposing this invaluable art was only found out after the separation, it would even then have been communicated by degrees, to those tribes that lay most remote, especially if there was any intercourse by trade. This was evidently the case with regard to the inhabitants of these islands.* At a very early period, the Phœnicians, coasting along the shores of the Mediterranean, made settlements in the isles of Cyprus and Rhodes, and extending their navigation, passed successively into Greece, Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia; nor did the southern parts of Gaul and Spain escape them. About 1260 years before the Christian æra, instigated by the love of gain, they entered the ocean, and landed on the western coast of Spain. That country is said to have presented them with the same spectacle that America in the sixteenth century, did to the Spaniards. Though destitute of arts and industry, the inhabitants possessed abundance of gold and

* See Rutherford's View of Ancient History.

and silver, with the value of which they seemed so little acquainted, that they exchanged them freely for oil, glass, and other trinkets. Silver, in particular, was so plentiful, that the Phœnicians, unable to convey away all they had obtained, were obliged to take out the lead with which their anchors were loaded, and put that metal in its place. From Spain, and the northern parts of Gaul, they visited Great Britain and Ireland. The former supplied them with tin, the latter with copper, lead, and silver, extracted from the above mines.*

These adventurers, to secure their commerce, planted colonies, and built cities in all the countries to which they resorted. From the smallness of their territories, they could not possibly have effected all this, had not the revolutions and emigrations occasioned by the conquests of Joshua, favoured their designs. The inhabitants of Palestine,

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* *See* O'Halloran, *chap.* vi. *p.* 122.

Palestine, finding themselves threatened with immediate destruction, by the irruption and devastation of the Hebrew tribes, took shelter in Sydon, which, not being large enough to support the multitudes of these exiles, the Phœnicians employed them to make settlements, and extend their commerce in foreign parts.

But no event render these people more famous than founding Carthage, the subsequent greatness of which made an important figure in the history of mankind. Situated on a bold projection of the African continent, in the very centre of the Mediterranean; she comprehended within her view the east as well as the west, and embraced, by the extent of her trade, all the seas, and all the countries of the known world. An excellent port offered a secure asylum to ships. The natural fertility of the adjacent soil—the happy site of the town, surrounded by a cluster of islands and territories, conveniently situated for traffic—the adventurous spirit of its merchants and mariners—the skill and industry

try of the artisans and manufacturers, together with the wisdom of the government, which was never shaken by seditions, nor oppressed by tyranny, till the later periods of the commonwealth—all contributed to the sudden increase and rapid improvement of the Carthagenian colony. From the enlargement of its territory it became a separate state, which soon rivalled, and afterwards surpassed the mother country. In a duration of seven hundred years, its dominion comprehended the finest portion of Africa, as well as a part of Spain, Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, Malta, with the Baliaric and Fortunate islands.

The freqent intercourse of nations that possessed all the arts and sciences then known, with the inhabitants of these islands, would greatly contribute to their civilization. The knowledge of letters, among other things, would be introduced. That their use was known before the arrival of the Romans, is evident, from Cæsar's observing*, that the Druids did not

* Bel. Gal. *lib.* 6.

not deem it lawful to commit things pertaining to religious worship to writing, " though, generally, in other cases, both in " their public and private accounts, they " used Greek letters." From his saying *generally*, it is natural to suppose, that these people had an alphabet somewhat, if not wholly, different from the Greek. The Rev. Mr. Davies thinks, that the first received was imported by the Pelasgi, a colony that came into Europe, from Asia Minor, in the time of those post Diluvian patriarchs, among whom the earth was first divided. He, who would be farther informed on this subject, may consult that ingenious author,* where he makes it appear, that the western Celtæ had an alphabet similar to the ancient Greek, which, nevertheless, was not recently borrowed from that people, but sprung from an origin, though remote, common to both nations. O'Halloran makes Phænius, the founder of the Milesian race, the inventor of letters. Cadmus imported them into Greece.

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* Sect. 6.

Greece. It is remarkable, the Irish alphabet has a great similarity to the Greek; and this, like the former, originally consisted only of sixteen letters.

Mr. Astle, who has discussed the subject of ancient letters with consummate ability, says,* "Plato somewhere mentions Hyperborean letters." Now, under this name, the older Greeks understood the Druidical order, especially that of these islands.

That the Celtic letters were not derived from Greece, appears from Strabo, who, speaking of the Turditani, a colony of that people in Spain, says, "They were the wisest among the Iberians, for they have letters, written histories, and poems, and laws in verse, as they assert, six thousand years old."

This account, though evidently exaggerated, shews the great number of years

* Page 46.

those men were in possession of letters, the knowledge of which was so remote as to be lost in antiquity. Assertions, nearly as extravagant, are made by those of our own writers, who pretend, that learning was cultivated in these islands two thousand years before the Christian æra; and that Saron, the son of Magnus, who governed those realms about that period, to restrain the fierceness of his subjects, founded public schools. Cambden and Lewis* are of opinion, that from this prince the town of Sarum, or Salisbury, took its name†.

I am of opinion, however, that the sciences could have made no great progress till the arrival of the Phœnicians. How early, and to what degree they advanced, even then, cannot be well ascertained. Caius informs us, that king Cuhclyn, who reigned above three hundred years before Christ, was well versed in music, and knew several foreign languages. Some instances are given by other authors, of the early knowledge

* See Lewis's Hist. of Brit. *p.* 56.

† See the Bardic Museum of Jones.

knowledge of these people: but to whatever height it might have attained, the invasion of the Romans, and afterwards the more destructive conquests of the Saxons and Danes, quite obliterated every vestige of former improvements. The old British inhabitants driven, by their ferocious enemies, into the mountains of Wales, or western parts of Scotland, literature did not revive among them till the fifth century. From that period till the twelfth, Welsh harmony and poetry gained the utmost zenith of their perfection. The laws of king Howell, in favour of the bards, shew in what high estimation that order of men were held. There was scarce a subject they left unsung. Jones, in his Bardic Museum, tells us, there are still poems of theirs extant on theology, ethics, war, peace, beauty, love, happiness, mirth, sorrow, satire, music, harmony, poetry, geography, history, navigation, nature, art, rural sports, games, mechanics, Philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, magic, prophesy. And he farther adds, that several of their songs breathe the high spirit of

lyric enthusiasm, and in his opinion, are more interesting than any others, because each of them records or refers to some particular event, and also conveys to us the genuine taste, customs, and manners, of the people, as well as historical facts.—They were the impulse of nature, composed at the very time when each circumstance happened; and sung, or repeated by the bards, on the various occasions they refer to.

But when the victorious arms of Edward the first united Wales to the crown of England, to secure his dominion, that cruel prince put all the bards to death. As the massacre was general, many of their works, as well as those of their predecessors, perished with them. However, the genius of the nation could not be destroyed, and those who loved poetry, continued to exercise their talents in odes and elegies; a species of composition with which the Welsh language abounds. Jones, in his Bardic Museum, has given some specimens. It is to be hoped, others, following his example, will continue the research,

search, till all, or the greatest part of these curious remains of British antiquity, shall make their appearance in English.

We are told, that when the Romans drove the Druids out of Britain, they took refuge in Ireland. Be that as it will, they brought no accession of knowledge into that country, since no people now on the face of the globe can boast a more remote origin, or trace instances of earlier government and civilization than the Irish. It has been a pitiful prejudice in too many English writers, to throw discredit upon the early history of that island. This ill-judged policy began as far back as the days of Henry II. who sent over Giraldus Cambrencis for the avowed purpose of collecting and publishing whatever he could find that was disadvantageous to the character of the natives. Numerous and wonderful are the lying inventions of this writer. A very learned person* to whom Mr. Flaherly prefaces his Ogygia, wrote a detection

* Mr. Josiah Lynch, titular archbishop of Tuam.

tection of this man's misrepresentations and slanders, which he called *Cambrencis eversus*. Sir James Ware, who published his antiquities of Ireland, under queen Anne, " admires that some men of his age, " otherwise grave and learned, should " obtrude those fictions of Giraldus upon " the world for truths." Indeed, no writer of any judgment has ever attempted to justify the groundless and incredible fables of Cambrencis. Even Mr. Pinkerton, though otherwise inimical to the Irish,* asserts that he shews the greatest ignorance in his account of the Irish history.

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* He not only abuses the Irish, but all that boast a Celtic origin. " The Welsh and Irish genealogies, *(Vol. i. p. 75.)* " are only documents for Bedlamites, being the quintessence of " frenzy and folly." *(p. 98.)* " These Celtic gentry are al- " ways ready to tell lies; there is no danger from them, for as " folly is the cause of their villany, so it is also its detection." *(p. 242.)* " The grand characteristic of the Celts is to put " falsehood for truth, and truth as falsehood." Valuing himself greatly upon being descended from the Goths, he says, *(p. 227.)* " What a lion is to an ass, such is a Goth to a Celt." Of the latter language, he remarks, *(p. 226.)* " Is not what we idly " term the Celtic, a mere repository of old Gothic words, which " the Celts adopted like cast off clothes, and retain, because they " make no progress in ideas or society." Thus does this self-sufficient antiquarian indiscriminately throw dirt about him.

The early periods of these people, like that of all other nations, must be involved in fable and obscurity. Though it has been generally supposed that the first inhabitants of Ireland were Celts, it seems now pretty clear, that the ancestors of the present race were Phœnicians or Carthagenians. Language is the best proof of the origin of a people. The natives of Ireland are at this day in possession of a vernacular tongue, which was in use above three thousand years ago. Plautus, in one of his plays, (written during the second Punic war) in the character of Hanno, a Carthagenian, puts into his mouth several sentences, that have puzzled all modern commentators, till the ingenious and learned Lieutenant-Colonel Vallency, whose unexampled proficiency in the Irish language, renders his researches into the antiquities of that country useful to the public, has given an accurate collation of these Punic speeches, with the Irish, as now spoken. As might be expected in a language which was not understood, the ignorance of editors and printers have occasionally misplaced

placed syllables, and run one word into another. The colonel has corrected this dislocation, and rendered the whole intelligible, with little or no alteration. The curious reader may wish to see a specimen of this wonderful similarity, or rather identity of the old Phœnician with the present Irish.

The Carthagenian, as in the editions of Plautus.

Bythlym mothym noctothij nelechthanti diaſmachon.

Properly arranged by Colonel Vallency.

Byth lem! mo thym nocto thii nel ech anti dias machon.

Irish.

Beith liom! mo thyme noctaithe neil ach anti daiſe macoinne.

English.

Be with me! my fears being disclosed, I have no other intention but recovering my daughter.

Carthagenian and Irish, without the change of a word or letter.

Handone filli hanum bene, filli in mustine.

English

English.

Whenever she, (Venus) grants a favour, she grants it linked with misfortune.

Carthagenian, as in the editions of Plautus.

Meipsi & en efte dum & a lam na ceftin um.

Irish.

Meisi & an eifte dam & alaim na ceftin um.

English.

Hear me, and judge, and do not too hastily question me.

The Punic and the Irish, in these sentences, will be found to differ little more than provincial dialects of our own language, in some counties; and infinitely less, after a lapse of three thousand years, than modern English from what was spoken four centuries ago.

What strengthens the supposition that a colony of Phœnicians settled in Ireland is, that warlike instruments found in this country under ground, exactly resemble the weapons discovered about Cannæ, some of which are in the British museum. The brazen

brazen swords and spears are of the same form and substance, being a composition of brass and tin. It may likewise be observed, that to this day, the Irish peasants are in the annual habit of lighting upon certain hills, on the eve of midsummer, what they still call *Ball's fire*, though quite ignorant, that *Bell* was the god of their Phœnician ancestors.

The grand epoch of political eminence in the early history of Ireland, was the reign of the great and favorite monarch Ollam-Fodlah, according to Keating, about 950 years before the Christain æra. Under him was instituted the great *Fes* at *Teamor* or *Tara*. This was a triennial convention of the states, the members of which consisted of the Druids,* and other learned

* The Phœnicians are said to have brought Druidism into Britain; from whence, according to Cæsar's account, it passed into Gaul. Laing, following the opinion of Pinkerton, doubts of its having ever existed in Ireland or Scotland. The notion, however, contradicts the authority of history, and as Phœnecian colonies had settled in those parts, there is every reason to believe they carried that system with them.

learned men, who represented the people. The royal assent, on these occasions, was given to a great many good laws. As early as the time we are speaking of, it was ordained, that every nobleman and great officer, should, by the herald's appointment, have a particular coat of arms assigned him, according to his merit and his quality, to distinguish him from others of the same rank; and be known wherever he appeared, either at sea or land; in the prince's court, or his own place of residence, or in the field of battle.* To preserve order and regularity on public occasions, all the attendants delivered in their shields or targets. These the grand marshall and principal herald hung up against the walls, and, on entering, each individual took his place under his respective shield or target, without the slightest disturbance.

Nothing can give stronger ideas of early civilization than this, and other regulations that

* See Keating's History.

that might be mentioned; but the limits of this discourse will not admit of entering into a longer detail of these people. Nothing but our ignorance of their history can occasion any doubt. To those who will examine, there is a mass of evidence, which, when impartially weighed, boldly bids defiance to the fastidious and hardened sceptic.* Without calling for acquiescence upon any particular fact, when we combine the early intercourse of the Phœnicians with the natives; their languages being the same; the similarity of the old Irish and Carthagenian military weapons. The coincidence of their records, as to the number of their kings. The reference of their earliest bards to long existing usages, confirmed by names and terms which have survived those usages, proving their former existence. Nay, the very fabulous allusions of their poems to the names of monarchs, who find their regular places in the lists of the most

* See O'Halloran's Introduction to, and history of Ireland, 3 vols.

most accurate annalists. The exact computation and number that fill up the space of time attributed to the continuance of the royal lineage. The very great probability of all the leading coincidences of the facts related, and the very traditions of a people, who have preserved their language for three thousand years; all tend to raise a monument of historical veracity, that ignorance, envy, prejudice, or malevolence will never be able to overturn.

The language spoken in the Hebrides and Highlands, being the same as the Irish, some have supposed that the inhabitants were originally from that country. Others maintain, on the contrary, that the north-eastern parts of Ireland had been peopled from the western coast of Scotland. There are great authorities on each side, which will make it difficult for me fully to explain. By the similarity of their speech, they seem evidently to derive their origin from the Phœnician colonies, that, as already observed, settled at an early period in both countries. There

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is no historic proof that Ireland was invaded by any strangers, except some Danish and Norwegian rovers, but, never in such numbers as wholly to subdue the island.

This is the reason why the language has continued for so many ages the same. But Britain, lying nearer the continent, and more exposed to nations that made it a practice to harrass their neighbours, became sooner a prey to their incursions. At the time the Phœnicians first landed there, the inhabitants must have been few. The establishments they made contributed greatly to increase their numbers: but when Alexander destroyed Tyre, and the Romans afterwards demolished Carthage, the intercourse with these states was put an end to. Left, therefore, to themselves, the maritime natives of the opposite shores passing over, and gaining footing by degrees, obliged the ancient settlers to move farther north. So that on the invasion of Cæsar, he found all the sea coasts possessed by Belgians, who retained the names of the several states from which they were descended.

scended.* The back settlers, he observes, were quite a different race.

Some time before the Romans visited Britain, the Norwegians gained footing on the north-east parts of the island, and growing stronger by degrees, compelled the old possessors to take shelter in the Highlands, and western isles. Many likewise, on this occasion, emigrated to the north-west of Ireland. The poems of Ossian inform us, that these fugitives were led by Conar, the son of Trenmor, the great grandfather of the celebrated Fingal. Whatever connexion might formerly have subsisted between the two countries, this intrusion occasioned animosities and disputes, which soon broke out into open violence. The natives, who were more numerous, would soon have driven out these unwelcome

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* As Pliny places a people called *Britanni* in Belgic Gaul, it is most probable they were amongst the first adventurers who passed into the island, and that from them it took the name of Britain.

come guests, had not Fingal supported his countrymen. After his death, the Irish succeeded at last in driving out the Scotch, who, landing in Argyleshire, as we are told by Bede, formed a distinct principality, which subsisted, till under the conduct of Kenneth, they, in their turn, overthrew the Picts, and gave their name to the whole of North Britain.

Though the *Chronicon Pictorum*, and the register of St. Andrew, both attest this fact; yet Pinkerton, unwilling to own his favourite Picts conquered by a race of men, whom he takes every opportunity to asperse in the most vulgar terms,* pretends that

* The Celts are mere radical savages, not yet advanced even " to a state of barbarism; and if any foreigner doubts this, he " has only to step into the Celtic part of Wales, Ireland, and " Scotland, and look at them, for they are yet just as they were, " incapable of industry or civilization, even after half their blood " is Gothic," (*a connexion not likely to meliorate them*) " and re- " main as marked by the ancients, fond of lies, and enemies to " truth."—Dessert. *p.* 77. " The Celtic, I will venture to " say, (though in another place he confesses little or no know- " ledge of it) is, of all savage languages, the most confused, as " the

that Kenneth was of Pictish extraction, and only assumed the Scotish language and name, in gratitude for the service they had rendered in gaining the crown. With as little regard to truth, he tells us, that not an ancestor of the present Hebrideans existed there in the days of Fingal. To prove this strange hypothesis, he asserts, that the Scandinavians, three hundred years before the Christian æra, possessed

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" the Celts are of all savages, the most deficient in understand-
" ing. Wisdom and ingenuity may be traced among the Sa-
" moieds, Laplanders, Negroes, &c. but among the Celts, none
" of native growth. All etymology of names is folly; but Cel-
" tic etymology is their frenzy. Enough of Celtic etymology.
" Let us leave it to candidates of bedlam."—Dissert. *p.* 102.
" It is to the list of our Celtic neighbours that we are indebted
" for the fables of English history down to within these thirty
" years, and almost total perdition of the history of Scotland and
" Ireland. Geoffrey of Monmouth, most of the Irish historians,
" and the Highland Bards, and Seanachies of Scotland, shew,
" that falsehood is the natural product of the Celtic mind: and
" the case is the same to this day. No reprobation can be too
" severe for these frontless imposters; and to say that a writer is
" a Celt, is to say he is a stranger to truth, modesty, and mo-
" rality." What a pity that a person, who says he has read near two thousand volumes before he began his *Inquiry into the History of Scotland*, did not peruse some short treatise that would have taught him moderation and good manners!

those islands. Now we have every reason to believe, that no invaders from those parts ever ventured so far at that early period. The arrival of Odin, who, by his conquests, forced the old natives of the north to molest their neighbours, did not, according to Snorro, take place till about seventy years before Christ. Eutropius, Bede, and others, inform us, that they made themselves masters of the Shetland and Orkney Islands; but this they could not do before the time we are speaking of. The Romans, it is true, found inhabitants there in the reign of Claudius. Tacitus farther relates, that they were conquered by the circum-navigators of Agricola. This Pinkerton contradicts on the authority of Solinus; a writer of no estimation, whose *Polyhistor* is a wretched compilation of historical and geographical remarks upon various countries. He acquired the nickname of Pliny's ape, on account of his frequent extracts from that author. Yet this is the man whom Pinkerton prefers to Tacitus! But it is no unusual thing with him, to contradict the best authorities, when

when they oppose his favourite theory, and to call to his assistance the most contemptible, when it suits his purpose. Thus he occasionally quotes Fordun, though he stiles him "a weak and infamous falsifier, "and a forger in his historical facts."*

Bede and others, inform us, that the Scandinavians made themselves masters of the Shetland and Orkney islands—their language puts the matter beyond dispute.

At what time the Hebrides were first inhabited, cannot be said; but the language, dress, and manners of the people, evidently shew it was from Scotland. When the Norwegians drove the Lowlanders into the hills and isles, they received a great accession of population. There is no doubt but they excelled their invaders in knowledge, and had arrived at a much higher degree of civilization. The Welsh and Irish possess records of greater antiquity; but the Highlanders vie with them in mu-

* Vol. ii. page 103.

sic and poetry; nor could they be much behind them in the learning of those times. If Abaris, the Hyperboræan, as is generally supposed, was an Hebridean. This celebrated man, being sent by his countrymen ambassador to Athens, travelled over Greece, and from thence passed into Italy, where he became acquainted with Pythagoras. Abaris's knowledge and abilities were uncommon.* Himerius, the orator, says, " he spoke the Greek with ease and " purity. That he was affable in conver- " sation, expeditious and secret in dispatch- " ing affairs; was studious of wisdom, and " steady in friendship; at the same time, " cautious

* O'Halloran claims him for an Irishman, others, ignorant of the early connexion of these Islands with the most enlightened nations of antiquity, have considered Abaris as a fabulous character; while others, who knew not the distinction of the insular Hyperboræans, make him a Scythian, his dress however shewed the contrary. For he came to *Athens*, holding a bow in his hand, a quiver hanging on his shoulders; wrapt in a plaid; with a gilded belt above his loins, and wearing trowsers reaching from his waist downwards. " By this it is evident," says Toland, " he " was not habited like a Scythian, who were always covered with " skins; but in the garb of an aboriginal Scot, between whom " and the Greeks there was anciently an intercourse.

" cautious and circumspect, trusting little " to fortune." Suidas informs us he wrote many books.

This extraordinary personage must certainly have been a Druid, a learned order of men, as ancient as the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Persia, or the Chaldees of Babylon. And, indeed, whoever considers the tenor of their doctrine, will be convinced it came down from Noah and his immediate descendants, at the dispersion. We find in their religion the simplicity which distinguished the Patriarchal faith and worship—one God; an altar either of turf or stone; and a sacrifice. They existed long before Greece could boast of her wise men and philosophers;* and Milton asserts,† " that writers of good an- " tiquity, have been persuaded, that even " Pythagoras, and the Persian wisdom, " took beginning from the old philosophy " of this island." The

* See Elias Sched. de Diis Germanis; and Borlasses Antiquities of Cornwall, *p.* 67.

† See his works in quarto, vol. i. *p.* 238.

The early transactions of the northern parts of Europe are not more obscure than the religion they formerly professed. What the Latin and Greek authors have written on this subject, is commonly deficient in point of exactness; yet if we bring together the few short sketches they have preserved on this head; if we compare these accounts with those of the ancient poets and historians of the nations themselves, some light may be thrown to distinguish the most prominent features. Tacitus tells us,* the Germans believed in one God, who was master of the universe, and to whom all things were submissive and obedient. A few plain easy doctrines seem to have comprised their tenets, and those of the other northern nations. They deviated little from the traditions and usages of their forefathers. The farther we go back to the creation, the clearer we discover traces of conformity among the human race. But in proportion as we see them

* "Regnator omnium Deus, cætera subjecta atque parentia." *De Mor. Ger. c.* 35.

them dispersed, the more they disagree in opinion and habits. The natives who settled in the southern countries were they who deviated first from the right path, and afterwards wandered farthest from it. These derived from their climate a lively, fruitful, and restless imagination, which made them greedy of novelties and wonders. They had, also, ardent passions, which rarely suffered them to preserve a rational freedom of mind; or see things coolly and impartially. Hence the wild frenzies of the Egyptians, Syrians, Greeks, and others, which, in a manner, entirely effaced all traces of natural religion, while it was preserved, without any material alteration, in the north. There the rigour of the climate necessarily fetters caprice, confines the imagination, abates the violence of the passions, and makes men less subject to levity and change. Nor was it till the Spaniards, Gauls, and southern Britons were subdued by the arms, and corrupted by the luxury of the Romans, that the people of those countries relaxed in principles, and suffered, by degrees, an intermixture

termixture of customs, some of them ridiculous, others cruel, in which, by little and little, as it commonly happens, they came, at last, to adopt the idolatry of their new masters. When the Romans invaded Great Britain and Germany, those countries were nearly in the same state of civilization, as Greece in the days of Homer. Under different princes, they were divided into small principalities. They had no historians. All transactions worth preserving, were recorded in verse, which the bards who composed them, and their successors, repeated at feasts or public meetings.* These had made such progress in poetry, as to draw the attention of the Roman historians, and even the admiration of other poets. Thus Lucan.

Vos quoque qui fortes animas, belloque peremptis
Laudibus in longum vates dimittis ævum,
Plurima secure fudistis carmina bardi.

Phar. lib. i.

You too, ye Bards! whom sacred raptures fire,
To chant your heroes to your country's lyre;

Who

* Strabo, *lib.* iv. Amianus Marcellinus, *lib.* xv. *c.* 9.

Who consecrate, in your immortal strain,
Brave patriot souls in righteous battle slain;
Securely now the tuneful task renew,
And noblest themes in deathless songs pursue.

Rowe's Translation.

But whatever merit their Poems might have possessed, when over-run by strangers, they were soon forgot, and the memory of the achievements they celebrated shared the same fate. Had the states of Greece been conquered, in like manner, soon after the days of Homer, the language would have experienced so material a change, that his compositions, ill understood, would have sunk into neglect, and been now as little known as the songs of many Gaulish, German, and British bards, no more remembered than if they had never existed.

Wherever the Roman arms prevailed, their language soon gained the ascendancy in the courts of justice, and in all public transactions. The higher orders would, of course, learn it, and the literati adopt it, as more fashionable, regular, and universal. When, in process of time, the Goths, Huns, Vandals,

Vandals, and other barbarous nations, in their turn, expelled the Romans, and settled, not only in the different provinces, but in Italy itself, a jargon, compounded of the provincial, and Latin speech of the conquerors, took place. From such mixtures have arisen the Italian, French, and Spanish, which the labour and diligence of centuries have at length, rendered copious, regular, grammatical and elegant languages.

The Saxons, who succeeded the Romans, and drove the ancient inhabitants into Wales, spoke the Gothic tongue. These were followed by others from the continent, particularly a party of Angles, from the south of the present Jutland, who possessed the districts north of the Humber, and from whom, the southern parts of the island is called England. The speech of all these people, which originated from the same root, was interlarded by the missionaries who converted them to Christianity, with Latin words, being their native language, and that always used in their religious service. But what brought about

about the greatest change and improvement was the Norman conquest, in one thousand and sixty-seven. This revolution introduced the French, which was spoken at court, as well as by the generality of the nobility. Accordingly, most of the apothegms, mottos, proverbial sayings, &c. preserved by the histories of those times, are in old French The great bulk of the people, however, continued the Anglo-Saxon. A charter of Henry the first, written about the year 1113, is in that language. An old chronicle, written about 1150, is in the same. The *Ormulum*, which is supposed to be penned in the reign of king John, is Saxon, refining into the present English. The first piece composed in this stile, is the *Geste* of king Horn, about 1250. After this, the English improved rapidly, and it is surprising what a difference appears between Robert of Gloster, and Robert of Brunne, though the works of the former are only sixty years older than the chronicle of the latter, which was in 1338. Chaucer, who flourished in the fourteenth century, is accounted

counted the father or English poetry. Succeeding authors improving greatly upon him, it is now become the favourite of the polite and literati, who formerly generally wrote in Latin; for if not the most soft and harmonious of modern languages, it is the most copious and energetic.

Many have supposed that the present Scotish tongue, on account of its affinity, is formed from the English. The notion, however, is erroneous. The Picts, who possessed the north, spoke a dialect of the Anglo-Saxon used in south Britain. And though, after the conquest of Kenneth M'Alpin, the Gaelic became the court language, and the people took the name of Scots; yet the subdued, composing the richest, as well as the most numerous part of his subjects, maintained their own tongue, which, in time, gained the ascendancy. The speech of their neighbours on the borders being nearly similar, contributed greatly towards this prevalence. Besides, in nine hundred and forty-five, Edmund, king of England, gave Cumberland

land to Malcolm the first, of Scotland, on condition of paying homage for it. From that time, the heir of the Scotish crown was always prince of Cumberland, and residing, as sovereign, in that country, adopted the language of the people, which, in those days, differed very little from his own.

On the murder of Duncan by M'Beth, in 1039, his immediate heir fled to England, where he remained seventeen years. There he learned the language of that court, which during the reign of Edward the Confessor, was French. On his return, in 1056, many Saxons accompanied him to Scotland, and still greater numbers flocked thither eleven years after, when William the Conqueror mounted the English throne. From that time, especially after the seat of government was removed to Edinburgh, the Gaelic ceased to be the court language, and was again confined to the Highlands, and western islands.

Though the modern English exceeds in

in modulation, richness, and variety of sound, the present Scotch dialect, yet some pains have been taken to meliorate and improve the latter. Among its benefactors may be numbered Thomas Lermon, or the *Rymour* of *Erceldom*, as he is called, being born at that village, near Melrose, in 1230. Barbour likewise flourished in the fourteenth century. James the first shewed a talent for poetry. Henry the Minstrel, Dunbar, Gawin Douglas, Sir David Lindsay, and Drummond, were all pleasing poets. Many pieces of these writers are still extant; and even several of the modern wits, such as Allan Ramsay, and the late immortal Burns, affect often the old Scotish dialect, esteeming it more expressive and emphatic.

Both the present Scotch and English, as hath been above observed, owe their origin to the Gothic, or Mæsogothic tongue. Ovid, who was banished into those parts, became so far acquainted with it, as to compose in it.

Ah pudet et Getico scripsi sermone libellum,
Structaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis.
Et placui, (gratare mihi) cœpique pœtæ
Inter inhumanos nomen habere getas.

In another of his elegies, he speaks of the similitude of the Gothic to the Greek language.

Exercent illi sociæ commercia linguæ,
Graiaque quod Getico victa loquela sono est.

From what he says, we may presume it was then a written tongue. In the regions of the north, it has taken the names of Norse, Islandic, Norwegian, and Scandinavian. Compositions of every species have made their appearance in these several dialects from time immemorial. In 1263, when Haco, king of Norway, lay on his deathbed, a cotemporary writer says, he had the Bible and Latin authors read to him; and then in the Norwegian, the lives of saints, and the chronicle of all the Norwegian kings, from Haldan the black. Besides, many animated specimens are quoted and preserved by their modern historians, that prove the propensity of these people to poetry.

poetry.* From the relics of ancient English poetry, published in three vols. and the number of old ballads also given in three vols. entitled the Minstrelsy of the Borders, it appears, that their descendants in this island inherit the same passion. In all countries, and in all ages, poetry seems congenial to the human race. Among the Egyptians, indeed, metre was originally used solely to preserve the laws of their princes, and sayings of their wise men.† These were sometimes inscribed in hieroglyphic characters, but more frequently committed to memory. Thales composed in this manner his system of natural philosophy. Pythagoras likewise dictated to his followers in verse.‡ Even as late as the days of Aristotle, the laws of the Agathirsi, a nation in Sarmatia, were all

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* See Saxo Grammat. Jo. Magnus. Torfœus, &c. passim: and Dr. Percy's five pieces of Runic poetry. See, likewise, Johnstone's Haco's expedition, translated from the Norse; Copenhagen, 1782, *p.* 128.

† Herodot. Diodor. Sicul. &c.

‡ "Jamblichius de vita Pythag. passim;" and particularly *lib.* i. *cap.* 15 *and* 16.

all delivered in verse. And from the fragments still remaining of the twelve tables, they appear to have consisted of short rythmic sentences.

From laws and morality, poetry made an easy digression to the celebration of heroes. We have Cicero's authority,* that anciently at Roman festivals, the virtues and exploits of their great men were sung. Among the Greeks in early times, the Bards distinguished themselves in this way; and it was customary to recite their compositions on public occasions. Fabricius † has enumerated seventy, whose names only have reached these days. As they existed before Homer, that celebrated author had the advantage of hearing their poems repeated, and it is not improbable he may be indebted to some of these for beauties, which we now admire as original.

The Persians had their magi, who pre-

 served

* Tusculan Questions, *lib.* iv. *No.* 3 *and* 4.

† See Bibliotheca Græca, *tom.* i.

served the remarkable events of former times, and, in war, went before to encourage the army in battle. If victorious, the song of triumph recorded the deeds of those who had fallen, and their praise animated the living to farther acts of valour. The same custom seems anciently to have prevailed among the Jews, as appears from the sublime song of Moses* and Deborah, preserved in Sacred Writ.

Traditional verses are, even at this day, a favourite amusement with the Mahometan nations. It is true, instead of recording the illustrious actions of their real heroes, they sing the fabled exploits of their romantic Buhalul; or the yet more ridiculous fictions of their prophet. A curious specimen of eastern religious poetry may be seen in Sir John Chardin's voyage to Persia.†

It was a practice with the Greeks to sing the hymn of battle, as they advanced to charge the enemy. The Germans did the same.

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* Exodus, xv. 1. Judges, v. † Chap. i.

same. "They have, says Tacitus,* poems "that are rehearsed in the field, and kindle "the soul into a flame. The spirit with "which these songs are vociferated, pre- "dicts the fortune of the approaching fight. "Nor is the manner of singing so much a "concert of voices, as of courage. To aid "the sound, and cause a certain broken "murmur, they lift their shields to their "mouths, that the voice, being rendered "full and deep, may swell by repercus- "sion." Among all the northern nations, the fate of battle depended not a little on the exhortations of the bards. To be reproached by them for cowardice, was reckoned the last degree of infamy.

We are told by Torfœus, a Norwegian historian, that in the time of a sea engagement, if near the coast, the Scalds were sometimes landed in a secure and convenient place; and ordered to mark every event distinctly, so as to be afterwards able to relate them in verse. The same author informs us, that

* De mor. Germ. cap. 3.

Olaus had, in a day of action, appointed strong guards for his three principal poets, after giving them instructions of the same kind.

The Welsh and Highland bards followed their patrons into the field, and were frequently of signal service. It was their business and custom, upon the eve of a battle, to harangue the army in a war-song composed on the occasion. This species of song was in the Gaelic called, *brosnuha cath,* that is to say, an inspiration to war. The poet addressed a part to every distinct tribe, shewing them the rewards of a glorious victory, and reminding them of the great actions performed by their ancestors. He insisted principally upon the love of fame; liberty, and their prince. As his exordium was always warm and energetic, he usually concluded with the same words.

The poet laureat in England, is a continuance of the bardic institute. His sole occupation now is, to address the king twice a year, in a flattering ode. Formerly he

he accompanied his master to the field, and celebrated those gallant men, who sacrificed their lives in defence of their country. In the year 1314, Edward the second of England invaded Scotland, at the head of a numerous army. Having reason to expect an absolute conquest of that kingdom, he ordered the prior of Scarborough, a celebrated rhymer, to attend him in that expedition. His design was to employ him in immortalizing his victory. But at Bannockburn, fortune declared for the enemy, and the prior was found among the immense number of prisoners which the Scots had made. The ransom demanded for his liberty was a poem on the battle, in praise of the conqueror.—He gave a specimen of his abilities. The four following lines are all that I have ever seen of the work.

Hic capit, hic rapit; hic teret, hic ferit; ecce dolores!
Vox tonat, æs sonat; hic ruit, hic luit; acto mado res est.
Hic secat, hic necat; hic docet, hic nocet; iste fugatur:
Hic latet, hic patet; hic premit, hic gemit; hic superatur.

As some may think these verses convey no

no bad representation of the tumult, hurry, and confusion of an engagement, I shall attempt a translation.

Now hacking and thwacking, now slashing and gashing, they close!
Swords batter, shields clatter; what wailing, what dealing of blows!
This rushing, this pushing; this bawling, this falling: this slain:
That hiding, that chiding; that dying; that flying amain.

When from undoubted proofs it appears that an art was so universally exercised, and by men of the first abilities in their days, there is reason to suppose, that in these compositions would be found some of superior excellence. This certainly was the case; but through the instability to which states and languages are subject, few have survived the wreck of time. The only examples of much antiquity, are found in the Old Testament. Greece affords some. Roman poetry is the production of a polished age. Those that can any way compare with the former, are the relics lately collected in the British dominions, among others, by the Rev. Mr. Evan Evans; and Mr. Edward Jones has given to the public several pieces of Welsh poetry and music,

music, as far back as the fifth century. Mr. Richard Llwyd has likewise favoured us with many poetical translations from the same quarter. It is to be hoped, others, following the laudable spirit of inquiry peculiar to the age, will add their endeavours to bring to light the contents of those MSS. both in verse and prose, which, notwithstanding the ravages of time, we are told to be still many.

Miss Brooks has given some translations from the Irish; and Mr. Bunting many of the old tunes of that country. By proper exertions, a great deal more of the same kind may still be snatched from oblivion. Had an earlier investigation been set on foot in the Highlands and Isles, a greater variety of traditional songs and MSS. would have been found. lying in a remote corner, guarded by inaccessible mountains, and possessing nothing that could tempt either avarice or conquest; the inhabitants for ages, continued tenaciously attached to the habits, manners, and language of their ancestors. Each of the Clans, of which they were

were composed, bore a different name. The residence of the Chieftain (which stood generally on the bank of a river, the side of a lake, or on the sea shore,) was a kind of palace, to which all were welcome. Thither they resorted in time of peace—thither they hastened at the sound of war.

In order to retain transactions, and cherish laudable sentiments, every principal personage had a bard, who recounted and sung the deeds of the family. The poet knew by heart the compositions of every person of any eminence that went before him. These specimens of genius served to create emulation and rouse exertion; while the wild majestic view of the scenery around; mountains, lakes, foaming streams, cataracts, and wide-extended heaths, could not fail to suggest comparisons to warm his fancy, and dignify his language.

The song of the bard was usually accompanied by some instrument. Music and poetry are twin sisters. Where one hath

hath been cultivated, and brought to perfection among a people, we are sure to find the other: both claim a title to inspiration; both offer equal difficulty to the composer. In this, however, they differ: poetry, depending on communicating ideas by words, may be locked up in an unknown tongue; but music, unfettered by language, is comprehended and relished by every ear capable of harmony. Thus, Ossian's poems lay burried in a corner, understood only by the natives; while the Scotch airs were received with raptures by all who heard them.

It is natural to suppose that the poetry of a nation equalled the excellence of its music, and that in the same manner the one has been handed down, so the other might descend to posterity, there being little more difficulty in remembering the words, than the tune composed to accompany them. If the natives had notes to retain the one, they were not ignorant of letters to preserve the others. From what has been already said, it is evident they had

had a knowledge of one, and probably of both, long before the days of Ossian.

But granting the Hebrideans had not the use of letters so early as is here contended, the knowledge of them would be introduced by Christianity, since that religion found its way among them soon after the days of Ossian. Nay, there is strong reason to believe, that some of that persuasion, whom persecution had driven beyond the pale of the Roman empire, had made their appearance there during the poet's life; for the Culdees, or the Sons of the Rock, to whom he addresses some of his poems, were, it is thought, of that denomination. Thus was opened an easy means of sending down his works in writing. We will grant that the catholic clergy, for uniformity sake, always performed the church office in Latin; yet, for the information of their flocks, they would not fail, as was practised in other countries, to translate the scriptures, and compose various other books of prayers and instructions in the vernacular tongue. It cannot be imagined, however,

however, that reading and writing could be very common in a corner of the world so remote, and among a people who cultivated none of the sciences but music and poetry, and these handed down chiefly by oral tradition. In countries where learning was more known, we find many, even of the first characters, extremely ignorant. Theodoric, king of Italy, could not sign the first letter of his name. And Eginhard, in his life of Charlemagne, says, that this emperor, though in other respects not unlearned, could not write; yet so celebrated were the Irish for literature, in his time, that he procured some men of eminence from that island, to encourage learning in France; and it is well known, that for many centuries the Picts were supplied with pastors from Icolmkill, a convent of monks, founded by Columba. A proof that the natives of those islands far exceeded in civilization and learning, the hordes of Danes that were in possession of the Lowlands. Even Pinkerton is obliged to own, that the Gaelic was then a written and cultivated language, while the Pictish was the speech

of

of ignorant barbarians;* and though the latter undoubtedly possessed letters, yet did they not produce an author before the thirteenth century. Pinkerton, who prides himself in being a descendant of these people, gives for reason, that "the Picts de-"spised holiness, and the learning then in "vogue; accordingly," says he, "there is "not one Pictish saint or writer upon re-"cord."—A singular reason to boast of their wisdom!!!

As the learning of the Hebrideans lay principally among the Ecclesiastics, the manuscripts, as in other countries, at that period, were mostly confined to Churches and Cloisters. The sanctity of these places could not, nevertheless, secure them against the shocks and revolutions to which every thing here below is subject. The Danes ransacked and burned Icolmkill, in the tenth century. When, in latter times, a change of religion took place in the Highlands and Islands, Churches and Monasteries,

* See vol. ii. *p.* 16.

ries, became peculiary obnoxious to the Reformers, and soon the whole of them were pillaged and demolished. Icolmkill itself, the chief repository of old papers, shared in the general ruin; and whatever it contained of antiquity or arts, was destroyed. This gave a fatal stab to Gaelic learning.

To add to the misfortune, the apostles of these innovations exclaimed vehemently against the Gaelic literati of that age, for being fonder of their native poetry, than theological investigations. One of these zealots, John Carswell, in the preface to his "*Foirm na Nurnuidheadh,*" or Forms of Prayer, printed in 1567, the first Gaelic book ever put into the press, evinces this. For the satisfaction of the reader, I shall quote a translation of the author's words, with the original below, for the amusement of the Gaelic scholar.*

"We, Gaels of Scotland and Ireland, suffer
"peculiar

* "Acht at a ni cheana is mor an leathtrom agas an uireas-
"bhuidh

" peculiar loss and inconvenience above any " other part of the world, in not having our lite- " rature and language printed, as other tribes of " men have: and we suffer a greater than all " other losses, in not having the holy Bible " printed in the Gaelic, as it is printed in Latin, " English, and many other tongues. And be- " sides, we have never had in print, the history " or antiquity, of our ancestors, although a " certain portion of the literature of the Gaels " of Scotland and Ireland, exists in manuscripts, " in the possession of bards and teachers, and " their patrons.

" Great is the labour of writing by the hand, " in comparison of printing, which shortens, " and speedily finishes whatever is done by it, " however great. And great is the blindness and " sinful

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" bhuidh ata riamh orainde gaoidill alban & eireand, tar an gcuid " eile don domhan, gan ar gcanamhna gaoidheilge do chur agcló " riamh mar ataid ag canamhna & adteangtha féin agcló ag gach " vile chinel dhaoine oile sa domhan, & ata vireasbhuidh is mó " iná gach vireasbuidh oraind, gan an Biobla naomhtha do " bheith agcló gaoidheilge againd, marta sé agcló laidne agas " bherla agas ingach teangaidh eile osin amach, agas fós gan " seanchus ar sean no ar sindsear do bheith mar an gcedna " agcló againd riamh, acht ge tá cuid eigin do tseanchus ghaoid- " heal alban agas eireand sgriobhtha aleabhruibh lámh, agas " adtamhlorgaibh

" sinful darkness, and ignorance, and perverse-
" ness of those who teach, and write, and com-
" pose in Gaelic, in exhibiting much more atten-
" tion, and showing more anxiety to preserve the
" vain, extravagant, false, and worldly histories
" of the Tuath-de-Danans and Milesians, and
" of the heroes of Fingal, the son of Cumhail,
" of the Fingalians, and of many others, which
" I shall not here mention nor name, nor at-
" tempt to examine; for the purpose of obtain-
" ing the vain rewards of the world themselves,
" than they display to write, and to teach, and
" to compose the sincere words of God, and the
" perfect way to truth: for the world loves false-
" hood more than the truth; and, as a proof of
" it, worldly sinful men will pay for falsehood,
" and will not listen to the truth, though they
" have it for nothing. A great portion of the
" darkness

" adtamhlorgaibh fileadh & ollamhan, agas asleachtaibh suadh.
" Is mor tsaothair sin re sgriobhadh do laimh, ag feachain an
" neithe buailtear sa chló araibrisge agas ar aithghiorra bhios gach
" én ni dhá mhed da chriochnughadh leis. Agas is mor an doille
" agas andorchadas peacaidh agas aineolais agas indtleachta dó
" lucht deachtaidh agas sgriobhtha agas chumhdaigh na gaoid-
" heilge, gurab mó is miân léo agas gurab mó ghnathuidheas
" siad eachtradha dimhaoineacha buaidhleartha bregacha saoghalta
" do cumadh ar thuathaibh dédhanond agas ar mhacaibh mileadh
" agas arna curadhaibh agas fhind mhac cumhaill gona fhianaibh
" agas

" darkness and ignorance of such persons, arises
" too, from the foresaid truths not being taught
" in good books, understood by all who speak
" the general language, or habitual Gaelic
" tongue.

" Already has the God of all power, and
" King of Mercies, and of Archangels, opened to
" us a path to the everlasting ways, by revealing
" that we are permitted to read, and to enforce
" the holy Scriptures among all people. And
" in like manner, the forms and substance of
" prayers, the dispensation of the sacraments,
" and the confession of the Christian religion,
" are transmitted to us by our Christian bre-
" thren of the church (chair) called Geneva.
" But with regard to Gaels of Scotland and Ire-
" land, certain persons have wished the good
" office

" agas ar mhóran eile nach airbhim agas nach indisim and
" so do chumhdach, agas do choimhleasughagh, do choind
" laudhuidheachta dimhaoinigh an traoghail dfaghail doibhfein,
" ína briathra disle Dé agas sliglithe foirfe na firinde do sgriob-
" hadh, agas do dheachtadh, agas do chumhdach. Oir is andsa
" leis an tsaoghal an bhreg go mor iná anfhirinde, da dhearb-
" hadh gurab fiór an abruim dobh eirid daóine saoghalta ceandach
" ar an mbreig agas ni hail léo an fhirinde do chluisdin an
" aisgidh. Cuid mhor eilé dar nainbfios agas dar naineolas an
" drongsa adubhramar romhaind, dith teagaisg fhirindigh ora-
" ind,

" office to the church of God, of translating
" this little book into the Gaelic language, un-
" derstood by the people, to be undertaken for
" their use; a circumstance which I rejoiced at.
" I myself could have wished not to have at-
" tempted the performance of this labour; but
" since it has not been done, as far as is con-
" sistent with my knowledge, I have undertaken,
" out of love to God and the church, a task
" which requires so much courage, and have
" exerted myself in it to the utmost, in hopes

E " that

" ind, agas leabhar maith neoch do thuigfedis cách go coitche-
" and as am briathruibh féin, agas as adteangaidh ghnathaidh
" ghaoideilge."

" Acht chena do fhosgail Dia na nuile chumhacht, agas Rí
" nan dul & na nárchaingeal róid agas slighthe suaithenta &
" doirsi dhúine anois, da chur ng ceill dúinn go bsuil ceadaighthe
" againd an sgriobhtuir diadha do léghadh agas do thuigsin agas
" do chur ag ceill do na poibleachaibh. Agas fós go bfuill foirm
" agas bridh na nurrnaidheadh agas modh freasdail na Sacra-
" muinteadh & foirceadal an chreidimh Crisdaidhe arna chur
" aneagar dúinn o na braithreachaibh Crisdaidhe dobbí sa chat-
" hraidh dara comhainm, Geneua. Acht ata ní cheana dabfaicind
" duine éigin do thaobh ghaoidheal Alban no Eireand, do
" ghebhadh do láimh an uireadsa do chuidiughadh do dhenamh
" re heagluis Dé, an leabhar beagsa do chur ag canamhain
" ghaoidilge asad tuigfedis cach é, do badh maith lium é. Agas
" ni rachaind féin aseilbh an tsaothairse do dhenamh. Agas
" onach bfuaras sin, & mátá sé and nach aithnidh dhamhsa é fós,
" do ghabhas féin do laimh ar grádh Dé agas na heagluise

" meisneach

" that God would assist me in my deficiency and " ignorance. I am also of opinion, that there " is no essential error or defect here, but what " is in the Latin or English print; unless there " be some want or error, in the opinion of those " who are learned in the Gaelic; a thing not of " material consequence with respect to the holy " Scriptures. And rare is the man who knows " the true orthography of the Gaelic, not in " Scotland only, but in Ireland also, unless it " be found among a few excellent and eloquent " bards,

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" meisneach is mó ina mhac faind, agas mo chumhachta do " dhenamh. In dochas go gcuideochadh Dhia lium im ui- " reasbhuidh agas im aineolas."

" Acht cheana. Saoilim fós nach bfuil imarcaidh no easb- " huidh andso acht mar tá sé agcló na laidne & anghaillberla. " Acht mura bfuil vireabhuidh no imarcaidh and do reir " dheachtaidh no cheirt na bfileadh ar an n'gaoidheilg. An ní " ar nach bfuil feidhm no foghmamh agan sgribhtuir dhiadha air, " agas is tearc neach aga bfuil ceart canamhna na gaoidheilge, " agas ni Nalbain amhain acht An eirind féin acht mara bfuil sé " ag beagan daois ealadhna mhaith re dán agas re seanchus agas " ag mèid eigin do mhacaibh maithe leighind agas ar na " adhbhrasin da bfaghadh saói re healadhain locht sgriobhtha no " deachtaidh sa leabhar bheagsa, gabhadh se mo leithsgelsa, óir " ni dhearrna mé saothar ná foghluim sa n'gaoidheilge, acht " amhain mar gach n'duine don pobal choitcheand. Acht cheana " do gheibhid na daoithe, agas na bromanaigh lochta imarcacha " is na neithibh bhios gan locht gan vireasbhuigh & leigidh siad " an égoir tharrsa gan an locht bhios go follas indte dfaicsin.

" Agas

" bards, who attend to poetry and history, and
" a certain part of the distinguished men of
" learning. And on this account, if a learned
" man find errors in the writing or diction of
" this little book, let him excuse me, for I do
" not arrogate to myself a more comprehensive
" acquaintance with the Gaelic than is possessed
" by the common run of people. Those bards
" and learned men, however, find many errors
" in things without error or deficiency; and
" they commit the injustice of passing over,
" without notice, the real faults that occur.
" The errors too mentioned by these people,
" exist, not in the work, but in themselves; and
" on this account, I shall not procure the as-
" sistance of that set, however numerous they
" may be; and neither shall I contend with
" them ignorantly, according to my own will or
" passions; and neither shall I give insult or of-

 " fence

" Agas ni hád sa cho ir bhios anlocht adeiridsean do bheith
" indte acht iondtasan féin ar an adhbharsin ni ghebha mé
" cumairce na buidhne sin, acht ge lionmhar iád, agas ni dhena
" mé cothughadh lé haimbfios do reir mo thoile no mo mhiana
" féin, agas, ni mó do bhéra mé tarcaisne no toibheim do neach
" oile ne ghebhas tuuth no formad mhé ris da n'denadh sé ni is
" fearr iná mar ta im chumhachtaibh féin da dhenamh: óir
" atáim ag admhail go bfuil sin sodhenta, acht cheana madhail
" lé dia so do dhenamh maitheasa no tarbha don eagluis agas
" mise do mharthain, do dhena mé tuilleadh saothair do chur na
" dhiadh so." &c.

" fence to any other person, nor feel spite or " envy, though he succeed much better than I " have been able to do; for I confess this is very " possible." Afterwards, by way of farther apology, he adds;* " I am very sure that men of " ingenuity and levity will sneer, and ridicule, " and treat with contempt, this little work, be- " cause poetical neatness is wanting to the ex- " pressions, and precision to the single words. " And if there is a deficiency in the orthogra- " phy or arrangement, or some letters substi-

" tuted

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* " Atá a shios agamsa, go n'dénaid daóine cúirialta édtroma, " sgige agas fochuidmheadh, agas fanumhad fan tsaótharm beag sa, " ar son gan snas fileadh do bheith ar na briathraibh, agas gan " chruás do bheith isna foclaibh, agas ma tá vireasbhuidh shoc- " lorachta no chearta scribhtha, nó litre aninadh litre sa leabharsa, " ní hingnadh sin do bheith amhluidh, ar son nach raibhe én sho- " cal gaoidheilge ag fear bhuailte an chló, acht dothuairim no do " bharamhail an chló do chur fiós. Agas atá fós a dheirbhshios " agam, go ndénaid na Papanaigh, agas go specialta na sean " Tsagairt scaiteacha, sgeth ascandaile am adhaigh féin, agas gurab " míchlu, agas masla mó luaidhidheacht vathadh arson mhoibre, " gedheadh nimesde sin, agas adeirim do réir póil, da n'denaind " toil na n'daóine nachar shearbhonta díleas do Chriosd mé, agas " fós ni meste an shírinde na daóithe dá dimoladh, agas mur tá " ruún agam cuidiughadh les na Criostaidhibh simplidhe ghébhas " mo dheaghthoil lé gean maith, agas nach gcuireand mhuireasb- " hadha an athais oram, mar fin don taoibh eile budh fadogh fúm, " cáineadh na pápanach dom bhrosnughadh. Do tsiór labhairt, " agas do tsiór scriobhadh na firinde, agas do tsiór nochtadh a " nurchoidesean ar fad mo bheathadh go himlan." &c.

" tuted in place of others in this book, we need
" not be surprised, for the man who printed the
" book had not one word of Gaelic, but printed
" as his fancy chanced to direct him. And well
" do I know, that the papists especially, and
" above all, the old satirical priests; will vomit
" malice against me, and that my work will procure
" me, from them, only scandal and reproach."

The author from whom these extracts are taken, died sometime in the year 1572. His memory is still preserved, by tradition, in the parish of Kilmartin, and in Lorn, where he chiefly resided. It is by no means popular. The bards, to whom he bore no very good will, made him, in return, the subject of their satirical verses and invectives, some of which are still preserved. Many proverbs, expressive of his rapacity and avarice, are still current in that country.

But however defective his moral conduct, the apprehensions he expresses for the manner in which his book would be received by the bards and old satirical priests, shews that those men were no strangers to literature, and had arrived at no small degree of elegance in their native tongue.

The

The apology he makes for defects in orthography puts it beyond a doubt, that the Gaelic was then a written language, which contained many popular compositions, and among other histories and poems, the actions of Fingal and his heroes.

The bigotry of the first presbyterian ministers, was not more friendly to the bards than Carswell. They might possibly think, that their legendary songs attached the people too much to their ancient usages. Besides, they all, at least till very lately, expressed the utmost dislike to poetry. Home had his gown stript off for writing the celebrated play of Douglas; nor is it long since the magistrates and minister of Greenock, before they admitted Mr. Wilson, (the author of the elegant poem, Clyde) to superintend the grammar school of that town, stipulated that he should abandon "the profane "and unprofitable art of poem-making."

It is happy that those who first introduced the light of Christianity into the western world, were not men of such nar-

row

row minds. Many of them patronised the arts and sciences. To the industry of the monks, whose labours drained morasses, and converted the most barren wastes into terrestrial paradises, we owe the preservation of what still remain of the Greek and Latin classics, the greater part of which would, otherwise, have been lost amidst the confusion and revolutions of the middle ages.

But though the religious frenzy of Knox's disciples hath deprived us of many Gaelic manuscripts, yet, as the Bardish profession continued to be encouraged in many families till the middle of the last century, some relics of ancient poetry escaped the general depredation. An English gentleman in the employment of government; who had resided a considerable time in the Highlands, giving an account of the country and people to a friend in London;* tells him, that being in the house of a chief who kept a bard, he ordered

* These letters were printed for S. Birt, Ave-Maria-lane, London, 1754, in two volumes. I presume they are now only in the possession of very few people.

dered him one day to sing a song. " The " bard readily obeyed; and with a hoarse " voice, and in a tune of few various notes, " began, as I was told, (continues the gen- " tleman) one of his own lyrics, and when " he had proceeded to the fourth or fifth " stanza, I perceived by the names of seve- " ral persons, glens, and mountains, which " I had known or heard before, that it was " an account of some clan battle. But on " his going on, the chief (who piques him- " self upon his school-learning) at some " particular passage, bade him cease, and " cried out to me, there's nothing like that " in Virgil or Homer."

The song, though informed and understood by the gentleman to be of the bard's own composition, most probably was some of Ossian's heroic poetry. For had it been merely an Ode, the Chief, who seems to have been a scholar, would never have compared a composition of that nature to the epic majesty of Homer and Virgil. And it was very possible for one, ignorant of the language, to mistake the names of persons and places.

Be

Be that as it may, this writer, though no way partial to the Highlanders, yet confesses, that among the lairds, he met with some, who surprised him with their good sense and polite behaviour. Of the lower class he likewise observes, that " they are " civil, when kindly used, and ever since I " have known the Highlands," says he, " I never doubted but the natives had their " share of natural understanding with the " rest of mankind."*

This

* These accounts differ widely from those given by Pinkerton, (see note p. 32.) who will not allow them, even at the present day, to be better than mere savages. Notwithstanding, on the authority of Dr. Blair, he admits the reality of one half of Ossian's poems, the principal reason why he rejects the rest is, that the preservation of them by tradition, " are ideas which could " not have occurred, but to a Celtic understanding." Nevertheless, speaking of the Gothic poetry, he tells us, " that it forms " one of the most singular features in the history of human " manners. Its familiar and constant use is so remote from " modern ideas, nay from the practice of any barbaric nation, " ancient or modern, that it seems to us almost incredible. Yet " nothing is more certain, than that to be taught the composition " of verse, and the use of arms, formed the whole Gothic edu- " cation. Verse was in such familiar use among them, that it " was common to accost a stranger in verse, who at once an- " swered in the same. The Scalds were only men more distin- " guished for this talent; and who from superiority in it, were " led

This writer says, the natives used the Irish characters, but at the same time observes, few could write in them. Their ignorance in this respect hath since increased: far from writing, not one in a thousand now can read them. A custom has prevailed for years, even in writing the Gaelic, of using the Roman letters. On this account,

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" led especially to practise it. But even to understand the ver-
" ses, it was requisite to have studied poetry much; for their
" metaphors are so violent and remote, and the construction so
" entirely changed, that a poem was required to be committed
" to memory, and often revolved, before it could be thoroughly
" understood. As a specimen of the figures, gold is called the
" dragon's bed, and the tears of Freya—poetry, the present or
" the drink of Odin—a combat, the bath of blood—the sea, the
" field of pirates—a ship, the horse of the waves; &c. &c.
" Hardly any idea was expressed in simple and direct terms.
" Hence the obscurity is prodigious; and to explain one ode of
" the Edda, Eric Hallsen, an Islandic poet of the last century,
" employed ten years, and was forced after all, to give it up in
" despair. Nor does this darkness arise from the metaphors
" only, but from the construction, which is so perverted, that
" the most perverted part of a Greek or Roman poet seems plain
" English to it." See Pinkerton, vol. i. p. 389.

If the preservation of Ossian's poems by tradition, " are
" ideas which could not have occurred but to a Celtic under-
" standing." What an intellect must he possess, who can suppose (as Pinkerton does) such difficult compositions, could for ages be handed down without letters.

count, the Highland Society, find a difficulty in procuring persons of sufficient knowledge to translate ancient manuscripts. Ever since the Bardic profession has ceased, the Gaelic has been on the decline. Men of property have quitted the country. If occasionally they visit their estates, educated, and perhaps born abroad, they cannot converse with their tenants. Thus the language floats in the breath of the ignorant, which from emigration, and introducing lowland shepherds, it in a few years must undergo a rapid change, or be entirely lost. O'Halloran complains of the Irish being equally neglected.

The habits of the ancient Highlanders widely differed from the present; they formerly resided at home. Though letters were confined to the clergy, bards, and persons of superior rank; yet the lower orders, unlike the mechanics and labourers of other countries, were not in general tied down to continued toil and hard drudgery. The occupation of tending cattle, gave many of them an opportunity of acquiring no inconsiderable

siderable knowledge in music and poetry. Mr. Martin, speaking of the inhabitants of Lewis, says, " several of both sexes have a " gift of poetry, and are able to form a " satire or panegyric, without the assist- " ance of any stronger liquor than water, to " raise their fancy." Their genius this way manifested itself in short, but natural and simple strains of grief and joy. Some rivalled the bards themselves in repeating ancient poems; and whenever circumstances allowed, a portion of their hours, especially during the long winter nights, were devoted to the song and the tale. The Rev. Mr. Smith, who has published translations of many Gaelic poems, accompanied by the originals, assures us; that near himself, in the parish of Klimnver, lived a person named M'Pheal, whom he has heard for weeks together, from five till ten o'clock at night, rehearse ancient poems, and many of them Ossian's. Two others, called M'Dugal and M'Neil, could entertain their hearers in the same manner, for a whole winter season. It was from persons of this description, undoubtedly, that M'Pherson recovered

recovered a great part of the works of Ossian.

The music of the Highlanders has been as much, if not more, admired than their poetry. Some of these tunes are very old, being originally composed for the harp, they have a soft, tender, elegiac cast, and are wonderfully expressive of love and grief. Yet, there are not wanting some of a sprightly and cheerful vein, the offspring of mirth, and the sport of fancy in the season of festivity. Others are of the choral kind, and sung when employed in rowing, reaping, fulling, &c. The time is adapted to the particular work going on, and is supposed to animate exertion, and alleviate labour. All are acquainted with the favourite airs played to reels that go by the name of Strathspey.

Martin, speaking of the natives of Sky, informs us, that there were several among them, who invented tunes, very taking in the south of Scotland and elsewhere. Some musicians have endeavoured to pass them for

for their own; but the style of them was so national, that they soon proved their own origin. Scotch tunes are frequently introduced on the English theatre.*

Giraldus, who flourished in the twelfth century, speaking of the Welsh music, says: "in musical modulations they sing "not (as every where else) uniformly, but "diversly, by modes and measures; so "that in a large company of singers, such "as is customary among these people, as "many heads as you see, so many verses "and variation of voices do you hear. *All* "*variations*

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* Dr. Armstrong, in his essays on various subjects; says of the Italian opera, "we run foolishly mad after this imported "music, while perhaps we have much better of our own. Most "of the modern Italian compositions only trifle with the ear. "The Welsh, the Scotch, and the Irish music reaches the heart. "The productions of our present Italian masters are thrummed "over for a season, because they are new, and forgotten for ever "afterwards, because, when you have heard them twenty times, "you find them still as insipid as at first. The music which "charmed these islands, perhaps long before the boasted revival "of this art in Italy, or rather Flanders, is as established as the "ancient classics; and those compositions, short and simple as "they are, never become threadbare, but give delight and rap-"ture every time they are heard."

" *variations finally coming under the sweet*
" *blandishment of B soft*, into *one union of*
" *voices and one agreement of instruments.* In
" the northern parts indeed of the *greater*
" Britain, beyond the Humber, and within
" the vicinity of York, the English, inha-
" biting those parts, *use* in the same sort of
" singing an *harmonic symphony;* with only
" *two diversities of tones*, and *two variations*
" *of voices* in modulation, one *in a humble*
" *key below the other,* but *this other in a higher*,
" soothing and delighting at once. Nor
" has *this* nation or *that* made the pecu-
" liarity for itself alone; but by ancient
" usage, and is converted now by length
" of time into nature itself. The mode
" has accordingly prevailed, and taken such
" deep root with both, that nothing is
" played with simplicity, but with a mul-
" tiplicity of parts, or with a couple of
" parts, as has been the usage of either.
" And what is very remarkable, *the very*
" *boys*, I might almost say infants, as soon
" as *they pass from crying to singing, observe*
" *the same manner.* Yet, as the English in
" general, but those of the northern parts

" only

" only use this method, I believe they have " contracted this peculiarity, as they have " their similarity of speaking, from the " Danes and Norwegians, who frequently " seized, and long possessed those parts of " the island."*

This account of Giraldus is curious, as it gives the state of music in his time, which seems to have arrived at a high degree of perfection. But though he admired the Irish much, yet he finishes his encomiums by confessing, that in the opinion of many, Scotland, even at that time, had not only equalled, but surpassed Ireland in musical skill. " Therefore," adds he, " those who would come at the fountain of " the art, must seek for it there."

The Welsh music has been for some years back on the decline. Jones tells us,† that the greatest part of the tunes which he has published, were taken down from hearing

* See his Cambria, *p.* 739.

† See his Bardic Museum, *vol.* ii.

ing them sung, or played by old harpers in north Wales; and reckons it a piece of great good fortune he did so, because most of them are since dead. He represents some of the Welsh music cheerful, some of a sentimental cast. Songs of the descriptive, imitative, and of the rural kind, are often heard round the hearths of the rustics. Epigrammatic stanzas, traditional love-sonnets, and pastorals, enhance the innocent delight of these people. Nor at their weddings, wakes, and rural evening assemblies, are wanting exhilarating lays.

In Ireland, where music was carried to a still higher degree of perfection,* most of the ancient songs are irreparably lost. Bunting, who, at a meeting of harpers pur-

* Powel, a Welsh historian owns, that "Gruffydh Ap Co-"nan brought over with him from Ireland, divers cunning mu-"sicians into Wales, who devised in a manner all the instru-"mental music that is now there used: as appeareth, as well "by the books written by the same, as also by the name of the "tunes and measures used among them to this date." The learned Selden corroborates this fact. *Notes on Drayt. Polyalb. Song.*

posely convened, has published all that could be collected, assures us, the specimens he has given, " are only the wreck " of better times." And afterwards remarks, that several of the airs were not taken from the harp, but from songsters, and could not even be adapted to that instrument.

For many years past, in the Highlands, the harp has given place to the bagpipe. The sound of the latter is better suited to war; and the music composed for that purpose, bolder and more martial. On this instrument, a skilful performer can describe the noise of a quarrel, the sounding to arms, the rage of a battle, and the broken discord of a flight; and conclude the whole with a solemn dirge, or lamentation for the slain.

The Highland Chiefs resided mostly at home. All the Clan, and even strangers, found there a welcome reception. The dwelling, though void of grandeur, and superb decorations, was provided with a numerous

numerous band of adherents. These passed their time in such amusements, and such exercises, as delighted an active warlike people. Large round stones were placed near the gates. The robust generally tried their skill in throwing them. Wrestling was another favourite pastime. There were declared champions of this profession, who went about, and challenged all that would not own their superiority. Leaping and running were other common diversions. If, to these manly exercises, we add the fatigues of hunting, it is plain they were sufficiently inured for a military life. And indeed, from their manners, habits, and the hardships they underwent, we may class them among the strongest, most active, and indefatigable men in the world.

From the barrenness of their mountains, and severity of their climate, it is hardly necessary to observe, that luxury was utterly unknown to them. They had no appetites of their own creation to satisfy. Happy in their ignorance of refinements, and by nature temperate, they rested con-

tented with a mere competency. When their fare proved coarse, it was made palatable by hunger and custom; when scanty, the deficiency was rendered easy by parsimony and patience. Their food was the natural produce of a wild, rugged, ill-cultivated country; such as its hills, forests, rivers, lakes, and seas supplied. Even when feasted by the chief, trunks of trees, covered with moss, served for seats, while large portions of beeves and deer, boiled or roasted, were placed before them on rough boards, or hurdles made of twigs wove together. During the repast, the piper played, and silence was observed. When all were satisfied, the *sligácrehin,* or drink shell, went round, while the bards celebrated those of their ancestors, most renowned, not only for military achievements, but for generosity and virtue.

These rude traces of ancient heroism and hospitality exist no longer. Of all the officers that formerly composed a Chieftain's household, the piper is the only one who still maintains his situation. The office

fice of bard hath ceased above half a century. Besides men of this profession, many others could repeat a number of ancient poems. But of these, few, or none, are now to be found. Almost a total change has taken place in the habits and manners of the Highlanders. Ever since the attempt made from that quarter, towards the middle of last century, to put the Stuart line on the British throne, government, to prevent any thing similar in future, dissolved the bonds that bound the people to their Chiefs; and, resolving to destroy all marks of distinction, prohibited the natives wearing their ancient dress. Schools for teaching English were established, in order to introduce that language, and to eradicate, if possible, the Gaelic.

But what proved most ruinous to the country was the introduction of sheep, in the place of black cattle. By this mode, one man, and two dogs, is sufficient to occupy a tract of land, that formerly maintained many families. Thousands, consequently, have emigrated, and more

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are daily following. Had those of landed property, like their ancestors, continued liberal, kind, and beneficent, the people, notwithstanding the laws enacted to disunite them, would have steadily remained attached; but the greedy, selfish, and oppressive conduct of their masters, hath at length alienated their affections. Accordingly, though the chiefs have increased their incomes, they have entirely lost their consequence; and some that could formerly, on an emergency, summons five or six hundred well appointed men, now cannot muster twenty. Thus, from persons equal in power to the first nobility, they are become as insignificant as private gentlemen, and in point of fortune yield to the generality of them.

From what has been said, it is plain, the Highlanders of this day differ widely from what they formerly were. They boast no longer the magnanimity and heroism of the Fingalians. Those were a free people, unawed by power, who lived under the mild government of paternal rulers. The present,

sent, an oppressed race, constitute a small portion of a powerful, rich, and extensive kingdom. This, however, argues nothing against their former consequence and importance. Nations of greater celebrity, have dwindled away to nothing. He who travels over modern Greece, will see the descendants of men once famous for bravery, science, and liberty, now cowardly, ignorant, and abject slaves.* It is true, the eye

* Not only countries famous in history, but others, the early annals of which were never recorded, have suffered similar degradations. We are told that Antonio de Leone e Gama, has made a collection of statues, idols, talismans, and manuscripts, on deer skins and cloth, remains of the history and arts of the ancient Mexicans. And from those, he has drawn proofs, in his memoirs, that the Mexicans had attained to distinguished skill even in algebra, astronomy, mechanics, and other sciences, to which they were hastily supposed to have been utter strangers. It seems, likewise, that North America was formerly possessed by a people of more knowledge and civilization than the present inhabitants. From the late discoveries of Monsieur Verandrier and his companions, who travelled westward from Montreal, in order to reach the south sea. When they had traversed many nations, of which no European had any knowledge before, they met with large tracts, every where covered with furrows, which had formerly been ploughed:—It is to be observed, that the people which now inhabit North America, never made use of horses oxen,

eye at every turn, will meet with piles of ruins, presenting broken pillars, the fine proportion and curious workmanship of which convince him of former taste and splendour. The Highlands and Western Isles never were, nor from their northern situations, ever can be places of affluence and commerce; yet, though they offer no vestiges of grand and elegant architecture, a person may perceive, by the ruins of many old castles, that the present race do not enjoy the comforts and magnificence of their predecessors, Some of them, particularly the vitrified edifices described by Williams, bear marks of a period more remote than the age of Fingal, or the invasion of the Romans. Which proves beyond contradiction, that the natives had then attained to a higher state of refinement than in after times.

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oxen, or ploughs. In several places they met on the plains, and in the woods, great pillars of stone, which to all appearance had been erected by human hands; they found one in which was fixed a smaller stone, measuring 12 inches by 5, on which was an inscription in unknown characters; this they brought to Canada, from thence it was sent to France, to the Count of Maurepas, then Secretary of State.

The early knowledge of these people in music and poetry being certain, there is no difficulty in admitting, as the bards would endeavour to excel, that one of superior genius, like Homer, might appear. The human mind was then as vigorous to the full as it is now. If we attentively peruse the compositions of those who have come down to us from remote antiquity, it will be found, they were penned by men of information, judgment, and parts. Those of Moses are universally admired. The book attributed to Job, a work, perhaps, of greater antiquity, is energetic, argumentative, and sublime. The Psalms of David, are interspersed with genuine poetry. Solomon's Proverbs and Book of Wisdom, shew an intimate acquaintance with human nature, life, and manners. The style of all the prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, hath in it an awful grandeur, that evinces the divine Spirit which inspired them.

These flourished not only long before Ossian, but most, if not all, before there were

were any writers in Greece. The early production, therefore, of Ossian's poems, is less to be wondered at, than that the sentiments they contain should in generosity and humanity, surpass not only Homer, but the refined and courtly Virgil. Though, in justice to the latter, we must observe, that as his heroes were cotemporary with those celebrated by the Grecian, he was obliged to colour after him. Both Homer and Ossian, it may be presumed, depicted faithfully the manners of the people they record. The Greeks seem to have arrived at a higher degree of refinement in the liberal arts; yet the Caledonians had certainly better notions of justice and humanity. However surprising this may appear, there is a plain natural reason for it. The inhabitants of Greece, having lost all ideas of the true God, had fallen into the utmost depravity. They became so blind as to worship for divinities, men of the most profligate and abandoned lives. Virtue with them, was but an imaginary name, whilst every species of iniquity was publicly practised. The poet had no better notions

tions than the rest of his countrymen—He could draw characters endowed with eloquence, military knowledge, and personal courage; but had no idea of those superior qualities of the mind that elevate the man, and assimilate him to his Maker. Of these Homer was ignorant; he was not sensible of their value. His pinnacle of greatness rose no higher, than to make his hero irresistible in battle. The man *in wisdom equal to a God*, attained to that reputation by low craft, imposition, and lies.

The religion of Ossian, as hath been observed, was of a more enlightened and purer nature. He owned a Supreme Being, an universal Lord, who rewarded the *good*, but punished the *bad*. The golden rule of not doing to another what he would not have another do to him, was implanted in his breast. He makes his warriors act up to this principle. Though brave, they are animated with a sense of propriety, honour, and justice. The violent passions of oppression, hatred, and ambition, are on all occasions reprobated. In every proceeding

and

and sentiment of Fingal, we see a magnanimity, a greatness of soul, which convey an high idea of human perfection. He had no ambition to increase his power, or enlarge his territory. He only makes war to redress injuries, to repel invaders, or to protect his allies. Whether the son may not have heightened the colouring, is not our business to determine; but he has set before us a personage more amiable and strictly virtuous, than any to be found in heathen antiquity.

Mr. Laing would likewise persuade us, that religion is absolutely essential to Epic poetry; and that the silence of Ossian's compositions in this respect, is a strong proof against their authenticity.

Homer, Virgil, and after them, succeeding poets, have admitted into the Epic, the intervention of the heathen gods. This might be the more excusable in the two first, because the heroes they celebrated were immediately descended, or nearly related, to some of these divinities. An interference,

terference, therefore, in what concerned their relatives, was nothing but natural. Yet, it must be owned, such interposition entirely destroys the pre-eminence of the chiefs; and the indecent quarrels of these litigious deities, in pursuit of their different views, only rendered ridiculous the heathen mythology.

The notions of the northern tribes, in general, were not so absurd. At the dispersion they carried with them the religion of Noah, and his immediate descendants.—Their only temples were woods, or groves, where they worshipped the supreme Lord of the universe. It is evident, the partial favour of such a Being, must always preponderate, and consequently detract from the merits of the conqueror. The Celtic bards,* therefore, kept heavenly agency

* In this respect, the practice of the Welsh bards conformed to the idea of the Scotch. For Mr. Jones tells us, they had laws which strictly forbade them introducing any fable, or perversion of truth, into their works; and, if they did so, they were severely punished with fines, long imprisonment, and loss of dignity. *Laws of prince Gruffyd ab Cynan.*

agency out of sight, and left the victory to be decided by the strength, prowess, and superiour address of the combatants.

Christianity is not more favourable to divine agency than Druidism. God's decrees are irresistible. To counteract them our poets have had recourse to witchcraft, enchantments, and hellish machinations.—These, however, are flimsy substitutes, and vanish at the interposition of Omnipotence. Dryden, who considered some kind of supernatural agency necessary to the Epic, to avoid the inefficacy of that just mentioned, has proposed a contest between the guardian angels of kingdoms; each of whom might be represented zealous for his particular charge, without any intended opposition to the purposes of the divine Will, of which all created minds must in part be ignorant. How so great a man would have succeeded in such a plan, had he, as he once intended, attempted the execution, we cannot say, but a very interesting, natural, and perfect heroic poem, may be written, without any invisible interference whatever,

whatever, as the compositions of Ossian prove.

Mr. Laing would likewise persuade us, that in Ossian's time, the Caledonians, having no other vessels but what were made of wickers, covered with hides, could not navigate the seas, nor pass into the different parts as described in the poems.

Ship-building, though as old, and probably more so, than the building of Noah's ark, has been many ages in arriving at its present perfection. That at the period we are speaking of, there were small craft made of wickers, covered with skins, we do not pretend to deny, since such have been in use till lately. But, Mr. Laing might as well endeavour to persuade a person ignorant of the maritime skill of this country, that because cock-boats ply in our rivers, and along our coasts, there are no larger vessels to transport us to the east and west Indies.

Many hundred years before the birth of Ossian,

Ossian, the Tyrians and Carthagenians, visited not only South Britain, but carried on a trade with the most northern parts of the island. Among other articles, Strabo mentions, in particular, bits made from the teeth of the Walrus, or sea horse. Now boats made of wickers covered with skins, were ill calculated to navigate the frozen seas where those animals are generally found,* and which require the strongest ships, built in these days. Their intercourse with the people just mentioned, supposing they were ignorant in these matters before, must have given them an insight into ship-building. But from whatever quarter they obtained the knowledge, the northern inhabitants have, time out of mind, been expert navigators. Their ingenuity in this art far surpasses any thing recorded of the Phœnicians, Carthagenians, Greeks, or Romans.

Observing

* They inhabit the coast of Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Hudson's Bay, &c. Are very fierce—if wounded in the water, they attempt to sink the boat, either by rising under it, or by striking their great teeth into the sides; which weigh sometimes twenty pounds each. Wickers covered with hide would be a sorry defence against such animals.

Observing that birds of passage crossed the German ocean twice annually, from the British isles to the continent; they shaped their course according as these birds took flight in their emigrations. If the voyage was to make discoveries, or to any distant parts, they took with them on board several birds; sometimes hawks, but generally ravens. When out of sight of land, if doubtful of what course they steered, or were desirous to reach the nearest coast, they let fly one of these birds, after mounting high in the air it made directly for the nearest land; which the sailors discerning, always directed their course the same way. We are told of one Flacco, a chief of the Orcades, who setting sail with a design to reach Iceland, having some of these pilots, as they used to call them; after proceeding a good way north, he dismissed one of his ravens, it flew back to the Orcades. Continuing still his course, he after a while let go another, this ascended aloft, but perceiving no land, returned again to the vessel. Still persisting, he turned out a third; this went off directly north, and

Flacco following, found land. The ships in which they made these excursions, were navigated both by sails and oars. The least carried twelve rowers, and as many fighting men, others an hundred, and some an hundred and fifty.

The use of the pilot-raven was common to the Danes and Norwegians, some of whose ships were very large. Their chronicles mention one of an extraordinary size belonging to Harold Harfagre, called the Dragon. Olave Triggueson possessed another named the Serpent, long and high, having thirty four banks of rowers.*

When Ingulph, in 874, settled in Iceland, he found there wooden crosses, and other little pieces of workmanship. These were left by fishermen from Ireland or the Hebrides, who were then catholics, and left these effects behind them.† A proof, that the natives of those islands were then daring adventurers by sea. We find the same people

* See Mallet, vol. i. p. 258. † Ibid, p. 270.

people early infesting the coasts of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. In 945, North Britain had such powerful fleets, that according to Matthew of Winchester, Edmund of England gave Cumbria to Malcolm of Scotland, on condition of defending his northern territories from the depredations of pirates.*

Ossian's omission of wolves and bears, is no argument, as Mr. L. asserts, of modern fabrication. A poet is not a Zoologist. It cannot be expected he should enumerate all the birds and beasts of the country. He only mentions those which answer his purpose. Neither Homer nor Virgil introduce the rhinoceros, or even the elephant, nor many other ferocious beasts, though inhabitants of the same regions that produce lions and tygers. The Highland bard seldom notices animals. His attention seems wholly occupied with hills, woods, floods, lakes, clouds, storms: the sun, moon, stars, and other magnificent objects of nature. He never compares his heroes in battle to beasts.

* Pinkerton, vol. i. p. 93.

Man, the most noble and intrepid of creatures, greatly loses, instead of gaining, by having his courage put in competition with the savage ferocity of a wolf or a bear.

In the *Literary Journal* for August 1804, is a spirited reply to Mr. Laing's dissertation against the authenticity of Ossian's poems. As many of his arguments are solid, and he possesses a knowledge of the Gael, the reader will excuse my quoting them here: taking at the same time the liberty of adding, and remarking, where we differ in opinion.

" Mr. Laing," he observes, " divides his de-
" tections," (so he terms his objections,) " into
" eight general heads, under which he introdu-
" ces numerous *minute detections*, a species of
" small sword thrusting of which he is very fond.
" We must beg the indulgence of our readers
" while we follow him through the mazes which
" he has traced: to ascertain such an important
" point in the history of literature, must be an
" object highly interesting to every reader.

" Mr. Laing's first detection is from *the Ro-*
" *man*

" *man history of Britain*, from which he deduces, " as *an historical fact, that there was not a High-* " *lander in Scotland of the present race, at the be-* " *ginning of the era assigned to Fingal.* The " proofs which he produces for this formidable " fact are, that some Irish historians fix the arri- " val of the *Scots* in this island, at fifty years " later than the era assigned to Fingal, and that " this account is supported by a number of con- " curring testimonies, among which are parti- " cularly pointed out, the indisputable opinions " of Whitaker and Pinkerton! whether the im- " maculate truth of the Irish (fabulous) histori- " ans, and the unimpeachable accuracy of Messrs. " Whitaker and Pinkerton, might not admit of " some question, we shall leave it to our readers " to decide:—but in the present instance they " may all be granted to have spoken the truth, " it may be allowed, that not a single Scot existed " in Great Britain in the time of Fingal; and " yet we shall state a few considerations which " induce us to believe, that the very same race " who now possess the country to the north of " the Grampians, were its possessors far beyond " any date assigned even by fabulous records. " That the *Gael* or *Caledonians* are the same race " who inhabited the Highlands of Scotland from " time immemorial, and that they are a race

" entirely

" entirely distinct from the Scots, appears from " the following considerations:—1. The Gael " and Scots differ from each other in language, " manners, customs, superstitions, prejudices, " and tradition. 2. Among the Scots, their " country is universally known by the name of " Scotland; they have no other name for their " own race than the Scots; Scot is a very gene- " ral proper name, and is often incorporated " with the name of places. 3. Among the Gael " on the other hand, the term *Scots* is utterly " unknown; they never call themselves by this " name, they never call their country Scotland, " Scot is never used as a proper name among the " pure Highlanders; nor does the appellation " of a single town, valley, or river, shew that it " was known to their language. But had they " originally been a branch of the same race with " the Scots, it is impossible that this should " have happened; it is impossible, that while a " tribe continued to inhabit the same country, " one half of it should have lost every vestige of " their original name, while the other retained it " in so many forms; and that it should have " been lost among that half which had least in- " tercourse with strangers, and which was pro- " verbially tenacious of ancient usages and ap- " pellations. Buchanan, believing the Scots and

" Gael

" Gael to be the same race, expresses his sur-
" prise at this strange circumstance, that one
" half of the nation should have completely
" forgotten its own name. 4. The Highlanders
" universally call themselves the Gael, their
" own particular province Gaeldoch: the king-
" dom of Scotland at large they know only by
" the name of Albin, or rather Albain, (Albion)
" and its inhabitants, by that of Albainich: the
" term of Albain is employed as a proper name,
" and it is often incorporated with the name of
" places, as Breadalbin, &c. 5. On the other
" hand, the word Albion, or Albain, is utterly
" unknown among the common people of the
" Scots, who have not learnt it from books, or
" from their southern neighbours. 6. The na-
" tural inference from these circumstances is,
" that the Gael and Scots are a distinct race;
" that the Gael are the same race who possessed
" Caledonia in the time of the Romans, and
" Albion in the time of the Greeks; and that
" the Scots are a race who arrived (from Ireland
" perhaps) at a later period, and gave their own
" name to the country they occupied. To in-
" quire who the Scots were, or when they ar-
" rived, is not necessary to our argument. It is
" probable they came about the era commonly
" assigned; as they occupied the counties which

" lay

" lay nearest England. Their name was natu-
" rally given by foreigners to the whole nor-
" thern part of the kingdom. These observa-
" tions, drawn from circumstances of which every
" one may ascertain the truth, will probably
" appear as convincing to the reader, as the
" unsupported conjectures of a few fabulous
" historians."

We cannot agree with this anonymous writer, that the Scots were a different race from the Gaels. Neither he nor any other can give a more rational account from whence these people came, than that already mentioned;* viz. that they were descendants of those who, at various times, emigrated to Ireland, and by reason of their restless wandering disposition, acquired the name of Scots. Driven from Ireland some years after the death of Fingal, and joining their countrymen, they subdued the Picts. As the appellation of Scot was a term of reproach, we cannot suppose the Highlanders would ever adopt it; and it was even long before the Lowlanders would submit to a name

* Vide page 31.

name given by foreigners to the whole kingdom.—But let us proceed.

" The other detections from the Roman his-
" tory contain such a tissue of gratuitous sup-
" positions and misrepretations, as we have rarely
" seen introduced into any controversy. Fingal
" is supposed to have fought with Caracalla, in
" the year 208; and because some Irish histo-
" rians fix the date of another battle, in which
" he was engaged, to near a century afterwards,
" this is to be looked on as an absurdity, which
" forms an undeniable detection of Ossian. Had
" these very accurate historians, (the redoubtable
" supporters of a millenium of fabulous kings)
" placed the two battles five centuries asunder,
" we should consider it much the same in regard
" to the decision of the question. The em-
" ployment of the name Caracalla, in the poems
" of Ossian, is another detection of the same
" class. *The absurdity*, says Mr. L. *was re-*
" *marked by Gibbon, that the Highland bard should*
" *describe the son of Severus by a nick-name, in-*
" *vented four years afterwards, (after the battle in*
" 208*) scarcely used by the Romans themselves, till*
" *after the death of that emperor, and seldom em-*
" *ployed by the most ancient historians.* Now with
" all due deference to Mr. Gibbon, be it re-
" marked,

" marked, that this battle took place in Fingal's
" youth, before he was married to the mother
" of Ossian; and that Ossian wrote his poems
" in his old age, after all his numerous relatives,
" and friends of his youth, had gone to the
" 'Halls of their fathers.' The name, Cara-
" calla, must therefore have been common over
" the whole Roman empire, long before the
" poem where it is mentioned was written; it
" had even been employed by historians who
" who look upon the use of a nick-name as in-
" consistent with the dignity of their writings,
" till after it has been long sanctioned by com-
" mon usage. The name Caracalla could, be-
" sides, be easily assimilated to the usual Gaelic
" appellations; and by the easy conversion
" which Ossian adopts, into Caracul, it was, ac-
" cording to the common usage of the Gaels,
" made to denote a personal quality, *carachiul*,
" *terrible eye.* The name Antonius was altoge-
" ther different from any thing in the Gaelic
" tongue, nor could any meaning be attached
" to it; and had not the familiar sound of Ca-
" racalla occurred, Ossian would only have dis-
" tinguished this prince by his well-known title,
" *Son of the King of the World.* Had Ossian
" been made to employ the term Antonius, it
" would have been indeed a detection."

We

We are sorry to find our author, while defending poems, the antiquity of which is denied, treating the traditions of the Irish with unbecoming contempt. The early history of that country we allow to be intricate, and involved in great obscurity. The ancient state of their literature, however, has a near connexion with our own. Like the Welsh and Highlanders, they, from remote antiquity, had bards, and cultivated music. The depredations of Giraldus, therefore, could not be so general, but many old manuscripts must have escaped his researches. The internal commotions and civil wars which convulsed those unhappy people for centuries back, must have proved more ruinous, in this respect, than the malevolence of that prelate. However, as a spirit of inquiry is now on foot, we may reasonably expect something that will assist us in exploring the dark labyrinths of former ages. Among those to whom public gratitude is due, must be considered the ingenious curate of Olveston, who, notwithstanding the illiberal taunts of the *Edinburgh Critical Journal*,

nal, has, in his Celtic researches, made many new and curious observations on the primitive formation of languages, and the first invention of letters. We should, likewise, acknowledge our obligation to O'Halloran, for his history of the early power and civilization of the Irish. Facts which the *Monthly Review* controverts, because Cæsar says, " the inhabitants of that island " differed little from the Britons." Besides that, there are many grounds to think the latter were once more polished, than when the Roman general came among them; he never visited Ireland, and those that gave the information stated, might possibly have deceived him. Still less reliance can be put in what Tacitus relates of the refugee, who told Agricola, that one legion, with some additional force, would be sufficient to conquer and retain the whole kingdom. What faith should be given to the assertions of such persons has lately been verified in the French emigrants, who, all along, have misrepresented the state of affairs in that country. But what argues strongly in favour of O'Halloran's pretensions

sions is, that the Romans, in the plentitude of their power, never attempted to subdue Ireland.

" The succeeding detections from the Ro-
" man history, (he should have rather said the
" old Irish and Scottish fables)* are still more
" unfair. Macpherson gives certain gratuitous
" interpretations to support the allusions in Os-
" sian: Mr. Laing undertakes to prove these in-
" terpretations to be absurd; and because the
" criticisms of Macpherson are absurd, the
" poems of Ossian must be a forgery! Fingal
" is said, in the poem of Carricthura, to be re-
" turned from battle. Macpherson, in a note,
" supposes it was from the Roman province:
" Mr. Laing is positive he must mean Valentia;
" and that the poem must be an ignorant for-
" gery of Macpherson's, because the province
" of Valentia did not then exist! In the same
" manner, Ossian mentions Caros as securing
" himself ' behind his gathered heap;' Mac-
" pherson supposes Caros to denote the usurper
" Carusius, and the ' gathered heap,' the wall
" of Agricola, which, he alleges, Carusius re-
" paired. Mr. Laing asserts that Agricola did not
" erect

* We are at a loss to know what fables are here alluded to.

" erect a wall, but merely a chain of forts, and
" that Carusius, consequently, did not repair
" this wall; Macpherson is, therefore, convicted
" of a blunder, and the poem, in consequence,
" is a forgery! It would not have required
" much candor to perceive, that Ossian's ' ga-
" ' thered heap' might allude to the entrench-
" ments of a camp, or indeed to any fortifica-
" tion, quite as well to the wall of Agricola.

" It would be abusing the patience of our
" readers to repeat over and over again, the
" same observations with regard to the other de-
" tections from Roman history, and the middle
" ages. They are all of the same stamp. Were
" Macpherson's accuracy as a critic of any con-
" sequence in the present question, we should
" endeavour to shew, that he is not always so
" absurd as Mr. Laing represents; but before
" we consider this as part of our discussion, our
" author must first shew us how Macpherson's
" blunders in criticism, come to be proofs that
" Ossian's poems are a forgery. The candor
" and modesty of Mr. Laing keep pace with
" each other on this occasion. When it suits
" his purpose, the authority of Solinus, who af-
" firms that no bees exist in Ireland, and who
" makes the Orkneys three in number, is pre-
" ferred to that of Tacitus, who must have had

" his

" his account of these Islands from the very " people employed in the expedition against " them. And because Tacitus does not men- " tion that any intercourse subsisted between the " north of Scotland and Scandinavia, or that the " vessels of the Highlanders were provided " with sails, Mr. Laing concludes, *that they never* " *passed into Scandinavia in a single ship*, nor in- " deed, had any vessels capable of carrying " them over; although it is allowed, on all " hands, that the Highlanders were in the con- " stant habit of passing from the main land to the " islands, and to the north of Ireland; and any " one acquainted with the tempestuous seas " which lash the northern coasts of Scotland " and Ireland, will be convinced, that a vessel, " capable of living in them, would have little " to fear in crossing over to the mouth of the " Baltic. Such are the *conclusive* detections from " the Roman history and middle ages.

" Another class of detections is from tradi- " tion; and here Mr. Laing thinks he has Ossian " fairly, because Mallet and Hume seem to be " of his opinion. Mallet may be perfectly cor- " rect, when he affirms, that the common class " of mankind never bestow a thought on any of " their progenitors beyond their grandfathers; " but had he been in the smallest degree ac-

" quainted

" quainted with the manners of the Highlanders
" of Scotland, he would have known, that the
" most common peasant of the pure and unmixed
" race, can always count at least six or seven
" generations back; that this knowledge of his
" ancestors is his proudest boast; and that the
" genealogy of the chieftains was, in particular,
" preserved with the most scrupulous venera-
" tion. Among such a people, were the poems
" which celebrated the most glorious actions of
" their ancestors, likely to be consigned to ne-
" glect?"

" Hume, indeed, alleges it to be utterly im-
" possible, that so many verses could have been
" preserved by oral tradition, during fifty gene-
" rations, among a rude and uncivilized people;
" and adds, in support of this opinion, his fa-
" mous dogma, *that where a supposition is so con-*
" *trary to common sense*, (in other words *common*
" *experience)* any positive evidence of *it ought ne-*
" *ver to be regarded.* Hume probably uttered
" this opinion before he was taught by Camp-
" bell's Essay on Miracles, that *positive evidence*
" is sufficient to prove the most positive dogma of
" the most subtle sophist, to be *positive nonsense.*
" It is remarkable, however, that such sagacious
" inquirers as Mr. Hume and Mr. Laing should
" not have perceived, that the rudeness of the
" Highlanders.

" Highlanders, which they so much insist upon,
" is the strongest circumstance against their own
" argument. If songs, recounting the exploits
" of their ancestors, can be preserved for a long
" course of years in any nation, surely it is
" among a people who account warlike glory the
" only object of ambition; who look upon their
" ancestors with a veneration approaching to
" idolatry; who have no intercourse with stran-
" gers—no change of objects to awaken various
" passions, and distract their attention; who, in
" the intervals of repose, recite their heroic
" songs, as the highest enjoyment of their con-
" vivial hours; who have no other means of pre-
" serving these highly esteemed songs but by
" memory; who have a particular class of the
" nation, their bards, set apart for this express
" purpose, and valued according to the number
" of those songs which they can recite.—Such
" were the Highlanders of Scotland, down to
" the time of the union with England; and yet
" Mr. Laing thinks it utterly absurd to suppose,
" that so many verses could have been preserved
" by memory among *them*, when we meet with
" no such thing, *even* in the civilized world,
" among people whose attention is distracted by
" a thousand cares and a thousand pleasures, and
" who are regardless of committing to memory

" what they can at any time have recourse to " in a printed book. But he should have been " more sure of facts, before he asserted that such " stretches of memory had not occurred in the " civilized world. He should have known, that " previous to the invention of printing, it was " usual to commit to memory, not only many " thousand verses, but even long prose dis- " courses, of celebrated orators. The Scaligers, " even in modern times, were not the only Ger- " man scholars who could repeat the *Eneid* and " *Iliad*. Even in regard to the *Psalms*, of which " Mr. Laing asserts a very small portion has " ever been committed to memory, he should " have extended his inquiry to the old Scottish " dissenters, and among them he would have " found many, who could not only repeat the " *Psalms* of *David*, but a large portion of the " *Old* and *New Testament*.

Mrs. Grant informs us,* persons still living, remember a woman in Strathspey, who, though never taught to read, could recite the whole book of *Psalms* in the Gaelic translation, merely by hearing it read to her by others. If a class of men, who

* Page 356.

who made it the study of their whole lives to retain poems, aided by the modulation of numbers, could not recite as many as this old woman could *psalms*, they must have been stupid indeed.

Here the anonymous writer proves; that Ossian's compositions might have come down merely by oral tradition. When to the force of his arguments we add, that the natives were all along in possession of letters, neither the incredulous Hume, nor any other who allows the classics to be genuine remains of antiquity, will deny the possibility of these poems reaching to our times.

" Macpherson observes, that the diction of " the poems of Ossian, is obsolete, and widely " different from more recent compositions; Mr. " Laing, from the mutability of language, infers, " that their preservation in an obsolete dialect " was impossible, as people would naturally, for " old words, substitute those more familiar to " them; and that the Gaelic language has un- " dergone great changes, he considers as proved, " *by its difference from the present Irish, a page of*

" *which, a few centuries old, is confessedly unin-*
" *telligible to the people at present.* It is a pity
" that Mr. Laing's ignorance should in this man-
" ner mislead his ingenuity; for had he been
" capable of comparing the Irish and Gaelic lan-
" guages, he would have discovered, that the
" former differs from the latter, chiefly in hav-
" ing a greater admixture of Saxon words and
" idioms; and from the fact, that the Irish of two
" centuries ago, approaches much nearer to the
" present Gaelic, than to the present Irish, he
" would have been led to conclude, that the
" Gaelic has remained uncorrupted, while the
" Irish has undergone a great change. With
" regard to the language of Ossian being obso-
" lete, it in fact appears so only in those parts of
" the Highlands, where the original language is
" most corrupted; and of these Macpherson was
" a native, where the language is spoken in the
" greatest purity, and where the poems of Ossian
" are chiefly preserved, they are perfectly well
" understood by every one; and the superior
" purity of the diction tends only to make a
" deeper impression on the memories of the peo-
" ple.—So much for this argument, which Mr.
" Laing assures us *is alone sufficient to confute their*
" *authenticity.*"

The observations just made by the anonymous

nymous author, are strictly true. The greater the intercourse there is between the natives of a country and strangers, the greater will be the changes introduced into its dialect. If conquered, then the language suffers according to the number of strangers that settle among the subdued. The immense shoals of barbarians who poured into Italy, and remained there after the decline of the Roman empire, quite changed the Latin tongue, though long brought to perfection, and enriched with innumerable books, and transformed it gradually into the present Italian. Almost every language in Europe hath, from similar causes, in a more or less degree, undergone the same metamorphosis. The English itself, is a farrago of as many tongues as there have been invaders. So that from the ancient British, it is become a mixture of Saxon, Teutonic, Dutch, Danish, Norman, and modern French, interlarded with the Latin and Greek. The Welsh, indeed, continuing an unmixed people, kept their original speech. So have the inhabitants of the Highlands and Hebrides. Unconquered,

quered, and free from the influx of strangers, their language for ages has continued the same. It has, to be sure, admitted of technical terms, the names of utensils, and inventions, not known in former times; and for which, consequently, the natives had no appellations. Some new words may likewise have been imported by interlopers, and persons returning after a long residence in foreign parts. But slight innovations of this nature could never affect a language so much as to make the poetry of Ossian unintelligible to his countrymen. The compositions of Homer, and their early writers, were understood in Greece long after it became a Roman province: and why should their old favourite bard be unintelligible to the Highlanders and Hebrideans of these days?

The number of English that settled in Ireland since they conquered the country, have not only rooted out the native tongue from many counties, but moreover greatly corrupted the dialect in others, where it is still retained. From this, in a great measure,

sure, proceeds the difference between the Irish and Scotch Gaelic; which, nevertheless, is not so great, but that the natives easily comprehend each other. An evident proof they were some time back one people. Whether the Highlanders emigrated originally from Ireland or not, about which there are various opinions, is nothing to the question now in dispute: the name and formation of their letters are the same. If, therefore, manuscripts of Ossian's poems are to be found in Ireland, as hath been confidently asserted, it is plain they have come down by written, as well as oral tradition.

" But, perhaps, (continues the anonymous " author) the most remarkable of all his (Mr. " Laing's) assertions, is an affirmation, that *there* " *never was a Druid in Scotland.* For the refu- " tation of this assertion, it is not necessary to " have recourse to the legends of fabulous his- " torians: the name Druid, is of Celtic origin; " the traditional knowledge of that order is uni- " versal, and the Druidical temples, the circle " of large stones placed on end, with a flat one " in the middle, every where meet the traveller

" in

" in his excursions through the Highlands. We " need only refer Mr. Laing to a very perfect " one, which is to be seen in the pleasure " grounds of Lord Breadalbane, at Taymouth. " Against this direct evidence our author's only " ground for his assertion is, that Tacitus makes " no express mention of the Druids in the wars " of Galgacus.

" *No sooner*, says Mr. Laing, *were the trans-* " *lations published, than the traditional existence of* " *the poems disappeared.* If they had continued " to be repeated as formerly, after the revolu- " tion which had taken place in the manners " and customs of the Highlanders during the " last fifty years, it would, indeed, have been " matter of wonder. Since the rebellion of " 1745, the power of the chieftains has been at " an end; the feasts of the clan, at which the " heroic songs were recited with enthusiasm, are " now only known from tradition; with their " ancient dress and side arms, which the people " were obliged to give up, their high pride in " warlike glory was almost totally lost; the " few remaining bards, who, after being no " longer in request at the halls of the chiefs, " used to wander from house to house, reciting " their poems as an evening amusement, have, " at length, become extinct; the winter evenings

" of

" of the peasantry, formerly enlivened by the " songs and tales of the times of old, are now " spent in reading the printed poems of latter " bards, or the methodistical pamphlets indus- " triously circulated among them. The cares " of traffic, and various occupations, now dis- " tract their attention; and the ideas of better- " ing their own condition, have begun entirely " to supplant the remembrance of their ances- " tors. Are not these sudden changes sufficient " to account for the practice of committing Os- " sian's poems to memory suddenly falling into " disuse?

" But Mr. Laing asserts, that *of the nu-* " *merous attestations of those who had heard, or* " *remembered to have known the originals, none, it* " *is observable, ever presumed to assert, that they* " *possessed in writing, much less that they had ori-* " *ginally furnished, a single fragment of the poems* " *which Macpherson had translated.* We are at " a loss to determine whether our author has " ever read Dr. Blair's appendix to the disser- " tation on Ossian; or whether he wilfully mis- " represents it. When any one peruses the " respectable list of clergymen and gentlemen " mentioned in that appendix, and compares the " facts they attest with this affirmation of Mr. " Laing; what degree of credit will he account

" due

" due to the fidelity of our historian? That
" they had assisted Mr. Macpherson in collect-
" ing the poems, that they had furnished him
" with particular poems, which they mention;
" that they had looked over his manuscripts in
" both languages, while he was occupied in the
" translation; that they had been accustomed to
" hear these poems repeated from their infancy;
" that they themselves could repeat several of
" them, and that they never entertained the least
" suspicion of a forgery, are facts distinctly at-
" tested by one or more respectable characters,
" who allow Dr. Blair to give their names to the
" public. Nay more, five clergymen attest, that
" they had taken the printed copy of Macpher-
" son's translation in their hands, while persons,
" whose *names and places of abode they mention*,
" repeated, in the original, the poems they had
" received from tradition; and that the transla-
" tion and these agreed exactly, except in a few
" variations, which must ever happen in oral
" tradition. Mr. Laing did well to express his
" contempt of *positive* evidence, before he made
" an assertion so directly contradicted by such a
" cloud of witnesses. But we beg leave to refer
" our readers to Dr. Blair's appendix for farther
" satisfaction on this head. The collection of
" documents at present published by the High-
" land Society of Scotland, will probably pro-
" duce

" duce many more attestations; although it is
" not to be expected, that even these will appear
" satisfactory to those who account no positive
" evidence of any avail, in opposition to their
" own theories.

" We cannot help remarking a very charac-
" teristic trait in Mr. Laing's method of dispu-
" tation. He passes, in silence, over the nu-
" merous attestations we have mentioned, and
" under this head, only brings forward the tes-
" timonies of a few English and Irish travellers;
" a schoolmaster, who died while a young man;
" and the author of a *Gaelic Dictionary*, whose
" gross blunders are laughed at by every Gaelic
" scholar. These persons, he tells us, only found
" a few trifling poems, and therefore no more
" were to be found! Whether such testimonies are
" to be preferred to those learned and respectable
" men, living on the spot, and conversant with
" the language and antiquities, we leave our
" readers to judge. As to Dr. Johnson, we all
" know the spirit with which he set forward in
" his inquiries; he knew nothing of the lan-
" guage or the people; his researches were con-
" fined to the inns where he put up, or to the
" families where he visited, most of whom were
" habituated to English manners and customs.
" Were any foreigner, distrustful of the works

" ascribed

" ascribed to our great bards being genuine, to
" proceed along the great roads of England,
" and endeavour to procure attestations to the
" authenticity of the *Paradise Lost*, or *Shakes-*
" *pear's plays*, at every inn where he alighted,
" we are afraid he, as well as Dr. Johnson,
" would retain his doubts at the end of his jour-
" ney. That such inquirers as Mr. Laing men-
" tions should have found poems, would, cer-
" tainly have been matter of surprize; but as
" soon as those who were alone competent to
" give information on the subject, were applied
" to, these treasures of antiquity were brought
" to light, and without hesitation attested.

" With regard to manuscripts, it is remarka-
" ble, that a circumstance which has so little to
" do with the controversy; should be appealed
" to by Mr. Laing, as something so very deci-
" sive. We have already shewn that the poems
" were familiar in the Highlands of Scotland,
" previous to Macpherson's time; that certain
" gentlemen assisted him in making the collec-
" tion; that many were found who could repeat
" particular portions of the poems, that had
" furnished Macpherson with certain parts of
" what he published, and that all these facts
" have been attested by respectable persons, who
" give their names to the public. After all this,

" what

" what is it to the question of their authenticity,
" whether any manuscript of them, two centuries
" old, was ever in existence; whether the pride
" or vanity of Macpherson made him conceal
" such manuscripts; or whether their ap-
" pearance had induced those who had seen
" them, to affix to them an earlier date than a
" more minute examination would have justified?
" Surely, Macpherson, if he had thought it
" necessary, could have been at no loss to get a
" few manuscripts forged and smoaked?—a fraud
" which has been so often and so easily prac-
" tised.

" We are now come to that argument which
" Mr. Laing had already expatiated upon in the
" third volume of his history, and which he
" reckoned altogether decisive, independent of
" any other. From the manners and customs
" of the age in which Ossian is said to have lived,
" he accounts it impossible, that the poems attri-
" buted to him could have been then produced.
" Mr. Laing's assertion, with regard to the hor-
" rible barbarity of the Highlanders in the third
" century, are indeed, sufficiently positive: but
" had he taken the trouble to inquire into the
" ancient manners and state of that people, he
" would not have been put to the miserable
" shift, of quoting what Dr. Johnson in his tour

" says

" says of their manners a hundred years ago, to " prove his own assertions with regard to their " situation fourteen hundred years previous to " that period.* The impossibility, that the " sentiments and manners described in Ossian's " poems, could have belonged to the Highlan- " ders of the third century, Mr. Laing deduces, " from his ideas of the manners which corres- " pond to the state of society in which they " were then placed; and from the absurdity of " supposing, that the people should have be- " come more barbarous as they approached to " civilization.

" In picturing out the Highlanders of the " third century, we conceive our author had " before his eyes a very different state of man- " ners, from that which actually existed among " them. If there be any state of society, pre- " vious to the introduction of artificial manners, " in which the good principles of the human " heart are more frequently called into action " than the bad, it is in the pastoral state. Those " harassing fears of want, which perpetually " haunt a nation subsisting wholly by the chase, " have now given place to the ideas of property, " and

* See vol. iii. *p.* 45.

" and the comforts of a more fixed abode. As " individuals have now more leisure, love, the " most prominent passion of the human heart, " begins to unfold itself in all its violence. As " the patriarchal government still prevails, and " distinct ideas of separate property have not " yet been introduced among the individuals of " the same family; filial respect, and the endear- " ing attachments of kindred, are their prevailing " and habitual sentiments. The effect of these " humanizing sentiments, is seen even in their " contests with the neighbouring tribes; and as " the love of fame, rather than the gratification " of avarice or ambition, is their chief motive for " the combat, the vanquished captive is usually " dismissed. In such a state of society, a re- " markable humanity of manners has ever been " found to prevail, unless some particular cir- " cumstance of a contrary tendency occurred. " Such was the golden age, the Saturnian reign " of the ancients; such was the condition of the " peaceable, amorous, and poetical Arcadians; " such were the manners of the Jewish patriarchs, " and of the Gael in the days of Ossian.

" The general outlines of manners in all " these instances were the same; although they " were all modified by peculiar circumstances. " The Gael had already been assailed amidst

" their

" their forests and pasturages by the all-grasp-
" ing ambition of the Romans; and the chiefs of
" families had learnt to unite under some re-
" nowned leader for their common defence.
" Their love of military glory had been roused
" to the highest pitch, by their frequent com-
" bats against foreign invaders. In such a state
" of things, when we reflect that the expressions
" of the strong passions which animated them,
" were, from the poverty of language, conveyed
" in bold and figurative terms, that a particular
" class of the nation, the bards, were continually
" employed in giving force and melody to their
" heroic narratives; that Ossian himself, a prince,
" a renowned warrior, was a still more renowned
" poet; that in his latter years, after all his race,
" all the companions of his youth had fallen, his
" only consolation was to recite his sorrows, and
" his former scenes of pleasure to his harp.
" When we consider all these circumstances,
" surely it is in such a state of society, and from
" such a poet, that we may expect (to use the
" words of Mr. Laing) *an uniform heroism, unknown*
" *to barbarians; a gallantry which chivalry never in-*
" *spired; a humanity which refinement has never*
" *equalled; and a cultivated sublime poetry.*

" If we allow for the effects of these peculiar
" circumstances in which the Gael were placed,
" we

" we shall find, that the general tone of their
" manners corresponded in a striking degree
" with those of the Jewish patriarchs, a remark-
" able humanity and generosity of sentiments, a
" particular warmth in all the attachments of
" kindred, and a refined delicacy in the inter-
" course of the sexes, are characteristic of both.
" What hero and heroine of romance, could be
" more chaste, more delicate and constant in
" their attachment, than Isaac and Rebecca? but
" Mr. Laing thinks the existence of such refined
" sentiments, in such a state of society, so ut-
" terly impossible, that no positive evidence
" should be received in support of it; we may
" therefore soon expect another ingenious dis-
" sertation, to prove that the writings of Moses
" are also a forgery of the nineteenth century.

" In opposition, however, to this account of
" the Gael, Mr. Laing may still adhere to his
" favourite Solinus, and join to him the autho-
" rities of Herodian and St. Jerome. He may
" overlook the circumstance, that these histori-
" ans, who had never visited Britain, seem desi-
" rous to make their countrymen stare, by their
" strange reports of an unknown nation of bar-
" barians; and that the Saint, who was an eye-
" witness, viewed their depravity through the

" mirror of religious fanaticism.* He may then " assert confidently as usual, that the ancient " Highlanders went stark-naked among the " Grampian snows, probably for the pretty va- " nity of exhibiting their painted skins: that " they murdered promiscuously for the sake of " murder; that they drank the blood of their " enemies, and had a particular relish for human " flesh; and that they enjoyed all their women " in common. If people would stare at such " assertions, he may again repeat his candid " salvo—that these facts look indeed as if they " were a little exaggerated, but that still his au- " thorities are authors of such undoubted vera- " city, that there must have been some founda- " tion for these stories, or they would not have " advanced them.

" The absurdity which Mr. Laing so triumph- " phantly insists upon, in the idea that the High- " landers should have become more barbarous " as they approached to civilization, would pro- " bably have disappeared, had he been anxious " to come at the truth, rather than to establish " a theory.

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* Granting St. Jerome was mistaken as to this historical fact; we see no reason for asserting, he saw the subject *through the mirror of religious fanaticism.*

" a theory. Are there not in history, numerous
" instances of nations, who had attained to a
" great degree of humanity, gentleness, and re-
" finement, becoming even suddenly rude and
" ferocious to a great degree, in consequence of
" strong excitements being presented to the
" worst principles of their nature? Will not Mr.
" Laing allow that the nation, among whom the
" gallant and polite court of Edward the third
" could arise, where the ideas of freedom and
" equal rights had began to blossom, where men
" of wit and learning, a Chaucer, and many
" other poets flourished—will he not allow, that
" this nation had become more barbarous during
" the struggles of York and Lancaster, when
" literature was utterly extinguished, and the
" whole kingdom presented one scene of rapine
" and bloodshed? Would not the horrid atroci-
" ties produced by the relentless ambition of a
" Sylla and Marius, have made an industrious,
" temperate patriotic Roman of the age of Cin-
" cinnatus shudder? Have we not in our own
" times seen a people, who boasted of being the
" most polite and refined that the world ever
" produced, suddenly hurried into the most
" rude and savage acts, by the strong excite-
" ments presented to their avarice, ambition, and
" revenge?

" Human nature is in all ages the same; and " the fiercer passions of the Gael, like those of " other nations, were called into action by pow- " erful incentives. After the death of Ossian, " the subordinate chiefs, who had quietly sub- " mitted to the power and renown of his house, " no longer owned a common superior; and be- " coming conscious of security, which their " mountains and morasses afforded them against " foreign invaders, they turned their arms " against each other. As the objects of desire " increased, and the ideas of exclusive property " became more distinct, the causes of quarrel " multiplied; and the ties of the patriarchal go- " vernment becoming weaker as the tribes mul- " tiplied, their chiefs were soon obliged to be- " come petty tyrants for the preservation of their " authority. The princes who successively ob- " tained the dominion of the lowlands, found it " impossible to reduce those mountaineers either " to subjection or tranquillity; it therefore be- " came their policy to foment the dissensions of " the Clans, in order to prevent their turbulence " from turning on themselves. Hence the " deadly feuds, and mutual barbarities of the " Highlanders. Was there nothing in these " circumstances to render the Gael more ferocio- " ous than in the days of Ossian? Surely if any " remembrances of the simple and humane man-

" ners

" ners of the pastoral state, could be retained
" among a people so constantly agitated by all
" the angry passions, it must have been their
" heroic songs, which contained so many cir-
" cumstances corresponding to the present state
" of their minds. Some traits, however, of the
" manners of the Gael in the days of Ossian,
" have survived all their subsequent revolutions.
" The patriarchal government continued to exist,
" although imperfectly, till their final subjuga-
" tion in the last century: the warm attachment
" of kindred, and the general kindliness of dis-
" position resulting from that form of govern-
" ment, are still eminently conspicuous among
" them; an Englishman immediately perceives
" his arrival among the Celtic part of the nation,
" by the superior politeness, and more active
" courtesy of the peasantry. Their favourite
" national melodies are uncommonly plaintive
" and melancholy; and their expressions of grief,
" love, &c. are impassioned and figurative, and
" pronounced with a degree of feeling, that to a
" Lowlander appears ridiculous.

" Such is the boasted argument which Mr.
" Laing considers as the bulwark of his opinions,
" and which he reckons so decisive against the
" authenticity of Ossian, that no positive evi-
" dence in support of it ought to be attended to.

" The

" The length to which we have carried our dis-
" cussion on this main argument, compels us
" to take a very cursory view of his detections of
" lesser note. In regard to the omission of reli-
" gious machinery, it is a fact well known to
" every Highland scholar, that the name of the
" Supreme Being has in no instance been intro-
" duced by the Gael into profane poetry. Like
" the Greeks and Romans, they talked freely of
" their inferior deities, the ghosts of their fathers;
" but the name of the great and Supreme Being
" was ever mentioned with awe and veneration.
" As to the omission of particular customs, it is
" sufficient to recollect, that in the days of Os-
" sian, the objects of desire, and the consequent
" peculiarities of customs and manners were few.
" Homer, like the other Greeks, was garrulous,
" sportive, and attentive to minute occurrences;
" Ossian, like his countrymen, was grave, taciturn,
" and moved only by the more powerful impres-
" sions. For a farther elucidation of the ancient
" manners and customs of the Gael, we beg leave
" to refer our readers to Dr. Blair's dissertation
" and appendix.

" Mr. Laing's next *copious and curious source*
" *of detection is the constant imitation of the Clas-*
" *sics, scriptures, and such temporary publications*
" *as were then in vogue.* To enter into an exami-
" nation

" nation in detail of the instances of imitation
" which our author adduces, would exceed our
" limits, and be equally tedious and useless. We
" shall therefore only state the general impression
" which they have left on our minds. That
" Macpherson, in the short space in which he
" was employed in this work, should have scra-
" ped together such a quantity of unconnected
" passages, and modelled them into so many
" regular poems; that he should, by a hint taken
" from one author, and a word from another,
" have wrought up such uniform and beautiful
" descriptions, as that of the desert Balclutha
" for example; and that in the transcribing from
" a variety of authors of different countries and
" ages, he should never once have, by oversight,
" introduced an idea or an expression inconsis-
" tent with a particular stage in the manners of
" his own country—are facts to us utterly incre-
" dible, however easy of belief they may appear
" to our author, when they favour his own side
" of the argument."

I must at the same time here observe, that it is but doing Mr. Laing justice to say, he has shewn himself an extensive reader, and minute observer, in the numerous parallels brought from ancient, as well as modern

dern authors; which he would persuade us Macpherson had in view in composing the poems attributed to Ossian. Many of the most obvious, it is true, have been pointed out by Dr. Blair and others, not for the invidious purposes Mr. Laing has in view, but as curious instances of men embellishing their narrations with images arising from the same objects. The surprise will, however, be in a great measure removed, if we suppose, that the Highland bard might very possibly have received some assistance from the writings of the Greek and Roman poets. I do not pretend, or think, he himself ever read their works, but some notion of them might have been communicated to him from the information of others. The Greeks, as well as the Phœnicians, we are informed, had an early intercourse with Great Britain and Ireland. It has been already shewn, that the natives of these countries had arrived at a higher degree of learning, at that early period, than is generally supposed. The Druids possessed the Greek letters, and probably knew that language. Abaris, who was sent ambassador to Athens,

Athens, spoke it in great purity; and so might many more, though that celebrated character is only recorded. If so, they could not be entirely ignorant of Grecian poetry.

No doubt can be entertained with regard to that of the Romans. For, if from their frequent intercourse with the Celts, the wits of that nation admired their bards, it is next to an impossibility these should not know the poetical compositions of the Italians. What puts the matter beyond contradiction is, that a full century before Ossian was born, Agricola, while stationed in Britain, erected temples, theatres, and stately buildings; caused the sons of the nobility to learn the Latin language; be instructed in the liberal arts; and brought them, by degrees, to imitate the Roman modes of dress and living. So that in a short time they assumed the polished manners of their conquerors, and even vied with them in pomp and refinements.

Supposing then Ossian himself had no access

access to the Latin poets, it is possible, nay probable, he was acquainted with the compositions of the Celtic bards, who had an opportunity of knowing and being improved by their writings. We are certain that the inhabitants of Britain assisted the Gauls against Cæsar; when, for so doing, that general invaded this island, Eder, who then reigned in Scotland, is said to have assisted his neighbours against the common enemy. Now it is impossible that men, who held so close an intercourse, could be ignorant of each other's poetical productions; and if they were not, a genius like Ossian, would not fail of profiting by such communication.

But even without such helps, there is nothing strange or impossible in two writers using similar comparisons in their descriptions. Thus, "like as the lion grow-
"leth, even the young lion, over his prey:
"though the whole company of shepherds
"be called together against him: at their
"voice he will not be terrified, nor at their
"tumult will he be humbled."*

Bishop

* Isaiah, *chap.* xxxi. 4.

Bishop Lowth, whose translation I here use, observes, this comparison is exactly in the spirit and manner, and very nearly approaching to the expression of Homer.

" As the bold lion, mountain-bred, now
" long famished, with courage and with
" hunger stung, attempts the thronged
" fold: him nought appalls, though dogs
" and armed shepherds stand in guard col-
" lected; he nathless undaunted springs
" o'er the high fence, and rends the trem-
" bling prey."

The learned bishop brings a number of similar instances where the prophet resembles the Greek and Latin poets. I mention this, because Mr. Laing pretends, there is no semblance whatever between the sacred and profane writers of antiquity.

In the beginning of the sixth book of Fingal, Ossian thus addresses an old deceased friend. " Be thy soul blest, O Car-
" ril, in the midst of thy eddying winds.
" O that thou would'st come to my hall,
" when

" when I am alone by night! I hear often
" thy light hand on my harp; when it
" hangs on the distant wall, and the feeble
" sound touches my ear, why dost not thou
" speak to me in any grief, and tell when
" I shall behold my friends?"

Did Kotzebue bear this passage in mind, when raving of his dead wife, he exclaims, " When I am thus alone, my Frederica " seems with me. I talk to her as though " she were present, and pour out to her all " my heart. Ah! perhaps she may be " really present!—Perhaps she hovers " about me as my guardian angel! Ah, " why does she not appear for one mo- " ment, to give assurance to her existence!"

Fingal asks, " Whose fame is in that " dark-green tomb! Four stones, with their " heads of moss, stand there, and mark " the narrow house of death."—He is answered, " Silent is Lamderg in this tomb, " and Ullin, king of swords."

In like manner, in one of the Welsh poems,

poems, translated by Mr. Jones, inquiry is made; "To whom belongs the square "grave, with the four stones on its cor- "ners?—It is the grave of Madoc, the "fierce knight."

Numberless other passages, equally similar in thought and expression, might be produced, from authors entirely ignorant of each other's writings; besides, many of Mr. Laing's pretended similitudes, are so faint, and far fetched, as to be scarcely perceptible. Any ingenious person, by picking, as he does occasionally, a few words from different places, and tacking them together, might form innumerable such imitations. A thinking man must perceive, that men's actions, ideas, modes of composition, are, ever have been, and always will continue the same: for, as the wise man says, "The thing that hath been, is that "which shall be done: and there is no new "thing under the sun."

The book of nature is equally obvious and familiar to all mankind. It affords the very

very same idea to the contemplative mind. Supposing the works of Homer had reached us, a poet describing the onset of two armies, would naturally compare them to waves dashing against the shores, or the violence of two streams foaming and mixing together. The cries of the combatants could not but remind him of the noise occasioned by these boisterous elements, or the roaring sound that a strong tempestuous wind makes in the trees of a forest.

" One of those sources of detection on which " Mr. Laing peculiarly insists," says my anonymous assistant, " and where his reasonings seem " particularly plausible, is the imitations he has " discovered in the address to the sun, in the " poem of Carthon. That the majestic appear- " ance of the sun in the firmament should have " excited similar ideas in the minds of Milton " and Ossian; and that these two poets, being " both old and blind, should have expressed " their feelings in nearly the same terms—might " perhaps be believed without any great stretch " of credulity. Our author, however, having " discovered these similarities, urges it as an ir- " resistible proof, that Macpherson pilfered the

" leading

" leading ideas from Milton, and completed his " address with other plagiarisms, which Mr. " Laing adduces. We are happy on this occa- " sion to be able to produce the original of this " address, taken down from the mouths of per- " sons who had it from their ancestors, and who " had committed it to memory before Macpher- " son was in existence. A copy of this address " in Gaelic was taken down from the mouth of " an old man in Glenlyon (a glen in the nor- " thern part of Perthshire) by the Rev. James " Macdiarmid of Weem, in the year 1765. " Another copy of it was taken down by a Cap- " tain Morris, from the mouth of an old man in " the Isle of Sky, in the year 1763; and was by " Captain Morris given to the Rev. Alexander " Irvine of Ranoch. Both the old men had " committed this poem to memory in their " younger years. These two copies, taken down " by persons unknown to each other, from the " mouths of persons equally unacquainted, and " living at a great distance of place, we have " compared, and found to correspond almost " exactly: we give the one taken down by Cap- " tain Morris, without the least variation, to the " public. The beauty and melody of the ver- " sification appear unequalled to those acquainted " with the language. As our readers may feel a " curiosity to compare the original copy with the

" translation

" translation of Macpherson, we have given a " version of the Gaelic *word for word*; the beauty " of the original is thus greatly obscured, but the " fidelity of that translator will appear conspi- " cuous :—

" O Ussa fèin a shiùbhlas suas,
" Cruinn mar làn-sciath chruaidh nan Triath,
" Cia as ata do dhearsa gun ghruaim?
" Do sholus atha buan, a Ghrian!
" Thig thu mach na d'aille thrèin
" A's faluichidh na Rèill an triall;
" Theid Gealach gun tuar ón spèur
" 'G a cleath fèin fuidh stuaigh san iar.
" Tha thussa na d' astar amhàin,
" Co tha dàna bhi na d'choir?
" Tuitidh darag bho'n chruaich aird,
" Tuitidh carn fui' aois a's scòrr;
" Traighidh a's lionaigh an cuan,
" Caillear shuas an Rè san speùr;
" Thussa a d'aon a chaoi fui' bhuaigh
" An eibhneas do sholuis fèin!
" Nuair a dhubhas mu'n domhan stoirm,
" Le Torruinn borb a's Dealan beàrth,
" Seallaidh tu na d'àille o'n toirm,
" Fiamh ghàire am bruaillean nan speùr.
" Dhomhsa tha do sholus faoin,
" 'S nach faic mi a chaoi do ghnùis!
" Scaoilidh cùl is òr-bhui ciabh
" Air aghaidh nan nial sann ear.
" No 'n uair a critheas thu ann sann iar
" Aig do dhorsaibh ciar air lear.
" 'S math gum bheil thu 's mise fèin
" Ann àm gu treun, 's gun f heùm ann àm,

" Ar

" Ar bliadhnai a tearna o'n spèur,
" A siubhal le chèile gu'n ceann.
" Biodh eibhneas ort fèin, A Ghriann,
" 'S tu neartmhor, a Thriath, na d'òige!
" 'S dorcha mi-thaitneach an aois,
" Mar sholus faoin an Rè gun chail,
" 'S i seàltuinn o neoil air an raon,
" 'S an liath-cheò air thaobh nan carn,
" An ossag o thuath air an rèth,
" Air fear-siubhail fui' bheùd 's e mall."

" O thou, who walkest above, round as the " full-orbed hard shield of the mighty! whence " is thy brightness without frown, thy light that " is lasting, O Sun! Thou comest forth in thy " powerful beauty, and the stars hide their course: " the moon departeth from the heavens, shrouding " herself under a cloud in the west. Thou art " alone in thy course: who is daring enough to " come nigh thee? The oak shall fall from the " lofty mountain's side; cairns and rocks shall " sink under the power of age; the ocean shall " ebb and flow: the moon shall be lost above in " the heavens! Thou alone for ever in thy " strength, rejoicest in thy own light! When the " storm darkens round the world, with thunder " terrible and lightening fierce, thou lookest in " thy beauty from the loud noise, smiling in the " disorder of the skies. But to me thy light is " vain! never shall I see thy countenance, either

" when thou spreadest thy golden locks on the face
" of the cloud in the east, or when thou trem-
" blest in the west at the dusky doors of the
" ocean. It is well, thou, like me, art at one
" season powerful, at another feeble; our years,
" descending from the sky, travel together to
" their end. Rejoice then, O Sun, while thou
" art strong in thy youth, thou mighty one!
" dark and unlovely is age, like the vain light of
" the feeble moon, when she looks through a
" cloud on the field; while the blue mists are on
" the sides of the rocks, and the blast from the
" north on the plain, (beating) on the wounded
" traveller that faintly walks along."

" From this literal translation we perceive,
" that what is called the eastern style of poetry,
" belongs also to the Celtic poetry, and is not an
" ingredient introduced by Macpherson.* We
" find,

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* His translation of the above passage. " O thou that
" rollest above, round as the shield of my fathers! whence are
" thy beams, O Sun! thy everlasting light? Thou comest forth
" in thy awful beauty; the stars hide themselves in the sky;
" the moon, cold, and pale, sinks in the western wave. But
" thou thyself movest alone: who can be a companion in thy
" course! the oaks of the mountains fall: the mountains them-
" selves decay with years; the ocean shrinks and grows again:
" the moon herself is lost in heaven; but thou art for ever the
" same;

" find, that he, like all other translators, has " omitted several particularising circumstances " which add greatly to the beauty of the original; " and that he has occasionally slurred over some " passages which he found obscure. As this ad- " dress (perhaps the most beautiful of Ossian's " poems) is attested by respectable witnesses still " alive, to have been in the mouths of the com- " mon people long before the birth of Macpher- " son, Mr. Laing has on this occasion to find out " some other imitator. From this striking in- " stance, one may judge of the other imitations " which his ingenuity has discovered.

" Would our limits permit, we might here " entertain our readers with some curious speci- " mens of Mr. Laing's ingenuity in tracing imi-

 " tations.

" same; rejoicing in the brightness of thy course. When the " world is dark with tempests; when thunder rolls, and light- " ning flies; thou lookest in thy beauty, from the clouds, and " laughest at the storm. But to Ossian, thou lookest in vain; " for he beholds thy beams no more; whether thy yellow hair " flows on the eastern clouds, or thou tremblest at the gates of " the west. But thou art perhaps, like me, for a season, thy " years will have an end. Thou shalt sleep in thy clouds, " careless of the voice of the morning. Exult then, O Sun, in " the strength of thy youth! age is dark and unlovely; it is like " the glimmering light of the moon when it shines through " broken clouds, and the mist is on the hills; the blast of the " north is on the plain, the traveller shrinks in the midst of his " journey."

" tations. If not only an idea, but even a single " word is similar, the whole passage is without " further ceremony pressed into the service. " The following is one of our author's examples: " Fingal thus addresses his chiefs; " Gaul, take " thy terrible sword. Fergus, *bend* thy *crooked* " *bow*. Throw, Fillan, thy *lance* to heaven." In " the poem of Hardiknute, we have the follow- " ing lines.

" Robin of Rothsay, *bend thy bow*,
" Thy arrow shoot *sae liel*;—
" Braed Thomas take ye but your *lance*,
" Ye need not weapon's mair.

" In this example Mr. Laing affirms that the " words of Hardiknute *are almost literally repeated* " *by Fingal*. If a direct and literal plagiarism " is to be deduced from such a common expres- " sion as *bend thy bow*, and the use of such a fa- " miliar word as *lance*, any author may be rea- " dily proved a direct imitator of any other: " nor should we find it difficult to shew, by this " rule, that Mr. Laing's history was almost " wholly cribbed, not only from Hume, Robert- " son, &c. but even from the Pilgrim's Progress, " and Jack the Giant Killer.

" Mr. Laing's next source of detections, is " from

" from an examination of the specimen of the " Gaelic originals published by Macpherson. " Here we have one of the most curious attempts " we remember to have met with in the annals " of criticism. Mr. Laing takes upon him to " decide peremptorily on the etymologies and " structure of a language, with which he owns " himself entirely unacquainted; and by the " decisions which his profound knowledge shall " here lead him to form, he modestly requires " his reader to judge of the authenticity of poems " written in a language, of which he does not " pretend to understand a single word.

" No subject has been more fruitful of foolish " theories and wild conjectures than the tracing " of etymologies. Every language possesses a " number of words, which both in sound and " sense resemble those of some other language. " The only rational account of this coincidence " is, that there was some original language from " which all the others took their rise; although " they became afterwards wonderfully diversified " by various circumstances, in which the dif- " ferent tribes of mankind were placed. If this " be the case, how shall we decide, particularly " in regard to the names and qualities of natural " objects, which terms were derived from this " original

" original language, and which were afterwards " adopted.

" But whatever Mr. Laing's opinion may be " on this subject, he allows, what it is impos- " sible he should deny, that the Celtic is fully " as ancient as any other language from which " it could be supposed to borrow any of its " terms. When this is the case, and when the " different languages have, for a long series of " years, been spoken by adjoining nations, no- " thing can be more preposterous than an attempt " to shew, when any particular word was trans- " ferred from one language to the other. Some " trifling occurrence, which no critical sagacity " can ever discover, may have caused a word to " be adopted almost as early in another language, " as in that to which it owed its origin. Allow- " ing all the words which our author produces, " to have been originally either Roman or Teu- " tonic, as an intercourse subsisted between these " nations and the Celts, long before the days of " Ossian: these words might, by innumerable " accidents, have been transferred from the for- " mer languages to the latter, long before the pe- " riod of that poet."

" It is equally impossible, where languages " are

" are of equal antiquity, to decide with which " the words common to both have originated. " Mr. Laing assures us, that *the Celtic has pecu-* " *liar names for the objects of nature, while the* " *terms of art, or of abstract ideas, are all derived* " *from the Latin;* and from this assertion he de- " duces the conclusion, that the latter must have " been borrowed from the more civilized Ro- " mans. The assertion which our author here " makes, is such as might naturally be expected " from one entirely ignorant of the Celtic lan- " guage; but the confidence with which he holds " up these blunders of ignorance to the public " as arguments, is certainly something scarcely to " be expected. Instead of all the abstract terms " in the Gaelic language being the same with " those in the Latin, the truth is, that few or " none of those which occur in Ossian, bear the " least resemblance to the latter. What ingenuity " can trace a Roman origin in such terms as *Gu* " *bràth*, for ever, *neart*, strength, *craoidhachd*, reli- " gion, *urram*, obeisance, *olc*, evil, *maitheas*, " goodness, *glioceas*, wisdom, *naoimhachd*, holi- " ness, &c.

" The same may be said of the few terms of " art, which could possibly be in use among a na- " tion living in the pastoral state, and none of a " different description occur in Ossian. Mr.

" Laing

" Laing indeed assures us, that the Gael knew " no art at that period, not even that of manu- " facturing their own arms; but he will proba- " bly find it difficult to point out a Teutonic ori- " gin for such words as *ceaird*, a trade, *ceard*, a " worker in iron or other metals; *ceardich*, a smi- " thy or workshop for iron; *goabhain*, a smith.— " The manufacturing of their arms was, indeed, " their principal trade; and hence it appears to " have acquired among them the title of the " trade.

" Our author, however, after having made " this distinction, finds it quite impossible to " procure examples in support of his theory: " his *detections*, therefore, are in almost every " instance, drawn, not from abstract terms, or " terms of art, but from words denoting *objects* " *of nature*, and which he himself had owned, " not only *might have been*, but actually *were* of " Celtic origin. Such are *talla*, a hall; *speur*, " the sky; *dorus*, a door; *feachda*, forces; *focal*, " a word. Surely Mr. Laing does not contend, " that the Gael had neitheir halls, skies, doors, " forces, nor even words, previous to their ac- " quaintance with the Romans and Saxons. If " they had no terms of their own for these very " common ideas, we conceive they must have " borrowed them from their neighbours, long

" before

" before the days of Ossian. As to the terms " for gold, silver, &c. which may have origi- " nated with the Romans or Teutonic nations, " Mr. Laing does not give a shadow of a reason " to shew they were transferred into the Gaelic " language at a later period than the third cen- " tury.

" Would our limits permit, we might amuse " our readers with several curious blunders, into " which Mr. Laing is led by his rage for etymo- " logies, and his ignorance of the language he " attempts to criticise. The word *cop*, or *coppan*, " is undoubtedly the same with *cup*, and is there- " fore common to the Celtic and Saxon. In the " Saxon, it is applied solely to the artificial ves- " sel employed in drinking; nor can it be " traced in that language to any object of " nature, which it might have denoted be- " fore art produced the vessel. In the Cel- " tic, however, *cop* was originally employed " to denote these familiar natural objects, the " bubbles formed on water or any other liquid: " it was afterwards employed to signify the con- " vex bosses, or studs of a shield, which in form " exactly resembled those bubbles; and when at " a later period art produced spherical drinking " cups, the word was naturally, for the same " reason, transferred to them. In which of these

" languages

" languages then is *cop* or *cup*, a radical word ? " Mr. Laing, however, was ignorant of these cir- " cumstances, and therefore he looks upon it as " a whim of Macpherson's, to apply the term to " the bosses of a shield; and draws an argument " of forgery from its not being applied in Ossian " to spherical drinking cups, which were not " then invented.

" In the word *cliadh*, Mr. Laing has been as " widely misled by his ignorance of the Gaelic " language. In the first place, he has con- " founded *cliadh* and *cliabh*, two words of a very " different signification. *Cliadh* signifies a hur- " dle, a plain piece of wicker work, on which it " was usual to thicken raw cloths, and which " were occasionally employed to shut the en- " trance of sheep cots. A *harrow* is in the same " manner called *cliadh chiadhtha*, from its being " formed of cross bars, like chequer work. This " is the word which Mr. Laing assures us *is lite- " rally the same with the Latin Cista, both in original " meaning and metaphor*. The word *cliabh*, for " which he evidently mistook the other, denotes " any thing made of twigs, bent in a circular form, " such as a basket; and, from the similar bending " of the ribs, the human breast. This metaphor " our author looks upon as exactly the same " with that by which the words *chest* and *trunk*

" are

" are applied to the same part, although the lat-
" ter evidently alludes to the close and hollow
" form of the breast. The etymological resem-
" blance between *cliabh* and *cista*, we acknowledge
" ourselves unable to discover.

" But the most whimsical of Mr. Laing's
" etymologies is his derivation of the word *long*,
" a ship. *Long*, in the Celtic tongue, denotes
" any species of wooden habitation, and hence
" was applied to houses in general, and to those
" barks in which the Gael so frequently crossed
" their numerous lakes. Mr. Laing, however,
" was ignorant of these circumstances; but his
" ingenuity is as usual, at no loss to supply the
" deficiencies of his knowledge. According to
" him, the Gael, who had once or twice, per-
" haps, seen the *longæ naves* of the Romans, and
" somewhat oftener heard of them, were so
" struck, not with the Latin *name* for a ship, but
" with the *epithet* applied to that name, that they
" began to use it for a variety of objects which
" had no resemblance whatever to the *naves*
" *longæ*. Not only their slender barks, but their
" wooden huts, their castles, and habitations of
" every sort, became *longs!*

" But Mr. Laing not only pretends to decide
" Gaelic etymologies, but even to judge of the
" melodies

" melodies of their cadences, and the structure " of their verses. From these he concludes, " that it is the easiest thing in the world to com- " pose in Gaelic verse; that no art whatever is " discoverable in the specimens published by " Macpherson; and that they only exhibit " *the* " *same rythm or cadence with his measured prose.*"— " In answer to this, it is only necessary to ob- " serve, that in the specimens published by Mac- " pherson, Gaelic scholars recognise the same " melodies and the same structure to which they " have ever been accustomed; and surely they " are at least as good judges in this case, as the " learned ears of Mr. Laing. Rhyme was used " among the Gael, merely as an aid to the me- " mory: it was not necessary that the rhyming " words should be found at the end of each line; " if the same sound recurred in any emphatic " syllable of two lines, it was thought sufficient. " Mr. Laing thinks this a very easy mode of com- " position; but if he would try his talents on " blank verse, he would probably discover the " difficulty of giving melody and force to num- " bers, even where no rhyme at all is re- " quired."

Here I shall take leave of the anonymous defender of Ossian; but in so doing, I must

I must acknowledge the great service he has rendered in this controversy, particularly in the Gaelic part, where I own myself deficient, though little more so, it seems, than my antagonist, whose pretensions to the knowledge of that language, the unknown author has sufficiently exposed.—This task performed, there appears no great difficulty in answering the rest of Mr. Laing's arguments.

After having, as already mentioned, accused Macpherson of stealing many of his most brilliant passages from others, he at last represents him as pilfering from himself; for his great sagacity has found out, that Fingal is little more than a transcript of the Highlander, a poem, said to be finished by Macpherson, when only twenty-one years of age. The plot of one, he tells us, exhibits the very outlines of the other. And to prove the assertion, he contrasts several passages of the poems, that have, according to him, a near resemblance.

The two poems so far agree, that in both

both, one prince invades the territories of another. This is a circumstance found in every history or epic story. Lewis the ninth of France invading Egypt, proved at first successful; but, conquered at last, is taken prisoner, and only released on paying a ransom. Regulus, after a series of victories, is likewise overcome and made captive, but sent back by the Carthaginians with a view to obtain peace. Æneas landed in Italy; subdued his rival Turnus in single combat, and would have spared his life, had he not beheld the belt of his friend, whom he had killed, upon him. In the Highlander, Seveno, king of Norway, makes a descent upon Scotland, and is opposed by Indulph, the king of that country. The two most prominent figures in the poem are young Alpin and Haco. The former conquers the latter, but, out of admiration of his bravery, permits him to return home with the remainder of his followers. Fingal does the same to Swaran, because he is the brother of Agandecca, of whom he was passionately fond in his youth, and still continued attached

tached to her memory. The motive for this act of generosity is widely different from the other.

As to the similarity of phraseology in some of the compositions, instead of Macpherson transplanting them from the Highlander into Fingal, it is more likely, if taken at all, it was from the original of the latter, to adorn the former: for, as the translator confesses an early acquaintance with his native poet, it is natural to suppose, he would borrow freely from compositions, which, shut up in the obscurity of an unknown tongue, might be imitated without any great danger of detection.

The description of the sun, shews that the style of Ossian has on some occasions a great resemblance to that of the scriptures; what may have given them a still greater appearance of being so, is, that Macpherson, in the early part of life taught school, which brought him acquainted with the sacred writers, and gave him a facility of imitating them. But whatever air of oriental diction, the

the translation has received in consequence, a person who saw the originals, in the possession of the late Mr. Mackenzie, avers, that the ground-work of the principal scenes, facts, and characters, is truly Celtic; and the attempts of introducing embellishments are seldom, if ever, for the better.

It has been a general complaint, that the sentences in Macpherson's version, are cut so short, and constructed in such an abrupt and starting manner, that it is difficult to follow the thread of the narration. In the original, we are told, no such perplexity occurs. There is likewise less rant and swell, with more circumstantial description. My informer farther says, he saw a translation of one book into verses, corresponding as near as possible with the original. There Ossian appears in his true colours, without any extraneous ornament, and to much more advantage, than in Macpherson's translation.

That the Gaelic originals are not composed from the English version is evident; because

because the poems procured in the Highlands, were seen by many before Macpherson began to translate them. In that gentleman's excursion to the Highlands and Western Isles, we are told,* he was accompanied by a person said to be one of the best Gaelic scholars of his time. He was, however, no otherwise useful to him than as a linguist, being destitute of taste, and even of ordinary poetical knowledge. This person cleared up to Macpherson many obscurities in the Celtic bard. In the collection, a great deal of extravagant and grotesque additions were expunged, all of which were easily known to be no part of Ossian, whose style, though bold and figurative, is all along distinguished by a dignity and pathos,—a sublime and tender melancholy peculiar to himself. The manner in which the poems were handed down, could not but expose them to some changes and interpolations. Time will always introduce alterations. Few works of antiquity have reached us exactly as penned by their au-

 thors.

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* Mrs. Grant, *p.* 363.

thors. Even those sacred volumes, on which our happiness depends, notwithstanding the care with which they have been transcribed, have admitted variations, which have embarrassed the best commentators. Virgil's Æneis has, by Tucca and Varius, been retouched, Dryden thinks the four first lines affixed to the poem were added by them, and has therefore rejected them. The works of Homer are said to have received considerable additions, and to be differently arranged than they were left by that poet. Many are even of opinion he did not write his poems, but being a genuine minstrel like Ossian, the Scalds of Norway, the Welsh bards, the Spanish and Italian *improvisatori*, composed his rapsodies extempore, and sung them with energy and enthusiasm, to an admiring multitude. Each rapsody was in itself a complete song, connected with the whole, which formed at length the Iliad. It is natural enough to suppose that the bard would, in repeating them on different occasions, enlarge, substract, or change, as his fancy led him. In the mouths of others they must likewise have

have undergone various modifications, until committed to writing.

Lycurgus was the first who brought the compositions of Homer from Ionia, but whether the whole of the Iliad and Odyssey in their present state, is uncertain; but Pisistratus was the person who arranged them, in the order they are now read. These, however, afterwards underwent several amendments. Zenodotus, in particular, is said to have taken great liberties with the text. And Aristophanes, his disciple, was likewise a corrector of Homer. But he seems to have laboured more in fixing what is called grammatical analogy, and the invention of points and accents, than in amending the text.

Of all the emendators of the Grecian bard, Aristarcus is the most celebrated. He was looked upon as the prince of critics.

Arguet ambique dictum, mutanda mutabit,
Fiet Aristarcus.——Hor.

Whatever he deemed spurious in Homer

was rejected as such by subsequent editors. We are not, however, to imagine his corrections were always made on the authority of exemplars: it is more probable that he changed or expunged, whatever he deemed unworthy of Homer. Hence Cicero says, *Aristarcus Homeri, versum negat, quem non probat.*

This account of the Grecian bard has, in every respect, so near a resemblance to Ossian, that I have here related it, to shew, that, whatever liberties Macpherson may have taken with his author, the same, if not greater, has been experienced by Homer.

Mr. Laing observes, that the changes the Gaelic underwent in the course of so many centuries, is a conclusive argument against the possibility of Ossian's compositions being handed down by oral tradition. This certainly would have been an insurmountable objection, if time had rendered the language unintelligible. But this is not the case; the anonymous defender of Ossian tells us, in the parts where the poems were more

more known, the diction had suffered so little by time, that they were perfectly understood. The constant repetition of the poems might have contributed much to this stability. Besides, it is very possible an author may contain obsolete expressions, and yet continue in favour, and be frequently in the mouths of every denomination of people. Shakespeare is a proof of this: no one's plays are in higher estimation, or oftener acted on the stage; nevertheless, in them are found words so obsolete and obscure, that some of the first geniuses of the age; have laboured in vain to ascertain their meaning.

It will undoubtedly be objected, that Shakespeare wrote only in the sixteenth century, and Ossian in the third. Very true; but it should be considered that the English, by adopting new words from the dead and modern languages, has undergone as great a change during that short period, as the Gaelic has done from the time Ossian's poems were composed till now: for lying in a sequestered remote corner, the natives

natives had no intercourse with strangers, nor desire of novelty. The difference time has made in the Celtic spoken by the Irish and Highlanders of this day is so trivial, that men born in distant countries, on meeting, converse and understand each other without much difficulty. Nor are Ossian's poems more unintelligible to either, than Chaucer to an Englishman, or even Spencer, who wrote only in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

Mr. Laing, after objecting to the authenticity of the poems, all that extensive reading, wit, and ingenuity could devise, comments at length, on the manner in which they made their appearance, and thinks it very suspicious. " Not satisfied," says he, " with a doubtful translation, a man of " letters, possessed of an original manu- " script, comments and dwells upon it; " communicates it with raptures to his " friends; conveys it in a faithful edition " to the world; deposits it in some public " library for the inspection of the curious, " and

" and finally bequeaths it to some public
" institution."

Now, impartial reader, hear and judge, if the manner in which these poems came to light and found their way abroad, differs widely from the formalities above required to render them authentic. Dr. Blair testifies, that " an accidental conversation gave
" occasion to Mr. Macpherson's translating
" one or two small pieces of the Gaelic poe-
" try. These being known to me (Dr.
" Blair) and some others, rendered us very
" desirous of becoming more acquainted
" with that poetry. Mr. Macpherson,
" afraid of not doing justice to compositi-
" ons, which he admired in the original,
" was very backward to undertake the task
" of translating; and the publication of
" the fragments of ancient poems, was with
" no small importunity extorted from him.
" The high reputation these presently ac-
" quired, made it he thought unjust the
" world should be deprived of the posses-
" sion of more, if more of the same kind
" could be recovered; and Mr. Macpherson
" was

" was warmly urged by several gentlemen
" of rank and taste, to disengage himself
" from other occupations, and to undertake
" a journey through the Highland and
" Islands, on purpose to make a collection
" of those curious remains of antiquity.
" He complied with their desire, and spent
" several months in visiting those remote
" parts of the country; during which time
" he corresponded frequently with his
" friends in Edinburgh, informing them of
" his progress, of the application which he
" made in different quarters, and of the
" success which he met with. Several let-
" ters of his, and those who assisted him
" in making discoveries, passed through
" my (Dr. Blair's) hands. His undertaking
" was the object of considerable attention:
" and returning at last, fraught with the
" poetical treasures of the north, he set
" himself to translate, under the eye of
" some who were acquainted with the
" Gaelic language, and looked into his
" manuscripts; and by a large publication,
" made an appeal to all the natives of the
" Highlands and Islands of Scotland, whe-
" ther

" ther he had been faithful to his charge,
" and done justice to their well known fa-
" vourite poems."

This is the plain natural narration of a man, who was himself, from the beginning, instrumental in bringing to light the works of Ossian, and whose veracity none can doubt. The manuscripts collected and brought by Macpherson from the Highlands, were looked into and examined, by persons acquainted with the language.—Many, we may presume, were only recent, being taken down from the recitation of persons who knew the poems by heart. There were more ancient: Captain M'Lachlan, of the 56th regiment, possessed some on vellum, so old, as to be scarce legible. They were the remains of many that had been collected by his predecessors, who were great admirers of the Highland bard. But the largest and most valuable assortment of his works, was procured from M'Donald, of Kiles, in Knoidart. One gentleman affirms, that among them was one of as old a date as the year 1410.

Mrs.

Mrs. Grant tells us a fact,* which, as most of her other informations on this head, she probably had from the linguist who accompanied Macpherson through the Highlands; that when the translator was pressed to produce ancient manuscripts, "a red "book, in which a chieftain had caused "several of the original fragments to be "written down, occurred. It was parch-"ment, and it was old; but upon exami-"nation, it shrunk from trial; for as I was "told, (says she) it was not three hundred "years old: these, however, (she properly "observes) proved superabundantly, that "the translator was not the author of the "poems." The red book here mentioned, seems to be the *Leabhar Dearg*, belonging to Clanronald's family. If so, it contradicts Mr. Laing, who asserts, it contained no original poems of Ossian. However, as he could not understand them, the falsehood must be attributed to his Gaelic master, whose ignorance has exposed him to so many

* Vide her letter to Robt. Arbuthnot, Esq. *p.* 349.

many blunders in the etymologies attempted from that language.

Though it is clear that the Gael of these islands had letters, yet we do not say the different sciences flourished among them, as in the better days of Athens and Rome. The Welsh and Irish pretend to great antiquity: how far their claims may be allowed, is not easily determined. No just judgment can be formed of what these people were, by the figure they make at present. Whoever contemplates the revolutions occasioned by time, will perceive nothing extraordinary in these people having been once powerful and learned, though now no vestige is to be seen of either. The Egyptians were extolled for wisdom and knowledge, though no proofs of having been so, have descended to us; specimens only of their workmanship have escaped the corroding tooth of time. The Old Testament, by a special decree of Providence, hath been preserved; other ancient writings of the Jews we have none. The Phœnicians, Tyrians, and Carthagenians, were

no

no less famous for commerce than for letters; yet, though they were the carriers of these to distant parts. No records of their own have reached our days. Even of many old Greek authors, who, next to the Jews, were the earliest writers, the names only are preserved. Nor, would Homer himself have escaped the general wreck, had not his poems been held in the highest veneration, and a custom prevailed of reciting them on public occasions. Printing has been the great means of multiplying books and cultivating knowledge. Before that invention, the time and labour of transcribing, rendered copies very scarce. The ancient Highlanders and Hebrideans could not be much addicted to letters. What learning they possessed, subsisted chiefly among the bards and higher orders. When converted to Christianity, the clergy introduced the Roman alphabet, and used it, as well as that language in the church service. This could not but prove detrimental to the purity of the provincial tongue. All manuscripts, not deposited in public places, would be kept in private families. The former,

former, as has been observed, were destroyed by the incursions of foreign enemies, or civil commotions. Those in the hands of individuals would be preserved, while the possessors understood and knew the value of them. But as writings frequently pass down to persons, who through ignorance, or want of taste, think little of them, they are apt to be neglected and lost.

Mr. Macpherson procured, or had access to all that remained in the parts he visited, at least that contained any of Ossian's poems. When his translations made their appearance, and their authenticity was called in question, the publication of the originals, was thought the best way of satisfying the incredulous, but unable to raise sufficient subscriptions for defraying the expense, he took the resolution of exposing them in Becket's shop, for public inspection. It cannot be supposed that manuscripts in a language so little understood, could be interesting, or attract the attention of many. That they did, however, of some, appears from a person signing himself

self W. Cambrensis. When Dr. Johnson, in his journey to the Hebrides, declared, that the poems of Ossian never existed in any other form than that in which they were published in Macpherson's translation: this gentleman publicly, in the St. James's Chronicle, contradicted the assertion, and affirmed, that he had *often seen and heard them repeated in another form, and in another language, in that of the Irish.* " And " though," says he, " I'm neither an Irish " or a Scotchman, I understand sufficiently " of both dialects, to prevent any imposi- " tion that might be attempted to deceive " on such an occasion. I say, I have seen " poetical MSS. in the Irish language, and " have taken abstracts from them, which " have contained the exploits of Fin-Mac- " Combal, and his heroes, though not ex- " actly the same; yet, like as to the mat- " ter, with the poems attributed to Ossian. " These are written in the Irish characters, " but certainly not so ancient as some there " would have them to be, but I may ven- " ture to say, long before Mr. Macpherson " and Doctor Johnson were born; and " therefore

" therefore to be seen before the form Mr.
" Macpherson has given us of them."

This anonymous writer vouches, that the manuscripts placed in Becket's shop, agreed nearly with others he had formerly seen in Irish characters; a proof that these poems have come down in writing, as well as by oral tradition. That they were the real originals of the translations given by Macpherson, cannot be doubted. After lying some months for public inspection, they were removed; for the expenses, I suppose, prevented still their being put into the press. This delay gave occasion to much altercation in the literary world. One party, led on by Dr. Johnson, positively denied the authenticity of the compositions; while another as strenuously supported the contrary opinion. The translator, all the time, looked on with seeming indifference, only saying, the doubts of adversaries " gave him no concern, as he
" had it always in his power to remove
" them." From these words we may infer Macpherson intended publishing the originals,

nals, the only way of silencing his enemies. Soon after, a thousand pounds were subscribed, and sent by his countrymen in India, to encourage the undertaking. But being then occupied in other pursuits, this much called for evidence was postponed. In the mean time, bad health coming on, prevented the execution of the design. After languishing for a time, he revisited his native land, where he died in 1796.

The manuscripts of Ossian's poems, with the money sent from abroad, for the purpose of publishing them, were put into the hands of the late Mr. Mackenzie, secretary to the Highland Society. Nor could they have been intrusted to a more proper person. Besides his classical knowledge, he was an excellent Gaelic scholar. To make his publication more universal and complete, he made a corresponding Latin translation, in which the Celtic words, as in Clarke's Homer, are given verbatim: too close perhaps; for a person who perused it, says, the Latin idiom is, in many instances, sacrificed to so literal a version of the Gaelic,

as

as to be unintelligible. The execution of so difficult a task, retarded the publication of the original. The work, however, was in the press, when Mackenzie died; which unhappy event unavoidably occasioned a farther delay. The Highland bard has lost a powerful advocate by the death of Robert Macfarlane, Esq. who lost his life last August, by a carriage running over him.—He was a literary character of some celebrity, being the author of several works of merit. The last two years were employed in translating into Latin the poems of Ossian, now printing by Mr. Bulmer. He likewise wrote a treatise (the first proof sheet of which was received only a few hours previous to his death) entitled, "An Essay, proving "the authenticity of Ossian and his Po-"ems," which we hope will not be lost to the public, as we understand the manuscript is finished. These circumstances have encouraged the enemies of Ossian to deny the authenticity of his compositions. Among the rest, Laing boasts he has put an end to the dispute for ever. His arguments, however, are not so incontroverti-

ble as he imagined. Nor is the one, with which he triumphantly concludes, better grounded than those already considered.

In the preface to the last corrected edition of Ossian's poems, published in 1773, Macpherson says, " without increasing his " genius, the author may have improved " his language, in the eleven years that " the poems have been in the hands of the " public. Errors in diction might have " been committed at twenty-four, which " the experience of riper age may remove, " and some exuberances in imagery may " be restrained with advantage, by a de- " gree of judgment acquired in the progress " of time. In a convenient indifference for " a literary reputation, the author hears " praise without being elevated, and ribal- " dry without being depressed. The taste " which defines genius by the point of the " compass, however ludicrous in itself, is " often a serious matter in the sale of a " work. When rivers define the limits of " abilities, as well as of countries, a writer " may measure his success by the latitude

" under

" under which he was born. It was to
" avoid part of this inconvenience that the
" author is said by some, who speak with-
" out any authority, to have ascribed his
" own production to another name. If this
" was the case, he was but young in the
" art of deception, as the translator, when
" he placed his author in antiquity, should
" have been born on this side the Tweed.
" But the truth is, that to judge aright re-
" quires almost as much genius as to write
" well; and good critics are almost as rare
" as great poets. Though two hundred
" thousand Romans stood up when Virgil
" came into the theatre, Varius alone could
" correct the Æneid. The novelty of ca-
" dence, in what is called a prose version,
" though not destitute of harmony, will
" not, to common readers, supply the ab-
" sence of the frequent returns of rhyme.
" This was the opinion of the writer him-
" self, whose first intention was to publish
" in verse: and as the making of poetry
" may be learned by industry, he had
" served his apprenticeship, though in
" secret, to the muses."

 " Here,

" Here, if there is meaning in words," says Mr. Laing, " Macpherson vindicates " and appropriates the poems expressly " to himself. He intimates almost in di- " rect terms, that he, the author, who " without increasing his genius, in eleven " years has improved his language, and " restrained the exuberance of his imagery; " the writer, equally qualified to excel in " prose or verse; the supposed translator, " who alone like Varius, can equal his " original, to avoid the invidious opposi- " tion of national prejudices, (a serious con- " sideration in the sale of a work) has " ascribed his poems to remote antiquity, " and another name. The applause of Re- " viewers was re-echoed by Blair and " Kaims, whose injudicious, yet ingenious " criticisms, had placed the Celtic bard on " a level with Milton, Virgil, and Homer " himself. The laborious Henry, the fan- " tastical Whitaker, adopted Ossian as ge- " nuine history; and Macpherson, exult- " ing in their applause, and his own suc- " cess, entered the preceding caveat as a " guarded, yet solemn protestation, lest " the

" the poems should descend to posterity,
" while the real author was defrauded of
" his fame. It was still necessary not to
" disabuse his countreymen, nor to disap-
" point, by a more explicit declaration,
" their credulous hopes of an epic poem
" in verse. The dispute with Johnson and
" Clark, taught him, that a moral charac-
" ter should still be sustained, and he con-
" tinued to fluctuate till his death, between
" the care of his reputation, and the cha-
" racter of an original poet, which he was
" desirous to assume."

I have again and again read the above quoted paragraphs from Macpherson's preface, which Mr. Laing has thus perverted, but find nothing to justify the assertion, of his claiming therein the poems for his own. He tells the reader, what every rational man must suppose, that in eleven years his judgment had improved, and that in the course of that time, he had acquired a greater proficiency in language. Conscious of this, he had revised his translations, and corrected some passages, intending, in future,

to

to resign them to their fate. It cannot be doubted but a translation may be retouched, errors in diction removed, and exuberances in imagery restrained, as well as in an original work. Pope is well known to have corrected, not only his own compositions, but likewise the Iliad; and declared, that in the latter he found so many faults, that he was puzzled where to begin, or where to end.

That Macpherson heard praise without being elevated, and ribaldry without depression, is a thing I am rather doubtful of. What proves the contrary, he threatened to horse-whip Johnson for opposing the authenticity of Ossian; which he would not have resented so highly, had he intended to pass the poems for his own. Authors sometimes affect apathy, but are not a race of people indifferent to applause and censure. It is related of Pope, that a pamphlet, wherein he was abused by Cibber, coming into his hands, he said, with seeming indifference, *these things are my diversion.* On perusing it, nevertheless, his features were so distorted by vexation, that a by-stander, afterwards

wards observed, " he hoped to be pre-
" served from such diversion as had been
" that day the lot of Pope."

The abundant and severe sarcasms cast out against Macpherson, proceeded chiefly from south Britain; while his own countrymen, in general, extolled his performance, many of the English affected to regard it with contempt. It was this slight which made him complain, that *taste is often defined by the points of the compass, and that rivers serve to mark out the limits of abilities, as well as countries.* Johnson, the most formidable of his adversaries, not only depised the work, but represented the whole as an impudent imposition. So far from attributing to himself the merit of being the author, Macpherson declares, there is not the smallest authority for supposing any such thing; and to retaliate on his opponent, adds, the translator was but young in the art of deception, since to succeed, when he placed his author in antiquity, and ascribed his own production to another name, he should have been born on the same,

same side of the Tweed with Johnson. To understand the force of this retortion, the reader should be informed, that while Johnson earned a livelihood by writing in the periodical prints, he used to attribute to several speakers in parliament, speeches composed in his garret, of which they never uttered a syllable. The species of imposture thus practised is here alluded to.

Though the poems on their first appearance, found many admirers, they, nevertheless, met some opponents. These attacked the publisher, who was not so indifferent to literary reputation as not to reply, by telling them, that *to judge aright required nearly as much genius as to write well.* The thought is taken from the first lines of Pope's Essay on Criticism.

> " 'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill
> " Appear in writing, or in judging ill ;
> " But of the two, less dangerous is th' offence
> " To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.
> " Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
> " Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss."

Macpherson seems to think that many disrelished

disrelished his translation because not given in rhyme. I have no doubt that this was an objection to numbers, who, accustomed to the compositions of Dryden and Pope, think nothing poetry that is not similar to theirs. The translator of Ossian tells us, this was his own opinion, and that his first intention was to have published in verse; *for he had served his apprenticeship, though in secret, to the muses.* He here may possibly allude to the Highlander; a poem which, though treated by Mr. Laing with contempt; as a juvenile essay, does no small credit to its author. For though the style, through too great an eagerness of novelty, is occasionally turgid and obscure; yet he, who could compose such at that period of life, might by care and practice have arrived at a higher degree of excellence. After all, the method adopted was much the best, as it would have been much more difficult to keep close to, and give the true sense of the original in any other way than a prose translation.

A particular stress is laid by Mr. Laing on

on Macpherson calling himself Author, as if that appellation was not equally applicable to a translator, as to an original writer. The verb *transfer* is likewise noticed, though in the place used by Macpherson, it cannot bear any other signification that to translate.

Such quibbles were unworthy of notice, did not Mr. Laing seem to think them of some importance. The same may be said of his blaming Macpherson for supposing Inistore to be one of the Orkney Islands, inhabited by Scandinavians, and covered with trees. Whereas Mr. Laing, on the authority of Solinus, will have these Islands in the days of Fingal, to have been mere solitary wastes, producing only heath and stunted brushwood.

We do not pretend to support the translator in all his remarks, but he has certainly a right of opinion as well as another. In supposing the Orkneys then inhabited, he coincides with Tacitus, a writer of greater weight than Solinus. We know the Scandinavians had driven the Gael from the Lowlands

Lowlands previous to that period; consequently they would have seized those Islands before attempting any conquest on the main-land. That the Orkneys might be woody then, though now destitute of trees, is very possible; for Iceland was so when first discovered, though now a naked open country. Many districts of the Highlands, where a tree is not now to be seen for many miles, were formerly covered with forests; and this is evident from the large roots dug out of the ground. I am told the same is the case in many of the Hebrides, where few or no woods are at this day to be seen. Mr. Laing likewise accuses him of inventing the blindness of Ossian: a fact, Mrs. Grant informs us,* alluded to, not only in common sayings, but in many Gaelic poems, well known to have existed previous to his translation; of which *the aged bard's wish*, versified by herself, affords an instance.

Assertions made without any proof, deserve

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* *Page* 362.

serve no answer. Mr. Laing has many such. Among others, that Macpherson invented Loda from Edda, and gives the fragment of a Norse poem which never existed. Though Mr. Laing, from being a native of the Orkneys, may know something more of that tongue than he does of the Gaelic; yet it is not likely he can be acquainted with all the traditionary songs of that country. We are told, that five hundred Icelandic manuscripts have been printed. To the natives of that island, says Mallet,* the world is indebted for almost all the historical monuments of the northern nations now remaining. While heathens, their annalists were always esteemed the best in the north. After embracing christianity, they were the first to unravel the chaos of ancient history—to collect old poems—to digest their chronicles into a regular form, and apply them to rescue from oblivion the traditions of their pagan theology.

We

* Vol. i. *p.* 391.

We may here observe, that these people are far behind the Highlanders in every comfort of life. They live in miserable huts, covered with skins: and many of them have no better cloathing. Their population does not exceed fifty thousand souls. They emigrated from Scandinavia, and speak the old Runic, or Gothic, the language used by those people, who about the beginning of the christian era invaded Scotland, and drove the ancient Caledonians into the mountains. So that the savages, who, according to Dio and Herodian, lay immersed in morasses with their heads only above water—stained their bodies with figures of animals—went almost naked, encircling their loins and necks with ornaments of iron, a mark of wealth which they prized above gold—were the Picts the ancestors of Mr. Laing and the present Lowlanders. The Celts were a much more polished, civilized race, who, as has been above related, brought over these rude illiterate barbarians to the light of christianity, and for several centuries supplied them with pastors. But though the natives

of

of the Highlands and Western Isles, spoke the same language, they were never united under one head. There is nothing therefore surprising, in Fordun and Winton, or the Highland genealogists, bringing down the pedigree of Alexander the third from a long list of Irish kings, through Riada, a distinguished leader. This did not proceed from ignorance of these celebrated characters, whose achievements were well known to the Lowlanders. Thus Barbour in one of his poems,

> He sayd, methynk Martheokes son
> Right as Gowmakmorn wes won
> Fyl haif fra Fyngal his menyie,
> Richt sa fra us all hyshes hee.

The passage alludes to some tradition of their battles, but is obscure. Gowmakmorn, is Gaul-mac-morn, or Gaul the son of Morni, in Ossian. Lindsey likewise, in his history of Squire Meldrum, mentions Gow Makmorn.

> Thouch thow be great lyke Gow Makmorn.

Hector Boice mentions the famous actions

ons of Fengal. It is true he does so in the same manner as we record king Arthur, and other ancient British worthies.

Nicholson, in his Scottish historical library, takes notice of having an old romance of the valour and feats of Fin M'Coul, a giant of prodigious stature in the days of king Ewain the second.

Buchanan, in like manner, in his account of the family of Buchanan,* mentions the Feans, and speaks of " rude rhimes," that record the acts of Fin Mac Coel, as retained by the Irish and Scottish Highlanders. This gentleman was himself well versed in the Gaelic.

In the countries where that language is spoken, the poems and persons they record, are well known. In Ireland, it must be allowed, they are much defaced with spurious additions, as appears from some translations published by Miss Brooks and others.

Camden

* Edin. 1723, 4to.

Camden received from one Goad, a schoolmaster at Limerick, the following account. *Defunctorum animas in consortium abire existimant quorumdam in illis locis illustrium de quibus fabulas et cantilenas recitant; ut Gigantium Fin Mac Huyle, Osker Mac Oshin; et tales sæpe per illusionem se videre dicunt.*

More intelligent and coherent relations of these ancient heroes, are found in the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland. There every stream and mountain, every tale, song, or adage, retained some traces of the generous hero, or the mournful bard—old people can remember, before Macpherson ever thought of translating these remains, many comparisons and allusions found in them, were as current as scripture quotations in the last age among the peasants of the west. " She " was beautiful as Agandecca the daughter " of snow—she is musical as Melvina—he " is as forlorn as Ossian, after the departure " of the Fingalians—such a one is alert and " nimble as Cuthullin."—Nor is there scarce a district in those parts without monuments

numents of their achievements, not only have they given names to caves, mountains, and lakes, but the very dogs of the country are called after them: we meet with stones to which Fingal tied Bran, and Cuthulin Luath. There also the poems of Ossian, though not without some mutilations and adulterations, have been for ages with amazing purity and fidelity handed down. As the fact, notwithstanding Mr. Laing's pretended detections have been sufficiently proved, we shall offer no farther remarks on the subject; especially, since the gentleman himself, after bringing what he calls *incontrovertible arguments*, owns at the end *they may be easily answered.* What could induce him to make this confession, we are at a loss to conjecture; unless, upon reading them over again, they did not appear so conclusive as he at first imagined. He therefore changes his ground, and appealing from reasoning to fact; which he owns to be *worth a thousand arguments;* he declares, that, " if a single poem of Ossian in manu-" script, of an older date than the present " century (1700) be procured and lodged

" in a public library, I (Laing) shall return
" among the first to our national creed."

This is reducing the point at issue to a narrow compass. Had the proposal been made at the outset, it would have saved both him and me a great deal of trouble; not that in regard to ancient Gaelic manuscripts, I could give any more satisfactory account; than has been done in the course of this discourse. There the reader will see, that though, some of the poems are confessedly procured from oral tradition, yet several gentlemen of veracity attest to have seen, among Macpherson's papers, several manuscripts of a much older date than Mr. Laing requires, to be convinced. Though not more credulous than my neighbours, I cannot resist facts so well attested; there are no stronger for believing the best established human transactions.

I understand the originals are in the press, and expected daily to make their appearance. When they do, the public will not be carried away by conjectures, but

but be able to judge on solid grounds. Till then let the discussion on this subject be at rest.

With regard to the few short poems that follow, I have only to observe, that it was at one time my intention to versify the whole of Ossian's works. But the first specimen given, meeting with an unfavourable reception, the design was dropped. Since then my studies have been turned to better and more useful purposes. The following versions were a part of the original undertaking, and have lain by me from the time I had given up the thought of being a poet. Lately, however, they came under the inspection of some acquaintances, who warmly urged to have them sent abroad. Though the judgment of the public rarely accords with the flattery of friends, I have acquiesced. If they meet approbation, very well: if not, I shall have greater reason to rejoice, that my former design was not put into execution.

CALTHON AND COLMAL.

THE ARGUMENT.

IN the country of the Britons, between the Roman walls, lived two Chiefs; Rathmor, who dwelt at Clutha, and Dunthalmo, lord of Teutha. The former was not more famed for his liberality, than the latter was infamous for his cruelty. Dunthalmo, an account of some private feuds, murdered Rathmor; but spared his two sons, Calthon and Colmar, whom he educated in his own house. However, when grown up, fearing they intended to revenge the death of their father, he shut them up in two caves, with a design to take them off privately. Colmal, the daughter of Dunthalmo, who was secretly in love with Calthon, helped him to make his escape; and, disguised in the habit of a young warrior, fled with him to Fingal. The king sent Ossian, with three hundred men, to rescue Colmar; but the youth is basely murdered by Dunthalmo. Ossian, shortly after, coming to battle with the tyrant, kills him, and totally defeats his army. Calthon marries his deliverer, and Ossian returns to Morven.

CALTHON AND COLMAL.

O THOU, who lonely 'midst our rocks dost dwell,
Thy voice is pleasant, and thy words excel!
In tuneful concert to the murm'ring stream,
Along the narrow valley comes thy theme;
And melts so sweetly in my ravish'd ear,
That, as in times of yore, I grasp the spear:
I grasp, but feeble grown, would wield in vain,
For years forbid, and sighing, I refrain.
But cease thy songs, and now let Ossian sing;
His hand to harmony awakes the string;
When brighten'd with the deeds of former days,
His raptur'd soul pours forth heroic lays.
Thus, after clouds, and deluges of rain,
Renew'd in lustre blazes out again;
The sun's bright orb, presenting to the view—
Hills, dales, and forests, dropping still with dew.
The aged seer, while nature seems to laugh,
Moves slowly forth, supported on his staff,

And

And breathes the freshness of the ev'ning air,
The sun-beams glist'ning on his silver hair.

Among the numbers that adorn my hall,
May still be seen a buckler on the wall;
Which, though its bosses are no longer bright,
Is deep indented with the strokes of fight.
The fierce Dunthalmo that in battle bore,
Till Ossian's furious spear his bosom tore;
As songs delight thy soul, I will proceed,
And tell the crimes that urg'd me to this deed.

In Clutha, Rathmor dwelt; a chief renown'd
For hospitality the nation round!
Both night and day, his ever crouded hall
Stood always open, and admitted all.
Bards rais'd the voice, while minstrels swept the string,
And joy and music made the palace ring:
Not friends alone, but strangers too caress'd,
Found entertainment, and his bounty bless'd.
Till dark Dunthalmo, mov'd by hate or pride,
Disturb'd the feast, and Rathmor e'en defied;
At which indignant, he th' intruder quell'd,
And ever after from his board expell'd.
This but excited more the ruffian's spite;
Who entering with a murd'rous band by night
The hall of Clutha, gen'rous Rathmor kill'd,
Where to the stranger oft the shell was fill'd:

So

So this good man, rever'd through all the land,
A victim fell to an assassin's hand.

His sons, then children, at return of day,
Beholding where in blood their father lay,
His corpse bedew'd with tears, and o'er him bent,
With lamentable cries the palace rent.
Their sorrows mov'd to grief the standers by,
And tender pity moisten'd every eye.
E'en fell Dunthalmo for the first time felt,
His savage bosom with compassion melt.
He spar'd their lives, and with the other prey
Bore to Balteutha's hall the youths away;
Where, till grown men, the twanging bow they bent,
And with their father's foe to battle went.

Now so it fell, while at the chase one day,
That traversing the glen where Clutha lay,
They saw in ruin those neglected walls,
And briers shooting in their father's halls.
Struck at the sight, the chiefs absorb'd in woe,
Recall'd the past, and tears began to flow:
The tyrant saw, and boding in his mind,
They might their wrongs resent, the youths confin'd
In two deep caverns, where the moon by night,
Nor sun by day, ne'er visited with light.
Here bound they lay, expecting ev'ry hour
The last vindictive weight of ruthless pow'r.

But

But blue-ey'd Colmal, fierce Dunthalmo's heir,
Who Calthon lov'd, was in the last despair.
She saw the youth must find an early grave,
Not her's, unhappy maid! the means to save.
To lift the spear, her arm had not essay'd,
Nor for her side was form'd the warrior's blade;
No heavy mail had press'd her breast of snow,
Nor roll'd her eye, a terror to the foe.
Thus helpless, how avert th' impending blow?
Rack'd with the thought she hastens to and fro;
Upon the wind her hair disshevell'd flies,
And bath'd in sorrow, wildly roll her eyes.

At length, when night had wrap'd the world in shade,
She sought her father's hall, and thence convey'd
The shining armour of a youthful knight,
Who, ere to manhood grown, had fall'n in fight.
In this disguis'd, to Calthon's cave she ran,
And loos'ning from his hands the thong, began:

Rise, son of Rathmor, rise, and haste away
To Morven's land, before approaching day.
Behold in me the offspring of Lamgal,
Thy young companion, ere thy father's fall,
Who, by affection led, thy life to save,
Is come to guide thee from this dreary cave.
Then lose no time, but instant speed thy flight
For Morven's land, while favour'd by the night.

To her the prince: O voice divine! thro' air
Dost thou, to mitigate my griefs, repair?
Since in this solitary vault confin'd,
Debarr'd the light, and face of human kind;
From realms above, white rob'd in lucid beams,
Oft have my fathers visited my dreams.
Art thou of them, or really Lamgal's son
That urges from confinement to be gone?
But recreant shall I fly to distant lands,
And leave my brother here in hostile hands?
No; give thy lance, and instant I'll repair,
The youth to free, or in his ruin share.

To this the maid: a thousand warriors wave
Their glitt'ring spears round car-borne Colmar's cave;
Thou cannot singly meet a host in fight;
Then drop the rash design, and speed thy flight
To Morven's King:—the lightning of his blade
Defends the weak, and yields th' unhappy aid.
Protection to an injur'd Prince he'll give,
And muster war thy brother to relieve.
Time's on the wing, and soon, approaching day
Will tip the mountains with his golden ray;
Resolve then quick—for if to-morrow's sun
Beholds us loit'ring here, we are undone.

She said; then rose impatient of delay,
And with her lover hurried swift away;

He

He weeping for his brother's peril, fled,
But did not know by whom his steps were led,
The virgin's face a plumy helmet veil'd,
And arms of shining steel her breasts conceal'd.
Bye-ways they trod, and o'er the mountains stray'd,
Till Selma's lofty tow'rs at length they made.
Fingal returning from the hill of deer,
At ev'ning found the youthful strangers there:
Who lowly bending down, address'd the Chief
In suppliant words, imploring his relief.
Like two refulgent beams they shone to view—
Their graceful mein the King's attention drew.
He heard their tale of woe; but paus'd in doubt
Which of his warriors he should single out,
To tempt this arduous deed. With valour fir'd
All to the dang'rous enterprise aspir'd,
And starting up, each half unsheath'd the blade,
Eager to prove his readiness to aid.

Just from the mountains come, tho' yet a boy,
I forward press'd, ambitious of th' employ.
My father saw, and placing in my hand
His own bright lance, the ensign of command,
Exhorted thus: Son of my strength be brave!
To Teutha march, and car-borne Colmar save.
Like your forefathers, at true greatness aim,
On virtuous actions build a solid fame.
Be fierce in battle as the winds that blow,
But mild and gen'rous when subdued the foe.

Such

Such have I been, compassionate and kind,
My study is the welfare of mankind.
To me the injur'd for protection run,
Oppressors tremble, and my presence shun:
So thou—The proud subdue, the weak redress,
And future ages will thy mem'ry bless.

Thus spoke the first of men: my bosom warm'd
To noble deeds, when morning dawn'd, I arm'd.
Diäran from the wall his buckler took,
And Dargo at my side his jav'lin shook.
To these three hundred youths of Morven's land
My father join'd; a well-appointed band,
With whom I forward march'd without delay,
The stranger pair companions of my way.

The sound of our approach Dunthalmo heard;
Nor was that active Chieftain unprepar'd.
His bold retainers arm'd, he, at their head,
Seiz'd a strong post, our progress to impede.
In front the rapid stream of Teutha pour'd,
Beyond, upon a hill, the party lour'd.
Thus rocks in rugged ridges meet the eye,
When blasted by the lightning of the sky,
With a few scatter'd firs, all scorch'd and bare,
They rear their dry and riven fronts in air.
I one commission'd of the tuneful train,
To proffer equal combat on the plain.

He

He grinn'd a scornful smile; but to the plan
Adopted first, still steady kept his clan
Rang'd on the hills secure. Like clouds that spread
Their drizzly wings on Cona's lofty head;
Till, by a sudden blast dislodg'd, they fly
Dispers'd o'er all th' illimitable sky.

The day far spent, at length to Teutha's side
Was Colmar brought, his hands behind him tied.
O'er all the croud majestic rose his size:
The chief look'd sad, on us he fix'd his eyes;
(Who under arms oppos'd in silence stood,
Between us only the swift-passing flood.)
When, lo! Dunthalmo basely in our sight,
With his own hand dispatch'd the hapless knight:
Transpierc'd he fell: his broken sighs we heard,
And saw with blood the purpled banks besmear'd.
Who could withhold?—Young Calthon wild with rage,
Plung'd through the stream the assassin to engage.
I follow'd close, supported by my spear:
With equal fury fir'd our men appear;
They breast the rapid flood, that refluent roars,
And white with foam, indignant beats its shores.
We forded swift—nor sooner gain'd the banks,
Than fierce we plung'd amid the hostile ranks.
Heaps fell on heaps, and more had fall'n, but night
Descending dark, unfinish'd left the fight.

We

We kept the field, resolv'd at break of day
The foe to attack; who still contiguous lay
Within a neighbouring wood —Beneath an oak
Dunthalmo rested on a moss-grown rock;
Against the Chief of Clutha burn'd his hate,
Nor deem'd his vengeance till his death complete.
No less enrag'd the mournful Calthon stood;
Resolv'd to die, or spill the tyrant's blood,
And 'venge his brother's death, in youth decreed,
Ere he acquir'd a hero's fame, to bleed.

Studious the warrior's stormy soul to still,
I bade my bards essay their tuneful skill;
But vain their efforts: even while they sung,
Impassion'd more, on earth his lance he flung,
Defiance hurling.—Colmal pensive view'd
The frantic fit, and tears her eyes bedew'd:
Full well she saw, now war could have no mean,
And Calthon or Dunthalmo must be slain.

The night, in darkness veiling nature's face,
On silent wings had measur'd half her race;
While with the service of the day oppress'd,
The weary troops enjoy'd refreshing rest.
All but the stranger Chief, who still awake,
Heard in their rocky beds the waters break.
When lo! his brother's ghost before him stood,
The wound Dunthalmo gave yet mark'd with blood.

All

All pale approach'd the harbinger of grief,
And in a feeble voice address'd the Chief:—

" O sole remaining hope of Rathmor's race!
" Thy brother murder'd, canst thou rest in peace?
" Did we not to the chase together go,
" Together o'er the hills pursue the roe?
" In blood and friendship intimately join'd,
" Hath death so soon eras'd me from thy mind?
" At Lona's rock my breathless body lies;
" To save the relics of thy brother rise!
" In some sequester'd place his corpse secrete,
" Before the foe fresh insults can repeat."
He said; and instant vanishing from sight,
Borne on the murm'ring blast, dissolv'd in night.

In clanging armour Calthon sprung.—The maid
Arose, and follow'd thro' the gloomy shade,
Disconsolate, fatigued, and void of strength,
Dragging along the spear's unwieldy length.
Arriv'd at Lona's lonely rock, they found
The mangled body stretch'd upon the ground.
When Calthon saw, his kindled fury rose,
On slaughter bent he rush'd amidst the foes.
Deep groans ascend; but soon enclos'd around,
They seiz'd, and brought him to Dunthalmo bound.
A shout of triumph shook the starry frame,
The hills of night return'd the loud acclaim.

From

From sleep awaken'd by the sudden sound,
My spear I grasp'd, and started from the ground.
Diäran rising at my side appear'd,
And valiant Dargo stood in arms prepar'd:
But horror chill'd our hearts, when looking round,
The stranger warriors no where could be found.
The cause unknown, and dreading loss of fame,
I thus address'd my friends—O grief! O shame!
What torpor numb'd, what fear withheld our hands?
Not thus our fathers fought in foreign lands;
They pass'd not night in indolent repose,
While near encamp'd, unconquer'd lay their foes.
Like eagles active, vigilant, and strong,
Their gallant deeds recorded are in song;
We their descendants, a degenerate race,
The great achievements of such men disgrace.
How will Fingal with fire indignant glow,
If we chastise not this insidious foe?
Let each his helmet brace, fix firm his shield,
And trace my rapid course along the field;
This monster of a king I will subdue,
Or never more the walls of Selma view.

Now rising morn had brighten'd Teutha's stream,
When, wrap'd in grief, to meet us Colmal came.
She told how Calthon, by the hostile bands
A pris'ner made, was in Dunthalmo's hands.
This heard, no longer doubting he was dead,
I on the stranger frown'd, and sternly said:

O Son

Son of the feeble hand! thus shedding tears,
Do Teutha's warriors meet the strife of spears?
Unmanly grief can nought thy friend avail,
With steel, and not with tears, the brave assail.
Go, recreant youth, pursue the tim'rous roe,
Or tend thy father's herds on Carmun's brow;
But quit a load thou wert not born to bear,
These arms some more deserving chief shall wear.

I said; and seizing rude her mail, laid bare
The breasts and snowy bosom of the fair!
When she, whom all till then had deem'd a knight,
Before us stands, a maid divinely bright;
With eyes cast down, and face that lovely glows
In all the beauties of the blushing rose.
The spear fell from my hand, in wonder lost;
Tears trickled down, and thro' the pitying host
The soft infection ran.—But when her name
The virgin told, I blest the radiant Beam,
And firm resolv'd, (if yet he breath'd) her love
To free or die; I bade to battle move.

'Twas bravely fought.—Nor till their leader slain,
Were put to flight the gallant hostile train;
Of those that perish'd, or by whom they fell,
That memorable day, who now can tell?
Their names forgot, no longer fame resounds,
Nor on the heath are seen their verdant mounds:

These

These wintry storms and deluges of rain,
Have long effac'd, and levell'd with the plain.
When such the permanence of deeds so late,
How short of human vanity the date!
Scarce a few stones o'er-grown with moss appear,
Where dark Dunthalmo fell beneath my spear.
There, blind and grey, the aged sits at night,
Recounting o'er the flaming oak the fight.
He tells his sons the valour of our bands,
And how the tyrant died by Ossian's hands.
The eager youths attentive fix their eyes,
And press around, transported with surprise.

The foe dispers'd or dead, we Calthon found
Tied to a tree, his hands behind him bound.
The leather thongs I sever'd with my blade,
And to his arms consign'd the faithful maid.
In Teutha long they happy past their days,
And I return'd to Morven crown'd with praise.

OINA-MORUL.

THE ARGUMENT.

MAL-ORCHOL, on account of some family feuds, refusing to give his daughter in marriage to Ton-thormod, the latter, in revenge, lays waste his lands. Fingal sends Ossian to the assistance of Mal-orchol. Ossian, the day after his arrival, takes his adversary prisoner in battle. On this, Mal-orchal offers him his daughter; but she discovering a prior attachment to Ton-thormod, he generously surrenders her to that Chief, and brings about a reconciliation between him and the father.

The poem begins with an address to Malvina.

OINA-MORUL.

As over Larmon's lofty hills of grass,
In spring, bright gleams of genial sunshine pass;
Successive thus, inspiring warlike lays,
Beam on my soul the tales of other days.
When other bards, forgetful of the strain,
With harps unstrung, the heady goblet drain;
While, stretch'd supine, they sleep at ease prolong,
Oft comes a voice that bids me raise the song.
It is the sacred voice of ages gone,
Recalling Chiefs who mighty deeds have done.
By their heroic actions set on fire,
I start from rest, and strike my sounding lyre:
I strike—nor are its notes a troubled stream,
They calm the soul, like fair Malvina's theme,
When her white hand awakes the quiv'ring string,
And Lutha's rugged rocks responsive ring.

Ah

Ah Toscar's lovely heir! Thou only ray
That cheers my clouded soul depriv'd of day;
Fair solace of afflicted age! draw near,
And to a deed that honours youth, give ear.

What time Fingal in Morven held the sway,
Long ere by years these locks were turn'd to grey!
Before the wind I plough'd the wave of night,
Observing, as I steer'd, Con-calthin's light.
For wild Fuärfed flew the winged ship,
A woody land, surrounded by the deep,
There then the generous Mal-orchol reign'd:
He formerly Fingal had entertain'd;
Who mindful of the favour, when inform'd
That round his friend the rage of battle storm'd,
Commanded Ossian, with a chosen train,
To join the monarch, and his cause maintain.

Arriv'd my ship, in Co-coiled I moor'd,
And by a special herald sent my sword.
The King receiv'd, and brighten'd at the view,
For this the sign of Albion's aid he knew;
Nor was it long before I met the chief,
Who grasp'd my hand, and spoke these words in grief.

You call, brave warriors, on a man o'ercome,
When foes beleager his deserted dome.
Ton-thormod in Sar-dronlo holds his reign,
A land like this encompass'd by the main,

Whose

Whose warlike natives long employ'd our arms,
Till by my daughter Oina-morul's charms
Their leader smit; he sought her for a bride;
But, hating the connexion, I denied.
At this enrag'd, his fury nought can stand,
With fire and sword he ravages the land:
You only come to witness our o'erthrow,
And see these tow'rs invested by the foe.

Fear not, said I, for Morven's sons are bold;
Like boys they come not battles to behold.
Though from this isle our country lies remote,
The King of Selma has not yet forgot,
When by a tempest forc'd upon your shores,
You led him friendly to these regal tow'rs:
Nor did a gloomy cloud thy face appear,
Thy board regal'd, thy music charm'd his ear.
The favour to requite, he bade us fail,
And in thy cause to perish or prevail.

Undaunted Chief of Trenmor's noble line,
Thy words are like Cruth-loda's voice divine;
Who dwells in clouds above the starry sky,
And gives a calm, or bids the tempest fly.
Besides the son of Comal, many guests
Have in the hall partook Mal-orchol's feasts;
Yet they desert him, when the clanging sound
Of war approaches, and his foes surround.

To all the winds that sweep the hoary main,
A sail to spy oft have I look'd in vain.
One, only one! of all my num'rous friends,
Affords assistance when the storm impends.
Thrice welcome then;—come enter these our tow'rs,
Whatever they afford is freely yours:
Here, while the shady night extends her reign,
Attend to Oina-morul's pleasing strain.

The spacious dome with plenty stor'd we found;
The voice of harmony the banquet crown'd;
A num'rous choir compos'd the Monarch's band,
Upon the harp arose his daughter's hand,
And while with skill her fingers swept the strings,
Her own sad tale the plaintive virgin sings.
In silence I observ'd the beauteous fair,
In graceful ringlets fell her shining hair;
Her eyes in tears, that but increas'd their pow'r,
Shone like two stars seen thro' an April show'r;
The sailor marks them as he ploughs the seas,
And blesses to himself the heav'nly rays.

No sooner morn had streak'd the sky with red,
Than my companions tow'rds the foe I led;
Where rapid Tormul's tumbling waters roar,
We found them posted on the rocky shore.
To the loud sound of tall Ton-thormod's shield,
They swift advanc'd to meet us in the field:

Ours

Ours not averse, a combat fierce began;
Chief clos'd with chief, and man encounter'd man.
Ton-thormod met me in the mingled shock;
Wide flew his steel, upon my helmet broke.
The chief o'ercome, I bound in leather bands,
And pris'ner gave him to Mal-orchol's hands.
The conflict o'er, the King with rapture view'd,
The prince a captive, and his host subdu'd.
Again at eve we shar'd the Monarch's feast;
Among the rest Ton-thormod sat a guest:
But mournful sat, revolving his defeat,
Nor durst the eye of Oina-morul meet.

The shell went round, till nature call'd for rest,
When in his own my hand the monarch press'd,
Then kind began: son of renown'd Fingal,
Thou shalt not unrequited leave my hall.
One child is mine, the loveliest of her kind,
In person faultless, and complete in mind.
Espouse the fair; she will thy soul delight,
And shine in Selma a distinguis'd light.
Nor will the portion she can bring, disgrace
Her union with the great Fingalian race.

Thus friendly he; then left me to repose;
But scarce laid down, my eyes began to close,
Than sweetly breathing through the silent air,
The sudden sound of music charm'd my ear,

Soft

Soft as the breeze that whirls the thistle's beard,
And lowly whisp'ring in the grass is heard.
The royal maid of Fuärfed it prov'd,
Who knew my soul by harmony was mov'd,
And plaintive sung:—" Who plac'd on yonder rock
" O'er rolling ocean casts a parting look?
" Upon the blast his hair disshevell'd flies;
" His bosom heaves, with sorrow stream his eyes.
" Retire, disconsolate youth, thy love is gone
" To wander in a distant land unknown!
" Though fame extols that race of Kings, yet true
" To her first love, she'll ever think of you;
" And doom'd in misery her days to end,
" Shall curse the fate that made our sires contend."

Sweet voice, I said, forbear thy plaintive moan,
Thou shalt not wander in a land unknown.
Descended from the daring Trenmor's race,
This bosom cherishes no passion base.
It scorns to act a low ignoble part;
And knowing now to whom inclines thy heart,
Thy sire to mollify shall be my care;
Then ease thy fears, and back to rest repair.

At break of day the captive Prince I sought,
And to the presence of Mal-orchol brought,
Whom I address'd:—Why treat a youth with scorn,
Of worth, of bravery, and nobly born?

For

For fame, not hatred, your forefathers fought;
Their rivalship in arms should be forgot,
Since now the chiefs in Odin's hall above,
The happy seat of harmony and love,
Immers'd in joys, with ancient heroes dwell,
And friendly stretch their hands to give the shell.
Like them be reconcil'd, forgive past rage,
And shun the vices of a barb'rous age.

My words had weight; the lovers' cause prevail'd;
I join'd their hands, the King their union seal'd.
Malvina thus, before these silver hairs
Were whiten'd by the length of passing years,
I could a Princess, bright in beauty's charms,
Forego, and yield her to a rival's arms.
A gen'rous deed with pleasure fills the mind.
And, well recorded, benefits mankind.

DAR-THULA.

DAR-THULA.

THE ARGUMENT.

COLLA, an Irish Chief, being killed in battle, Dar-thula, his daughter, becomes the prisoner of Cairbar, who falls violently in love with her. But while he preferred his suit, the sons of Usnoth, Nathos, Althos, and Arden, who were enemies to Cairbar, pass that way. At their approach he flies to avoid them. Dar-thula becomes enamoured of Nathos, and takes shipping with the three brothers for Scotland, their native country. But a storm rising, they are driven back on that part of the coast where Cairbar was encamped with his army. The three brothers, after a brave defence, overpowered, are slain; and the unfortunate Dar-thula, wounded in the conflict, expires on the body of her beloved Nathos.

The poem opens with an apostrophe to the moon. In the course of the narration, are introduced, by way of episodes, various circumstances explanatory of the story; which makes it one, if not the most diversified and interesting of Ossian's lesser compositions.

DAR-THULA.

HOW fair art thou, bright daughter of the spheres!
Serene and full thy lovely face appears;
Thy glory fills the vast ethereal space,
Innumerable stars thy presence grace,
Red twinkling round.—The dark brown clouds of night
Forbear to frown, and brighten in thy sight:
O'er all the spangled vault no orb is seen
Like thine superior, large, unrival'd queen!
The stars behold thy progress thro' thy skies,
And envious turn aside their sparkling eyes.
To what far region, or sequester'd place
Dost thou resort, when shadows veil thy face?
Like aged Ossian, when thy darkness grows,
Hast thou some secret hall to vent thy woes?
Perhaps the sisters of thy youthful years
Have fail'd in heav'n, and light no more the spheres.
Yes, they have fail'd, fair orb! and to thy hall
Thou oft retir'st, to mourn their hapless fall.

It is decreed that thou must likewise fade,
And leave thy paths above involv'd in shade.
Then shall the lesser stars, abash'd that now
Thy presence shun, their heads triumphant show,
And light with keener rays the world below.
Yet still, without a rival in thy reign,
Thou rul'st the night in majesty serene,
Ye winds, disperse the clouds which veil the sky,
That darting down her silver beams from high,
The mountain's shaggy sides may rise to sight,
And ocean's troubled surges roll in light:
For Nathos and his brother Althos ride,
With Ardan, beam of youth, the stormy tide;
And urge through foaming waves their desp'rate course,
To shun revengeful Cairbar's brutal force.
What other lovely form is at their side?
The dark surrounding shades her beauties hide;
Her robes in dusky wreaths are tost in air;
Upon the wind disshevell'd floats her hair;
Wrapt in the clouds that veil the starless sky,
She, like a spirit, dimly passes by.
It is Dar-thula with the radient eyes,
Who from the love of hateful Cairbar flies;
But flies in vain, for winds and waves withstand,
And fate denies her Etha's woody land.
Not Nathos' mountains these aloft that tow'r,
Nor these his native streams that rapid pour.
The hall of Borbar-duthal's son is nigh,
His moss-grown turrets intercept the sky.

The

The land, far stretching to the northern deep,
Back into Tura's bay compels the ship.
When thus on hostile shores my friends were cast,
Where wanton roved, O south! thy absent blast?
While adverse winds to mountains swell'd the main,
The thistle's beard you follow'd o'er the plain.
O! that in Nathos' bellying sails you blew,
Till Etha's woody hills had rose in view.
Elaps'd is now the term, his native shore
That hapless warrior shall behold no more!
The day of his return has long been past;
A feeble ghost, he rides the howling blast.

No marvel, that a youth abroad admir'd
For arms and arts, Dar-thula's bosom fir'd.
Fresh as the dawn of day appear'd his bloom,
His locks were glossy as the raven's plume;
The sun, when ev'ning breathes a gentle air,
Did not in mildness with his soul compare;
Not waters gliding smooth through Lora's vale,
Or reeds low sighing to a southern gale,
Could match the tuneful accents of his tongue,
On which the charms of elocution hung.
But when embattled, to dispute the day,
Two armies mov'd, wedg'd firm in close array,
He rush'd to combat, roaring like the sea—
Flash'd from afar his shield, and struck with fright,
The vanquish'd nations headlong urg'd their flight.

'Twas thus caparison'd, and bright in arms,
Dar-thula first beheld his youthful charms,
From high Selama's moss-encrusted tow'rs;
When he to succour Cormac led his pow'rs.
The virgin saw, and in these words express'd
The soft emotions throbbing at her breast.
" What lovely stranger yonder treads the green,
" Of princely carriage and undaunted mien!
" Contemning death, he rushes to the fight,
" And to an army dares, oppose his might.
" Youth of the ruddy look, thy wrath restrain,
" Fierce Cairbar comes with thousands in his train.
" Oh! that from that detested suitor freed,
" Thee for my future Lord the fates decreed.
" Blest, Etha! are thy rocks, and blest the earth
" Which gave to such transcendent beauty birth!
" There issues early to the mountain chase
" That stately form, that miracle of grace;
" The snowy whiteness of his bosom bare,
" And dancing to the wind his raven hair."

So spake the maid from steep Selama's height;
But now around her low'rs the cloudy night:
Still adverse from the north the tempests howl,
And thund'ring on the coast the surges roll.
Between the squally blasts and stormy main,
Comes sweet at intervals the virgin's strain.
Ye winds and waves your noise a while forbear,
Amidst the roar, we scarce his voice can hear.

" Are

" Are these the rocks of Nathos I descry,
" Or these thy streams, says she, that gush from high?
" From Usnoth's neighb'ring hall comes yonder blaze,
" That friendly points this way its cheerful rays?
" But elemental jars turmoil the night,
" And faint and distant seems the quiv'ring light.
" But Nathos is my light—while he is kind,
" Nor clouds nor storms affect Dar-thula's mind.
" Say why these frequent sighs? Does latent grief
" Afflict the manly soul of Etha's Chief?
" Is he cast down, because the northern wind
" Has on a foreign shore his sails confin'd?"

As you surmise, fair maid, the stormy force
Of adverse winds have drove us from our course.
Those are not Nathos' rocks thou see'st before,
Nor those his mountain streams that sound on shore;
No cheering blaze from Etha's halls is seen,
They hence lie far, with oceans vast between.
We are on Ullin's coast, the hostile land,
Where cruel Cairbar holds supreme command.
Haste Althos, tow'rds the north the bay explore,
While Ardan westward winds along the shore:
Myself will trace the narrow path which leads
To yonder turret, whence that light proceeds.
Mean time here rest thou lovely beam, nor fear,
For Nathos' sword to guard thee shall be near.

The

The warrior said, and hasten'd swift away,—
The virgin, lonely left beside the sea,
Long waited his return, with eager look
Still anxious first upon the road he took:
Her ears, the while, are deafen'd with the sound
Of ocean's waves, tremendous roaring round:
At last impatient, bursting into tears,
She wrung her hands, and spoke aloud her fears.
" Here solitary left amidst the night,
" While howling tempests chill my soul with fright,
" I trembling sit—what can the youth detain?
" He scorns the tyrant and his num'rous train:
" And much I fear, surrounded by the foe
" O'er match'd he fights, and now perhaps lies low."

While she laments him thus, as really lost,
The Chief returning joins her on the coast.
In his excursion he had reach'd the gate
Of lofty Tura, great Cuthullin's seat;
Whose ghost, that night upon the winds abroad,
Approaching met him near his old abode.
More large than life the shadowy form drew near,
A column huge appear'd his misty spear,
His eyes terrific shot a ruddy flame,
The stars dim twinkled through his airy frame:
His hollow sounding voice, like winds that blow
In rocky caverns pent, portended wo.
To warn him of his state, the warrior knew
The apparition sent, and sad withdrew;

Not

Not darker looks the sun, when tempests shroud
His blazing forehead in a show'ry cloud.

Dar-thula soon perceived his alter'd mien,
And frighten'd cried, what has my Nathos seen?
My eyes' delight, my last and only hope,
Be not depress'd, nor let thy courage droop!
Of father, brother, kindred, all bereft,
Thee if I lose, I then am wholly left.
Except the mournful torrent's solemn fall,
No noise is heard around Selama's hall:
The natives all engag'd on Cormac's side,
Assertors of his right, in battle died.
When first the news of their defeat was brought,
What anguish stung, what terror fill'd my thought!
'Twas eve; and by degrees, as night prevail'd,
The streams, the plains, and varied landscape fail'd.
A sudden blast, descending from above
Made high Selama's rustling forests move.
Beneath a spreading oak I had my seat,
Revolving, sad in mind, the people's fate,
Who led by Truthil and my sire afar,
Were then in distant regions waging war.
As there I sat, a man in arms drew near,
It prov'd my father bending on his spear.
His head a helmet bore, his side a blade.
Perceiving me, he stoop'd, but nothing said.
For his son's death, the ruin of his kind,
Confused his thought and overwhelm'd his mind.

At

At length tears eas'd his heart, and words found way,
When thus he told the slaughter of the day.

Dar-thula is the last of Colla's line,
No pledge of love, no other child is mine!
On Ullin's plain my only son lies dead,
With all our bravest warriors round him spread;
And bloody Cairbar hastens with his pow'rs
To take possession of Selama's tow'rs,
I with the remnant of our clan will try
Once more the fight, and venge my son, or die.
But ah my daughter! thou art passing fair,
In easy ringlets waves thy curling hair!
Where, when thy aged guardian is no more,
Shalt thou from hostile insult be secure?

And is young Truthil fall'n, I sighing cried;
The first of Cormac's friends, the soldier's pride?
For ever hath that ardent spirit ceas'd,
That urg'd to gallant deeds his dauntless breast?
No season this for me thy fears to shew;
Dar-thula trusts to her unerring bow,
Which faithful to her aim hath prov'd her skill,
And pierc'd afar the roe-bucks of the hill.
Like them, if Cairbar has a mortal part,
A shaft will find the passage to his heart.

The gray-hair'd warrior's face with transport glow'd,
A show'r of gushing tears his cheeks overflow'd,

His

His quiv'ring lips betray'd ecstatic joy;
In thee he said, I recognise my boy:
Like him thou speak'st, like him supremely brave,
Thou scorn'st to live the proud usurper's slave.
As courage prompts thee to the sanguine field,
Receive this spear, this helm, and shining shield;
They were a youthful warrior's light attire,
Despoil'd in fight, nor strength to bear require.
When early dawn has purpled o'er the sky,
I mean again the tyrant to defy.
Behind my shield, be near thy father's side;
His arm could for thy safety once provide;
But trembling now beneath a load of years,
Harass'd and broken with incessant cares,
He finds his vigour gone, his frame decay'd,
And of the man he was is scarce the shade.

We pass'd away in sad discourse the night;
But morn no sooner beam'd refulgent bright,
Than, rising with the sun, I shone in arms,
And follow'd aged Colla to th' alarms.
He struck his bossy shield, and to the sound
The sons of high Selama gather'd round.
Yet muster'd on the plain they seem'd but few,
Those likewise grey, and ill accoutred too;
For all the young and most approv'd for might,
Had fall'n with Truthil in the former fight.

Comrades

Comrades of youth, my sire, address'd the train,
Another man you saw me tread the plain,
Another man I charg'd the warring bands,
When great Confadan fell beneath these hands.
Now their own weight my limbs can scarcely bear,
You too since then far other men appear.
For time, like mists that wrap in night the vales,
Keeps moving on, and misery entails.
I little dreamt the ev'ning of my life
Would prove thus turbulent and full of strife;
But hop'd, that like the sun's departing ray,
My latter days would peaceful pass away.
Wherefore my sword, as useless, had laid by,
And in the hall my buckler hung on high.
When lo! around condensing vapours form
A night of clouds, and sudden bursts the storm:
While I decrepit, like an aged oak,
Too feeble to endure so rude a shock,
O'erwhelm'd must fall, and press the fatal plain
Already loaded with my people slain.
O Truthil, son beloved! where dost thou dwell,
With all the gallant Chiefs that round thee fell?
Thou answer'st not; and silent pass in air,
Regardless of the heavy ills I bear.
But now th' important hour impends, when I,
Or he, the cause accurs'd of all, shall die,
No more—my heart beats high, my strength returns,
And eager for the fight my bosom burns.

He

He said, and rushing on, his falchion drew;
The bold example all his host pursue.
Flash, as they wave, their brandish'd swords in air,
And streams upon the whistling wind their hair.

We march'd not far, before we Cairbar found
On Lona feasting with his warrior's round.
Surprised at our approach, the banquet ceased,
And summon'd to the field, all rose in haste.
We fought—but why on battles dwell, and arms
To him, whom I have seen amidst alarms,
Destructive as the lightnings of the sky,
When bright but terrible, they dart from high,
And in their course the blasted nations die.

His eager jav'lin first my father threw,
Then drew his sword, and midst the thickest flew.
Where'er he turn'd the blood in streams pursu'd;
He could no more had youth his arm endued;
Till from a hand unknown, with hissing sound,
An arrow came, and stretch'd him on the ground.
His death my startled soul with horror chill'd,
I forward sprang, and o'er him spread my shield.
In this heroic act of duteous care
I must have fall'n, had not my breasts left bare
Betray'd my sex; when Cairbar, at the sight,
Restrain'd his men, and stopt the furious fight.
A sumptuous tomb was rais'd above the dead,
And I triumphant to Selama led:

There

There all the soothing blandishments of love,
In vain he breath'd my hatred to remove.
For while among the trophies of the field,
I saw my brother's sword, my father's shield,
My heart indignant burn'd against the chief,
And made me to his protestations deaf.
Then sent by heav'n you came, and struck with dread,
The hateful tyrant from Selama fled;
Fled like an evil spright, that sees the light
Of morn approach, and vanishes from sight.
His thousands were not near, nor durst he stand
In single combat thy superior hand.
Nor dares he now—let Nathos lift his spear,
And Cairbar's quiv'ring heart will yield to fear.

The virgin said; and Etha's chief replied:
From early youth my courage has been tried!
Scarce could this arm a warrior's jav'lin wield,
When danger summon'd to th' embattled field.
Ev'n then amidst the tumult of the fight,
Charm'd with the clang of steel, my soul grew bright;
The vale in verdure cloath'd looks not so gay,
When brighten'd by the sun's all cheering ray.
But sad reverse, through thee a coward grown,
I tremble for thy perils, not my own.
As some lone traveller, that far from home,
Beholds the tempest's fast approaching gloom,
I, that have view'd thee a bright star, whose light
Resplendent blazes o'er the hills at night;

Perceive,

Perceive, with grief, surrounding clouds arise,
That must for ever snatch thee from my eyes;
For here the storm detains us on a coast,
Possessed by Cairbar, and a num'rous host,
While all our brave companions of the war,
On Albion's barren hills are distant far.
Thus void of strength, without the pow'r to fly,
No other mean is left us but to die.
It's true thy brothers both are men of might,
And Nathos oft hath fearless met the fight;
But what are three, though dauntless hearts they boast,
To cope in war with Cairbar's countless host?
The gallant Oscar, with a chosen train,
Hath meditated long to cross the main
In aid of Cormac's cause. O that his sails
Approach'd the shores, distended by the gales!
Then would my arm be strong, and trenchant blade,
Wide slaught'ring Erin's crowded ranks pervade;
Make Cairbar tremble e'en amidst his bands,
Nor dare against Dar-thula lift his hands.
Yet why despond? To numbers in the scale
Our courage weigh, and we may still prevail.

Prevail or not, undaunted spoke the fair,
(Assuming resolution from despair)
In yonder arms, that to the meteors glow
Within the ship, I mean to meet the foe:
For better thus attempt the fight and fall,
Than lead a wretched life in Cairbar's hall.

Ye

Ye kindrêd ghosts, that now pass dim through air,
This solemn vow, this steadfast purpose hear,
No force shall make me with the monster dwell,
By whom my father and my brother fell.

To hear the virgin thus determin'd speak,
A gleam of joy broke forth on Nathos' cheek.
Bright maid, he cried, with ev'ry virtue blest,
Thy noble fortitude inspires my breast.
Let Cairbar with his thousands come along,
That Chief I brave, and all his num'rous throng.
Whate'er befalls, old Usnoth will not hear,
That from superior force I turn'd through fear;
Ere yet my sails were spread before the wind,
The words he spoke are rooted in my mind.
Thou go'st, he said, to join the king of shields,
The great Cuthullin fam'd in martial fields.
Like him, applause by valiant deeds acquire,
And scorn when dangers threaten to retire.
Be firm, be fearless, or thou wilt disgrace
In foreign regions, our illustrious race;
And I, already verging to my end,
Shall, whelm'd with sorrows, to the grave descend.

Here grief suppress'd his voice, without a word,
While tears ran trickling down, he gave this sword:
Which taking, I set sail—To Tura come,
A desert place we found that lofty dome:

The

The arms that hung around the hall were gone,
And aged Lamhor mournful sat alone.
From whence, said he, the chiefs in steel array'd?
A sight no longer in these walls survey'd.
From high Temora come the martial train,
Or some remoter region o'er the main?

To his inquiries, I this answer gave;
From Etha's woody land we cross the wave,
Slis-Sama's sons, of car-borne Semo's line,
And come Cuthullin in his wars to join.
But by thy tears conclude our purpose vain,
And this redoubted champion must be slain.
If what my fears suggest be real, tell
Thou son of lonely Tura, how he fell.

He fell not like a star, the Seer replies,
That shoots at night along the vaulted skies,
A transient spark which shines, then instant dies.
The hero's course was like the meteor's flame,
That journeys through the vast ethereal frame,
Destruction spreading in its rapid flight,
And, boding war, mankind appals with fright.
Sad, Lego are thy banks, and sad the side
Of Lora's murm'ring waters—there he died!

Then fell the warrior in the full career
Of his renown, while slaughter bath'd his spear!

A life

A life of fame amidst alarms he past,
And crown'd with conquest, glorious breath'd his last.

Arriv'd at Lego's verdant banks we found
The hero's tomb, of earth a lofty mound.
There still the sorrowing host confus'dly spread,
And bards of many songs bewail'd the dead.
We join'd the mourners, and, indulging grief,
Three days successive wept the fall'n chief.
But when the third returning morn unveiled
Her blushing cheek, I struck on Caithbar's shield,
And Erin's sons, obedient to the sound,
Their jav'lins shook, and joyful crouded round.

Success prov'd friendly to our first essay;
On Corlath, Cairbar's friend, who nearest lay,
We like a sudden torrent, rush'd by night,
And all his follow'rs kill'd, or put to flight.
When dawn'd the following day, with blood besmear'd,
And strew'd with heaps of dead, the vale appear'd.
Then swift as wreaths of mist, without delay,
For Cormac's echoing halls we haste away,
The helpless king to guard; but found him dead,
In early youth by Cairbar lowly laid.

When Erin's sons beheld an empty space,
The ancient palace of their kingly race;
As clouds disperse that long have threaten'd rain,
Slow, melancholy, dark, withdrew the train.

Deserted

Deserted by our friends, to Tura's bay
We hasten'd back, resolv'd to cross the sea.
'Twas then, that passing by Selama's height,
We made the bloody tyrant take to flight:
Swift he retir'd, like foggy mists which sail
O'er Lano's marshy fens before the gale;
There first, Dar-thula, I thy charms beheld,
Bright as the morning sun, on Etha's field.
As fix'd in raptures on thy face I gaz'd,
" How lovely is that beam!" I said amazed.
You harken'd to my vows, and blushing gave
Consent, to pass with Usnoth's son the wave.
But adverse to our wish, the winds withstand,
And back impel us on this hostile strand.

Here Althos, just returning, made reply,
The storm detains us, and our foes are nigh.
Along the coast their clanging arms I heard,
And saw in air their dusky standards rear'd:
Like Cromla's falling stream, distinct and loud,
The voice of Cairbar over-awes the crowd;
Who, ere the shades of night succeeded day,
Perceiv'd our sable vessel in the bay,
And must'ring from the country round, a host
Ten thousand strong, he occupies the coast.

When Nathos with a smile; let Cairbar guard
The wide extended shores; we are prepared

To meet him and his host: to battle bred,
The sons of Usnoth numbers never fled.
Forbear to roar ye noisy waves around,
And cease tempestuous winds your surly sound.
'Tis not your rage, or rolling of the deeps,
That on the coast of Ullin Nathos keeps.
No—though a calm should hush the sea and sky,
His soul forbids him, and he scorns to fly.
Haste Althos, bring from yonder bark on shore
The scaly mail our great forefathers bore.
Bring too yon spear, dim gleaming to the stars,
Which mighty Semo carried in his wars.

His arms to Nathos brought, the warrior drest
In solid plates of steel his manly breast;
Then lovely treads the beach with martial air,
Nor heeds the tempest whistling in his hair:
He fearless casts around his fiery eyes,
And Cairbar, and his num'rous host defies.
Dar-thula silent at his side appear'd,
Her stedfast soul for life or death prepar'd.
But though a calm serene sat on her brow,
Two crystal tears stood ready to o'erflow.

The chief perceiv'd, and thus to Althos spoke;
A cavern lies in yonder neighb'ring rock,
With Colla's daughter thither swift repair,
And there remain the guardian of the fair;

While

While I, with youthful Arden boldly go,
And call to battle Cairbar and the foe.
O! that the tyrant had but heart to stand
In single fight, the fury of this hand!
But hear me Althos—should our valour fail,
Display for Etha's echoing groves thy sail;
And there arriv'd, let aged Usnoth know,
That crown'd with deathless fame his sons are low;
That death they brav'd amidst surrounding bands,
And died observant of his last commands.
The pleasant tidings will allay the smart,
With which the fatal news will rack his heart.
Nor stay Dar-thula, o'er my fall to weep;
But when in safety landed from the deep,
Then call thy maids at Autumn's dark return,
And in a solemn dirge for Nathos mourn.
O that the voice of Cona, in my praise,
Were heard to utter elegiac lays!
The lasting honour would rejoice my mind,
When a dim vapour roving on the wind.

Thy wish hath sped: amidst the clouds rejoice
Brave son of Usnoth, Ossian tunes his voice,
And if his song can give eternal fame,
To latest ages shall descend thy name.
Why was I not that hour on Lena's plain,
When by the vile assassin basely slain!
My sword had join'd thee in th' unequal strife,
And I had rescu'd, or had lost my life.

That fatal night, in Selma's hall we sat,
Conferring o'er the genial bowl till late;
And in the neighb'ring forests heard the sound
Of storms abroad, and spirits shrieking round.
At length, with rushing noise, a louder squall,
Tempestuous ent'ring, whistled through the hall.
It reach'd my harp, which sounded to the blast
As if a dying man had breath'd his last.

All star'd surpris'd, but none the silence broke,
Till, with a sigh, the king of Morven spoke.
Did none remark that sad prognostic tone,
Which echo'd like a chief's expiring groan?
Some of our heroes (would my fears were vain!)
Are now in danger, or perhaps are slain.
Touch Ossian, gently touch the solemn string,
And to the sound a song funereal sing;
That joyful mounting to ethereal air,
They may to Morven's heath-clad hills repair.

The monarch mournful said; I took my lyre,
And sung thus doleful, while I touch'd the wire.
" Ghosts of my fathers! forward bend from high,
" The flaming terrors of your course lay by;
" And whether dead, in bloody conflict slain,
" Or whelm'd beneath the billows of the main,
" To your celestial bow'rs the warrior hail,
" This night ascending from our earthly vale.

" A robe

" A robe of mist to clothe his limbs prepare,
" Of vapours form a pillar for his spear,
" And for a sword to glitter on his side,
" An half extinguish'd meteor's light provide:
" Then stamp, of purest elements, a face
" Endow'd with beauty, majesty, and grace,
" That when amidst the tempests he descends,
" Those lineaments divine may charm his friends.
" Ye spirits of my fathers, bend from high,
" And now transport the hero to the sky."

In Selma thus I sung before the king,
My fingers sweeping the soft tinkling string;
While Nathos distant lay, on Ullin's coast,
Surrounded by the night and Cairbar's host.
Their noise he heard distinct, on Lena's plain,
Between the gusts of wind and roaring main,
He heard; but firm of soul, and void of fear,
In silence stood reclin'd upon his spear.

Meantime, slow gaining on the clouds of night,
Day shew'd the objects round, and brought to light
The Irish army rang'd along the flood,
Like a low ridge of mountains cloath'd with wood.
There stood the tyrant, with malignant leer,
Rejoicing to behold his rival near.

Nathos advanc'd, impatient of delay,
Nor would the maid conceal'd behind him stay;

But

But mov'd unaw'd to meet the hostile band,
Her lifted javelin shining in her hand.
Young Arden too and Althos sought th' alarms,
Both blooming fair, both resolute in arms.
When Etha's chief, ere yet he threw his spear:
Lo! high Temora's king, thy rival here!
Then boldly sally forth, and prove thy might,
It's Nathos dares thee to the single fight;
And who survives the victory to claim,
His be the glory, and the lovely dame.
Against a stranger cast upon thy coast,
Tis mean to summon a whole nation's host.
I met thee once in arms, but Cairbar flew,
For then my followers equal'd his he knew.
Now by an army back'd he proffers war,
Because he sees my friends are distant far.

The gloomy tyrant hearing, inly burn'd
With indignation, and severe return'd,
Youth of the heart of pride, shall I advance,
And stain with vulgar gore my royal lance?
Thy sires are not renown'd, nor glorious shine
Among the first of men, like Atha's line.
Are in their halls the arms, and bucklers seen
Of mighty chiefs, in former battles slain?
But were it so, I am a king, and scorn
To fight with little men plebeian born.

The son of Usnoth stung, without reply
On his companions silent cast his eye,

Whose

Whose vengeful darts with his that instant flew,
And sent with force, three mighty warriors slew.
Then brandishing their swords, they rush'd along,
And sprung impetuous midst the thickest throng.
The ranks bor'd through, give back; as clouds recede
When their dark ridges the loud blasts invade.
Red Cairbar saw, and bade his men afar,
Maintain a distant desultory war;
At his command a cloud of shafts they pour,
And Usnoth's sons fall buried in the show'r.
So fall three oaks, that far from any wood,
On the bleak summit of some hill have stood,
Till in their strength the hurricanes descend,
And from th' adhering cliffs the saplings rend.
The passenger, who saw them lately grow,
That way returning, now beholds them low;
And wonders how alone, and plac'd so high,
They could so long the stormy winds defy.

Beside the dead, with long dishevell'd hair,
Dar-thula stood, an image of despair:
The blooming rose her faded cheek forsook,
Approaching death star'd ghastly in her look.
She would have spoke, but fault'ring on her tongue,
The words half-form'd, in sounds imperfect hung.
Cairbar drew near, and thus insults her woe;
Ungrateful maid, where is thy lover now?
Thy hopes have fail'd of reaching Etha's land
Or where Fingal in Morven holds command.

Had

Had not the winds thy hasty flight withstood,
I had pursued and drench'd those realms in blood;
Fingal had bled amidst his vanquish'd pow'rs,
And sorrow dwelt in Selma's ancient tow'rs.

Thus while he ranted in unmanly strain,
The virgin's shield dropp'd sounding on the plain.
Her iv'ry skin appear'd in crimson dy'd,
A feather'd shaft stood rooted in her side.
Yet constant to the last, her Nathos' breast,
White as a wreath of snow, she sinking prest,
Her hair spread o'er his face, while mixing round
Their blood, a purple current, steep'd the ground.

Cairbar beheld, and grieving when too late,
Commands his hundred bards to mourn her fate.
These struck their harps, and thus the maid bewail'd:
" Hath then the first of Erin's beauties fail'd!
" Let silence reign, where high Selama's brow
" O'erlooks the solemn-rolling streams below;
" And let the subject realms her death deplore,
" The ancient race of Truthil is no more!
" Here the last relick of the lineage lies;
" Returning morn shall not unseal her eyes,
" Nor rising sun her heavy slumbers break,
" And say, Dar-thula, peerless maid, awake!
" On gentle wings soft blows the fanning breeze,
" In verdure cloth'd appear the mountain trees;

" Unnumber'd

" Unnumber'd flow'rs with sweets perfume the air,
" And smiling spring renews the joyful year.
" These scenes could once the virgin's soul excite,
" And call her forth, but they no more delight!
" She cannot burst the prison of the tomb,
" Nor lovely rise again in beauty's bloom."

Thus o'er Dar-thula sung the tuneful train,
When they her tomb erected on the plain.
I after sought the place, and mournful paid
Sad elegiac honours to the maid;
Then when Fingal to Ullin cross'd the main,
O'erthrew the tyrant, and reveng'd the slain.

CROMA.

CROMA.

THE ARGUMENT.

CROTHAR, losing through age his sight, Rothmar, a neighbouring Prince, resolved to avail himself of the opportunity of annexing the old man's territory to his own. The design coming to the knowledge of Fingal, he sent Ossian to the assistance of Crothar. But before he arrived, his son, Fovar-gormo, a youth of great promise, venturing to engage the enemy, is slain, and his army routed. Ossian, however, renews the war, kills Rothmar, and totally defeats his forces.

The poem opens with the lamentations of Malvina for Oscar. It is to console her, that Ossian relates this story of Crothar; who, with uncommon fortitude, bore the death of his son.

CROMA.

IT was my Oscar spoke!—his voice I knew,
Though now his visits to my dreams are few!
Ye worthies of my race, unfold on high
Your halls of mist! Malvina's steps are nigh.
I heard a voice, that bids me hence depart;
A pulse unusual flutters at my heart!
Why would your murmurs restless winds forsake,
The rolling waters of the distant lake?
Your ill-tim'd rustle in the neighbouring oak,
The pleasing slumbers of Malvina broke,
Just as the form of Oscar, on a beam,
From heav'n descended to delight my dream;
His golden garments, edg'd with rays of light,
Sky tinctur'd, flash'd intolerably bright.
I heard his lovely voice!—The sound I knew,
Although his friendly visits now are few.

O son

O son of Ossian! my afflicted mind
Has long continued to thy mem'ry kind,
My sighs still heave, when dawning day appears,
With dewy night descend my gushing tears.
A lovely tree, beneath thy fost'ring care,
With branches crown'd, I throve in foreign air;
Till thy death, coming like a tempest, laid
My head on earth, and wither'd all my shade.
Returning spring hath oft the woods renew'd,
But no green leaf of mine hath since been view'd.
Worn down with grief, and blighted in the bloom,
The virgins saw me drooping to the tomb;
And to assuage the violence of my woes,
Would to their harps a sprightly tune compose.
Sometimes they said—" Malvina! why complain?
" Wilt thou forever weep the warrior slain?
" Did birth and dignity the youth adorn,
" Or was he lovely as the beaming morn?
" However dear, forbear to weep the chief,
" Or death must follow such excess of grief."

O Toscar's daughter![*] why this doleful strain?
You wring your heart with ecstasy of pain!
While laid at Morruth's gentle gliding streams,
The ghosts of ancient bards inspir'd your dreams;
Less sweet th' enchanting notes our youth essay,
When from the hills return'd, at eve of day

They

[*] Ossian speaks.

They sing the chase.—But cease those plaintive airs,
They but excite afresh incessant tears.
Light vernal show'rs refresh the flow'ry plains,
While havock follows long continu'd rains;
To minds at rest past troubles are a joy,
But griefs intemp'rate inward peace destroy.
Then lend an ear to Ossian's artless lays,
They will instruct and set thy mind at ease.

The king commanding, to the northern gales,
For Innis-fail were spread my snowy sails;
I Croma reach'd, swift tilting o'er the flood,
Where then the tow'rs of Crothar's palace stood.
Crothar the brave, who in his younger years,
Was strong and active in the strife of spears.
But age no sooner trembled on his hands,
Than Tromlo's chief arose to seize his lands;
Fingal indignant, bade me cross the tide,
Support his friend, and humble Rothmar's pride.

On landing I a herald sent before,
And follow'd with my people from the shore.
In Croma's hall the sightless king we found
Sat on a throne, his father's arms around;
His hoary locks, all white and loosely spread,
Wav'd round the staff on which reclin'd his head:
He then was humming to himself a song,
When ent'ring at the gate our armour rung.

The

The monarch rose, and eager to his breast,
The offspring of his friend transported press'd.

" My strength hath fail'd," the mournful king began,
" And Crothar now can scarce be deem'd a man!
" O that this hand could still the sword sustain,
" As on the day, when fierce on Strutha's plain,
" Your father fought! He was the first of men,
" And him alone I own'd superior then.
" My gallant actions his attention drew;
" He gave the praise that was to valour due,
" And plac'd upon my arm the bossy shield
" Of mighty Calthar, whom in war he kill'd.
" Behold where yet it hangs on yonder wall,
" Among the spoils that ornament my hall.
" Is Ossian strong?—Approach, and let me feel
" If like thy father thou canst lift the steel.

I gave my arm, to please the good old man,
Which having felt, he sigh'd, and thus began.
" My son, thy arm is strong and form'd for war,
" Yet to thy father's is inferior far!
" But who of mortal men e'er equall'd him,
" In fair proportion, size, and strength of limb?
" Ye sons of Croma, be the feast prepar'd,
" And let the voice of harmony be heard,
" For great is this descendant of Fingal,
" Who honours with his presence Crothar's hall."

He

He said; and straight the joyous board is crown'd;
With choral songs the lofty roofs rebound;
Festivity and revel fills the court;
But this ill-season'd merriment prov'd short.
It was a gleam, as transient as the light
The passing moon darts through the clouds of night.
Th' impending peril soon renew'd their fears;
Old Crothar sat amidst his weeping peers,
Nor sooner ceas'd the bards to strike the string,
Than pensive spoke the venerable king.

" Ossian! thou seest that latent griefs destroy
" Our eager efforts to afford thee joy.
" But think not thus in Croma's hall, the shell
" Went mournful round before my people fell:
" Our pride was to regale the stranger guest,
" While fair-hair'd Forvar-gormo graced the feast;
" But that regretted youth now slain in fight,
" Hath not behind him left one streak of light.
" To save the realm he met a stronger foe,
" For this his father's and the people's woe!
" No sooner Rothmar heard these eyes had fail'd,
" And that these arms were fix'd; than he avail'd
" Himself of this my state, and led his bands,
" By force to seize on our defenceless lands.
" The peasantry submit, or seiz'd with dread,
" At his approach their habitations fled.
" In wrath I took my arms to meet the fight,
" But what could Crothar do depriv'd of sight?

" Enfeebled, and unequal in their gait,
" These trembling limbs could scarce support my weight.
" 'Twas then I wish'd the day, when firm I stood
" The shock of war, and drench'd the field in blood.

" When, from the chase return'd, my son beheld
" His feeble sire accouter'd for the field;
" (A miserable object old and blind!)
" The noble youth indignant spoke his mind.
" 'Does Crothar stagg'ring, thus in arms appear,
" Because he has no son to lift the spear?
" Know, Forvar-gormo has been taught to throw
" The missile dart, and draw the twanging bow.
" Upon his strength rely, and with the race
" Of Croma, let him this invader face.
" My bosom beats, my heart is all on fire;
" I will repel, or in th' attempt expire."

" Go, meet him, I replied, my gallant son!
" But be not by the heat of youth spurr'd on,
" To rush amidst the battle's thickest rage,
" Where, hand to hand, in front the strong engage.
" Then shall I hear thy steps return with joy,
" And cling transported to my darling boy.
" Upon th' event tis painful long to dwell,
" He went—he met the foe—they fought—he fell;
" And Tromlo's chief, elated with success,
" Advances now our palace to possess."

This

This is no time the song of bards to hear,
Or fill the shell—I said, and grasp'd my spear.
The people saw the battle in my look,
And rising round, their shining jav'lins took.
All night along the shady heath we strode,
Till o'er the eastern hills the morning glow'd;
When to a vale o'erhung with rocks we came,
Through which, meandering ran a limpid stream:
Along its banks the sons of Tromlo lay,
Their arms refulgent flash'd against the day.
We gave a shout, and rush'd upon the band;
Surpris'd, they did not long the onset stand.
By Ossian's sword their leader press'd the plain;
Nor had the sun descended to the main,
Before to Crothar back his arms I bore;
Who joyful felt them, dropping still with gore.

Again the people to the hall repair,
But handed round the shell with alter'd cheer.
Ten harps are strung; five bards, in sounding lays,
Pour forth their burning souls in Ossian's praise;
Alternate they advance, alternate sing,
In words responsive to the minstrel's string.
While these with music charm, th' inferior throng,
In copious bowls, the genial feast prolong;
Forgetful of the past, they send away
The hours in mirth, till morn restores the day:

No cares molesting, and no dangers near,
All night, all day, they revel without fear.
For he, the nation's late and only dread,
The gloomy Rothmar, slept among the dead.

In Forvar-gormo's praise my voice was heard,
What time the youthful warrior they interr'd.
Old Crothar follow'd to the grave his son,
Without a tear, without a single groan.
He search'd the lifeless corpse, and when he felt,
That honestly before his wounds were dealt,
With joy transported, he exclaim'd—" 'Tis well,
" In battle, as a warrior should, he fell!
" The scars that seam his breast prove this, and shew
" That boldly face to face he met the foe.
" Thrice happy they, in youth who press the field,
" With all the glory crown'd brave actions yield!
" They shall not in the hall, grown old and blind,
" Deserted sit, the scorn of base mankind:
" With heart-felt grief lament the virgin train,
" And in the song their memories remain.
" But, ah! how diff'rent far the hapless state,
" Of those decreed a length of years by fate!
" They linger on, till men forget the praise
" Due to the valour of their former days;
" A miserable life, ordain'd to last
" Till all their kindred, all their friends have past.
" Then,

" Then, when they die, 'tis joy around their bier,
" And strangers place their stone without a tear.
" How happier far in youth to fall with fame,
" When virtuous actions a distinction claim!"

These rights funereal paid, I anchor weigh'd,
And soon the coast of hilly Morven made.

BERRATHON.

BERRATHON.

THE ARGUMENT.

LARTHMOR, King of Berrathon, being dethroned by his son Uthal; Fingal sent Ossian and Toscar (the father of the celebrated Malvina) to restore the father again to his throne. Uthal was handsome; Nina-thoma, the daughter of Torthoma, fell in love with, and married him. But proving inconstant, he left her on a desart island, whence she is relieved by Ossian; who landing, defeats the forces of Uthal, and killed him in battle. Nina-thoma, whose love for her husband, not all his bad usage could erase, died of grief at his death. In the mean time Larthmor is retored, and Ossian returns to Morven.

The poem opens with an elegy on the death of Malvina, the daughter of Toscar, and closes with presages of his own approaching end.

BERRATHON.

THROUGH Lutha's narrow vale smooth winds along.
A gentle brook, with alders overhung;
So close above the serried branches join,
That scarce between the noontide sun-beams shine.
The fertile glen is cloth'd in green, and there
The lonely thistle shakes its head in air.
There likewise, heavy with the dewy show'r,
Waves to the breeze at times the full-blown flow'r;
And nodding, in each breath expects the blast,
That wide abroad its scatter'd leaves shall cast;
Though fair and fresh to day, strew'd o'er the plain,
To-morrow for its place to seek is vain!
An emblem of the short precarious state,
To hapless mortals here allow'd by fate.
Not Cona's voice, whose numbers charm'd mankind,
Can from the common doom exemption find:
The hunter, issuing forth at morning hour,
Will one day say; "no more in yonder bow'r,

"The

" The plaintive tone of Ossian's harp I hear;"
So shall he mournful say, and drop a tear.

But from a world of misery releas'd,
When these, now sightless eyes are clos'd in rest;
Then come Malvina, with thy music come!
And raise on Lutha's banks my lonely tomb;
That in the neighb'rhood of those verdant plains
Thy steps frequent, may lie my cold remains.
Inform me, son of Alpin, has not fame
Convey'd some tidings of the gentle dame?
Her soft approach, her soul-enchanting song,
Hath from our mountains now been absent long!

Unhappy bard! worn down with age and care,
To hear afflicting news thy mind prepare.
Know, passing lately by Tor-lutha's wall,
No curling smoke ascended from the hall:
Nor heard I voice of man, nor noise of hound;
The trees were still, and silence reign'd around:
With cheeks, no longer flush'd with beauties glow,
All pale appear'd the sisters of the bow;
And when for fair Malvina I inquir'd,
They at her name, in silent grief retir'd:
Their eyes, like stars dim shining thro' a show'r,
Were bath'd in tears—to speak they had not pow'r.

Then is for ever set that beam divine?
Too soon in Lutha hast thou ceast to shine!

As

As sinks the moon behind a cloud, and leaves
Involv'd in sudden gloom the trembling waves;
Such darkness follows thy departed light,
Of which depriv'd, to me tis double night!
Here lonely midst these rocks, forlorn and blind,
In future must I sit, without the kind,
The converse sweet, that soften'd all my ills,
For ever now departed from our hills!
Yet why lament the loss, since heav'n-way borne,
She rises brighter than the ruddy morn,
Amidst her kindred in the starry sky,
And there enjoys beatitude on high?

O'er Cona, far above the winged storm,
Clouds heap'd on clouds an airy palace form;
A globe immense, self-pois'd it floats on high,
Another world between the earth and sky:
There, as below, superior in the hall,
Sits leaning on his spear the great Fingal;
There his broad shield, dim gleaming to the sight,
Looks like the pallid moon's departing light,
When half her orb in ocean dipt remains,
And other half beams sickly on the plains.
On mists around repose his warlike train,
Attentive to the sound of Ullin's strain;
Whose shadowy fingers press the scarce-seen strings,
While with a sweet, though feeble voice he sings.
The lesser chiefs officious round resort,
And with a thousand meteors light the court.

The

The lucid dome, Malvina slow ascends;
A lovely form she stands before her friends,
But new amidst th' assembly of the skies,
Turns bashful from their gaze her humid eyes.

At her approach, Fingal the fair accosts;
Comes Toscar's daughter to the realm of ghosts?
In Lutha sadness reigns, now thou art gone,
And sorrow dwells around my aged son!
Be cautious winds, when cleaving swift thro' air,
You next to Morven's heath-clad hills repair;
Molest not Lutha's solitary halls,
Upon the arms that hang around the walls
Breathe gently as you pass! for she, whose hair
You wont to lift, resides no longer there.
By yonder rock, where Lutha's waters flow,
A rigid corpse she silent slumbers now!
There whispering gales your balmy pinions spread,
There fragrance breathe around her mossy bed,
And when her maids, their dirge perform'd, go home,
Supply their place, and sigh upon her tomb.

But from the dusky west, with misty hair,
Who comes supported on an airy spear?
A smile is on his gray and wat'ry face;
Malvina! 'tis thy sire, his form embrace.
" Com'st thou," he cries, " bright object of my love,
" So soon to shine upon our clouds above?
" But solitary left, and worn with care,
" Thy wish was long to join thy friends in air,

" And

" And quit a race of feeble men, that claim
" No kindred to their great forefather's fame:
" Of those brave chiefs, renown'd in former years,
" None now remain but Ossian, king of spears."

Then has not yet great Conloch's son forgot,
Our early friendship, and the battles fought
In foreign parts; when conqu'ring side by side,
Our youthful valour first the combat tried.
As from two falling rocks, the foe withdrew
Where'er we charg'd, exclaiming as they flew;
" This way yon chiefs resistless sweep the plain;
" Destruction marks their course with heaps of slain!"

Haste son of Alpin, haste! convey my lyre;
The deeds of former times my soul inspire,
When eager of renown, I past the seas
With gallant Toscar, in my youthful days;
And while I sing, be near to con the lay;
It is the last that Ossian shall essay.

My canvass spreading, ('twas the king's command)
Before a prosperous gale I quitted land,
And bounded swift along the foaming tide,
With Toscar, lord of Lutha, by my side.
For distant Berrathon we bore away,
A land surrounded by the boist'rous sea;
Where late the hospitable Larthmore reign'd,
Who at his board my father entertain'd;

Then

Then when to Scandinavia's frozen clime,
He cross'd the sea in Agandecca's time.
But age no sooner trembled on the hand
Of the old man, than eager to command,
His son arose; a youth endow'd with grace
And outward form to please the female race.
He seiz'd the throne, and of a barb'rous mind,
His aged father in a grot confin'd;
A dreary vault! that never saw the beam
Of morning sun, or oak by night to flame:
The mouth expos'd to Ocean's tempests lay,
No light admitting, save the moon's pale ray,
And one red star, that look'd into the cave,
When first emerging from the western wave.

Here, pent in durance, he for life had lain,
If gray-hair'd Snitho had not pass'd the main;
And told Fingal, imploring his relief,
The royal captive's misery and grief.
The monarch heard, and snatch'd his spear in rage,
Resolv'd t'avenge the insult done to age;
Till recollecting that a war so mean,
Would but the lustre of his actions stain;
He gave in charge to Toscar and his son,
The reinstating Larthmor on the throne.
We put to sea, ambitious of th' employ
And often half unsheath'd our swords for joy.
For, ne'er before, entrusted with command,
Were we commission'd to a foreign land.

Light

Light tilting o'er the frothy waves we flew,
And now the distant coast had full in view,
When night around her sable mantle cast,
And murm'ring died away the rustling blast.
But soon the moon refulgent shone on high,
And stars unnumber'd studded thick the sky.
By these nocturnal lamps, though day had fail'd,
Along the coast of Berrathon we sail'd,
Slow making way, amidst the sullen roar
Of billows tumbling on the pebbled shore.
When Toscar thus:—Dost thou not hear the strains
Of one who in a doleful voice complains?
Lo, sat on yonder rock the fair appears;
A melancholy object, all in tears!
Her head is on her snowy arm reclin'd,
Her raven tresses play upon the wind.
Hark, Ossian, to her song! the plaintive theme
Is sweeter than the sound of Lavath's stream.
Not softer music melts the list'ning sky,
When ghosts of bards in heav'nly numbers vie,

With wonder seiz'd, I nearer drew to shore,
When I both saw, and heard her thus deplore.
" How long ye waters of the vast profound,
" These rocks assaulting, will you foam around!
" Remote from whistling woods, resounding caves,
" And the hoarse thunder of the stormy waves;
" Torthoma's daughter, in a palace bred,
" Her youth midst scenes of royal splendor led.

" Then

" Then her soft voice, symphonious to the lyre,
" Hath often at the banquet pleas'd her sire.
" The youths enamour'd of her charms, express'd
" Their admiration, and her beauty bless'd.
" Yet, nor their sighs, nor ardent vows could move,
" Her virgin heart, a stranger then to love;
" Till Larthmor's graceful son, whose smooth address
" No woman could reject, obtain'd access:
" She saw, and thought him brighter than the sun;
" She saw, admir'd, espous'd, and was undone!
" But what in Ninathoma could displease,
" That he deserts her here amidst the seas?
" Did she her tender hand for murder arm,
" Or entertain'd her soul a thought to harm?
" Why then, Oh Uthal! would'st thou cruel fly.
" And leave her on this barren rock to die."

Against the monster, who could act a part
So truly base, indignant burn'd my heart,
I made to land, and peaceful thus address'd
The plaintive fair: why heaves with sighs thy breast?
The sons of Morven, through the world renown'd
For gallant actions, stand in arms around.
If injur'd or betray'd, the traitor name,
And Ossian's sword shall vindicate thy fame.
Torthoma's daughter, I thy story know,
And will chastise the author of thy wo:
With us embark; for Berrathon our pow'rs
Are destin'd, and Tinthorma's echoing tow'rs;

Where

Where Uthal reigns. He shall his faith renew,
Or vengeance soon his perjur'd head pursue.

I said: without reply the royal dame,
Bright as the moon of heav'n arose, and came,
The dignity of courts was in her pace,
And joy sat radient on her lovely face.
So, when the shadows fly, the fields resume,
Refresh'd by vernal show'rs, their smiling bloom,
And gliding smooth the stream's transparent tides,
Reflect the willows, drooping on their sides.

Again we sail'd, and just as dawning day
Beam'd o'er the hills, arrived in Rothma's bay.
A furious boar here rushing from the wood,
My jav'lin flew, and stretch'd him in his blood.
Great was the joy; for by this lucky deed,
I in my soul presag'd we should succeed.

Now from Finthorma, issuing to the plain,
Approach'd the clam'rous sound of Uthal's train.
And spreading round in crowds the thickets beat,
To rouse the savages from their retreat.
Himself, in pride of youth, mov'd o'er the strand,
Two pointed jav'lins brandishing in hand:
A shining faulchion, to his baldrick tied,
At ev'ry motion wav'd upon his side;
His polish'd bows three youthful hunters bore,
Five active dogs ran bounding on before.

At distance kept the nobles of the court,
Admiring as he went, his kingly port.
And well might they admire, had not the whole
Been sullied by the vices of a soul,
More gloomy than the shades which heaven deform,
When veil'd in clouds the moon foretels the storm.

But unexpected, when in arms our force
Before him rose, he, starting, check'd his course;
When from all quarters, to secure the king,
His people ran, and round him form'd a ring.
Then an old bard, commission'd by the rest,
Came forward, and our party thus address'd.

" Strangers, from whence? to this forbidden shore
" Ill-fortune guides you to return no more.
" For lazy vagrants we no feast prepare,
" Nor forfeit lives of bold intruders spare.
" If such, or as I guess from Selma's hall,
" Black fate impends, and you must perish all.
" Three from the rest select; these back may go,
" To let Fingal th' unwelcome tidings know.
" Perhaps he will, with greater force invade;
" But if he dares, he falls by Uthal's blade.
" So, like a tree far shooting to the skies,
" The glory of Finthorma's king shall rise."

Incens'd at these unmanly taunts, I burn'd
With filial zeal, and scornful thus return'd.

" Fingal

" Fingal by Uthal fall!—He durst not stand
" The terror of his eye, much less his hand.
" The king of hills, in arms a mighty name!
" Has not an equal on the rolls of fame:
" For, first in valour, as in royal birth,
" He awes the scepter'd rulers of the earth,
" Who, when his fury's rous'd, his presence fly,
" As storms disperse, and leave a cloudless sky,
" Abhorring wrongs, he sends us to pull down
" Th' unjust usurper of his father's crown:
" And fail or not in the attempt, will claim
" The meed of virtuous deeds, a deathless name."

This said, I stood to meet the war prepar'd,
And Toscar at my side his faulchion bar'd.
Swift as a stream, in close array combin'd,
Advanc'd the foe; and now in fight we join'd:
Man against man, with rage impetuous drove,
Shields loud encounter shields; swords flash above,
And meeting clang: thick in an iron show'r,
From either host the darts incessant pour:
A grating jar, riv'n helms and corslets yield,
And hewn to pieces, strew the sanguine field.
As roar a thousand ghosts, that down the sky,
Borne on the winds of night, tempestuous fly;
Lash the deep groaning oaks, nor cease to blow,
Till stretch'd in ruins, half the wood lies low.
Such was the bloody conflict's deaf'ning sound,
And such th' immense destruction dealt around.

At length, our steadier valour turn'd the day;
My sword descending with resistless sway,
Cut Uthal down.—When their proud leader dead,
His people saw, they trembled and they fled.

The fallen chief, as I at leisure view'd,
His features lovely, though with blood imbu'd,
Forgetting ev'ry recent cause of hate,
I wept for pity, and thus mourn'd his fate.

" Young plant, alas! extended on the plain,
" Vain thy once stately height, thy beauty vain!
" No more thy branches, waving high in air,
" Shall yield protection to the heath left bare;
" Nor in the desart breeze shall rustling sound
" Thy leaves, now shorn, and with'ring on the ground.
" Yet comely still, and lovely e'en in death,
" Looks Larthmor's son, extended on the heath."

Mean time, the clamors of the neighbouring fray
Reach'd Nanathoma, sat beside the sea.
Who guessing at the scene of blood that past,
Her eyes, that stream'd with tears, on Lethmal cast;
(An aged bard to guard her left behind,)
To whom she thus disclos'd her troubled mind.
" I hear the shouts of war; with Uthal's train,
" Thy friends have met—perhaps the chief have slain.
" Ah! that inclosed amidst the stormy tide
" I had remain'd, and there in secret died:

Then

" Then never would the news have reach'd my ear,
" Nor added anguish to the woes I bear.
" Hark; nearer still the growing clangors spread;
" The son of Larthmor is among the dead!
" Inconstant youth, though thou my death design'd,
" Still true to thee, is this unalter'd mind.
" Another shout!—and follow'd by a moan—
" Ah me! it may be Uthal's dying groan."

She weeping said, and hast'ning to the field,
In Ossian's hand beheld his bloody shield.
Aghast she saw, and turning from the view,
Along the heath with steps distracted flew;
Where pale in death, and lifeless on the ground,
Amidst a heap of slain, the chief she found;
Then silent on the corpse herself she cast,
And in short sobs convulsive breath'd her last!
Nor after death forsook her strict embrace,
But clasp'd him still, her hair spread o'er his face.
None that beheld, from sorrow could refrain;
A tomb we raised above them on the plain,
And while around in silence stood the throng,
Myself compos'd this elegiac song.
" Rest hapless pair, in youth's first early bloom,
" Stretch'd in the dreary mansion of the tomb!
" Beside this purling stream interr'd you have,
" All that avails the dead!—a decent grave.
" When at the chase, the virgins passing here,
" Will often pay the tribute of a tear;

" To

" To music set the story of your woe,
" Will to the harp in mournful cadence flow;
" This Selma's pitying daughters will repeat,
" And distant nations long lament your fate!
" Rest hapless pair, in youth's first early bloom,
" Stretch'd in the dreary mansion of the tomb."

These rites funereal to the lovers paid,
Two days encamp'd upon the coast we staid.
Meantime the natives, of their own accord,
Convene around, and own their ancient lord;
From prison freed, the monarch we escort,
'Midst the applauding multitude to court.
Finthorma's royal residence we found,
A spacious hall, with glitt'ring arms hung round:
Arms by a race of kings, who war admir'd,
In fighting fields from vanquish'd foes acquir'd,
To these oft Larthmor look'd, assur'd the sight,
To men who valour priz'd, would give delight.

Now pleasure reign'd: distinguish'd and caress'd,
The sons of Morven shar'd the royal feast.
The king sent round the shell, with joy elate;
Nor knew he then his son's untimely fate;
Which to conceal, a rumour had been spread,
That grieving for his crime, the prince was fled
To foreign shores; in exile to remain,
Till time should do away rebellion's stain.

Such

Such to the father the account convey'd,
But silent in the tomb the youth was laid.

Three days had now elaps'd; when dawn'd the fourth,
Invited by a breeze that sprung from north,
I took my leave, embark'd, and hoisting sail,
For hilly Morven flew before the gale.

Meantime the king, (who with a num'rous band
Of minstrels, had attended to the strand
His parting friends) was moving from the shore,
When Uthal's monument appear'd before,
On Rothma's heath. Surpris'd, he stopp'd, and said;
" Which of my chiefs deceas'd hath here been laid?
" This lofty mound of late conjested earth,
" Proclaims its tenant of no vulgar birth:
" If one not rais'd while Uthal held the throne,
" To me his rank and lineage must be known.
" What! silent all?—You can no more disguise!
" The prince is dead, and here interr'd he lies.
" My son, my son! rebellious and unkind,
" Yet dotes on thee, for all thy guilt, this mind.
" Oh! that in prison still I had remain'd,
" And thou in high Finthorma peaceful reign'd.
" Then would, at times, thy tread have reach'd the place,
" And issuing early to the mountain chase,
" The sound, though distant, of thy pleasing voice,
" Would have reviv'd, and made my soul rejoice.

" No

" No solace can be mine, for I have lost
" An only child, my age's joy and boast!
" Depriv'd of him, in darkness I remain;
" Life is a blank, existence but a pain!"

Absorb'd in sorrow, thus the father moan'd;
In tears around, the sad attendants groan'd;
While I and Toscar, from our first campaign,
With conquest crown'd, triumphant cross'd the main.
But Toscar long hath been upon the wind,
While I at Lutha sit, forlorn and blind!
Like the last sound, when winds the grove forsake,
My hollow voice is tremulous and weak.
My end approaches fast: before me swims
The mist that shall array my airy limbs,
When on the clouds, a renovated form,
I o'er the lofty hills shall ride the storm.
A feeble race, astonish'd at the mould,
And size gigantic of the chiefs of old,
When they behold my shadowy form on high,
At its approach, shall to their caverns fly;
But I, regardless of their abject fears,
Shall move along, and wrap in night the spheres.

Now with a sudden gust the forests shake,
I hear the chaffing billows of the lake.
Let, son of Alpin, in the wonted shade,
Beneath the copse, these aged limbs be laid;

Where,

Where, o'er the stream the knarred oak reclin'd,
Affords protection from the chilly wind:
A tuft of wither'd fern is waving near,
Which, as it moves, will mix in Ossian's hair.

On Mora's stream-worn side, dost thou not see,
Expos'd to the rude blast, a leafless tree?
There, on a bough, hangs up my harp in air.
E'en now its low vibrations reach my ear;
Is it the passing winds that make thee play,
Or passing ghosts that would their skill essay?
Perhaps Malvina's! Her soft touch I know,
She lov'd the melancholy joy of woe.
But now thy master's hand shall make thee speak,
And all thy pow'rs of melody awake:
Another song shall rise, and on the lay
To heaven my parting soul shall wing its way.
From high, ye spirits of my sires, descend,
To the last sound of Cona's voice attend;
Resort with joy to hear its last essay,
Then to your airy halls my soul convey.

And now I strike my harp, and strike again;
A fuller tone, a more sonorous train!
Ye winds, with all your rustling wings, be near;
To great Fingal the solemn numbers bear;
They are his plaints, to whose heroic theme,
The mighty owe their never-dying fame.

Forc'd by the northern blast, heav'n's gates unfold,
Their cloudy valves, and I aloft behold
Fingal in arms, dim gleaming to the sight,
That mighty form once terrible in fight!
But now the chief, a phantom light as air,
Is like a mist, through which dew-bath'd appear
The twinkling stars—his shield a moon decay'd—
A half-extinguish'd fire his dreaded blade—
An unsubstantial shadow, thin and wan,
With but th' external figure of a man,—
A fleeting vapour, wanders through the sky,
The ghost of him, who once made armies fly.

But though the valiant dread no more his form,
In darkness clad, he rides the desart storm;
The winds are in his hand; the sun he rolls
In gloomy mists, and veils in night the poles;
His lightnings fly, the skies descend in show'rs
And trembling mortals own superior pow'rs.
Yet when in mildness, issuing from his bow'r,
He fans with balmy gales the morning hour;
The clouds disperse; in majesty serene
Looks forth the sun, and laughing gilds the scene:
Each blooming shrub, each dew-bespangled spray,
Wave to the breeze, in vernal florets gay;
Bright down the vales meand'ring glide the rills,
And roes swift bounding seek the desart hills.

Again

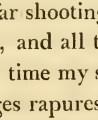
Again the winds abate, their distant breath,
In fainter murmurs, dies along the heath.
Delusion mocks, or great Fingal I hear,
(His voice hath long been absent from my ear)
He calls his son.—" Come Ossian, come away!
" Thou must at length the debt of nature pay!
" Then join those friends, whose never-dying praise
" Shall in thy songs descend to future days.
" Though short, our lives were bright: like flames that cast
" A temporary blaze, we shone—then past.
" But though extinct, and silent are the plains
" That echo'd once; we live still in thy strains!
" The harp in Selma was not idly strung,
" And long shall last the themes our poet sung!
" Then come my son! no more delay, but join
" Aloft on clouds, the heroes of thy line."

Unconquer'd king of men, I come, I come!
The life of Ossian verges to the tomb.
In Selma's hall no more his voice is heard,
His steps on Cona's hills have disappear'd;
Age summons to repose, the blast may shake
These hoary locks, but not from sleep awake!
Night closes round.—Depart, O winds! your breath
Cannot remove the lethargy of death.
When enter'd once the dreary tomb's domain,
To rescue thence all human force is vain!
Why then this qualm, this unavailing fear,
Now that the doom allotted man draws near?

What

What must befal, the bravest cannot shun!
The mighty chiefs of former years are gone:
Like them the sons of future times will cease,
And be succeeded by another race.
As ocean rolls its billows to the shore,
The waves behind impelling those before;
As leaves unnumber'd, which the woods supply,
In summer flourish, and in autumn die;
So generations pass, at nature's call
They rise successive, and successive fall.
Not Ryno's beauty could elude the grave,
Nor car-borne Oscar's strength the hero save;
Fingal himself a similar fate hath found;
Fingal! the great, the matchless, the renown'd.
When these the fell destroyer hath not spar'd,
Why wish to shun the evil they have shar'd?
But though this frame must moulder in the tomb,
The garland genius form'd, still fresh shall bloom.
Like Morven's oak, far shooting to the skies,
That meets the winds, and all their rage defies.
Amidst the storms of time my songs shall live
And in succeeding ages rapures give.

FINIS.



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