





JAMES NORMAN METHVEN







ONE DAY'S JOURNEY
TO THE
HIGHLANDS
OF
SCOTLAND.

MARCH 12. 1784.

ANTIQUAM EXQUIRITE MATREM.

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T H E

P R E F A C E.

THE following Day's Journey to the Highlands, was undertaken at the desire of a Gentleman well known in the literary world; and who is particularly distinguished by his knowledge of, and abilities in Gaelic Philology.

A Manuscript History of a certain Parish in the County of Perth, fell into the hands of this Gentleman;—in this Manuscript, the Author gives a particular account of OSSIAN's stone, situated in Glenalmond.

About forty years ago, some soldiers when employed under the command of General Wade, in making the military road from Stirling to Inverness, through the Highlands, raised the stone by large engines, and under it was found a coffin full of burnt bones; the coffin was composed of four gray stones, such as are mentioned in the Poems of Ossian. That this was the matter of fact, can be attested by several persons still alive, and who were on the spot at, and lately after the removal of the said monument.—Birt, in his Letters on the Highlands *, and Whitaker, in his History of Manchester †, are both very particular,

* Vol. II. p. 299—300.

† Vol. II. p. 142—143.

particular, as to this stone, and the cause of it's removal. To prove that this was Ossian's grave, and monument, is not the business of the following performance. The writer will leave a disquisition of that nature, to those who are more skilled in the Gaelic Language and Antiquities:—however, he presumes to lay before the reader, the following account, which he gathered as far as he could learn, from some of the most intelligent persons in Glenalmond, together with the corresponding testimony of those in that neighbourhood.—The relations are not, however, so complete as he could have wished, owing to the expedition he was obliged to make, in the course of one day's journey.

Before he conclude this address, he is happy to find that some Noblemen and Gentlemen, of the first distinction, have undertaken the same Tour, with a view to discover any traces of Ossian, and his monument, in this part of the country. Happier will he be, if this present attempt which he ventures to publish under the patronage of such distinguished characters, shall excite others to pursue and investigate these researches into remote antiquity.

JOURNEY

J O U R N E Y
T O T H E
H I G H L A N D S.

MARCH 12. 1784.

SET out from Perth about seven o'clock in the morning, in company with two young Gentlemen. About two miles from thence, we passed by the ancient castle of Huntingtower, formerly Ruthven-castle, which originally was the residence of the noble family of Ruthven for many ages. This family was further dignified by the title of Earl of Gowrie, and lived in this country in great splendour. Huntingtower now belongs to his Grace the Duke of Athole. This noble seat is environed with regular plantations of tall firs, and has spacious avenues leading to the castle from the east, south, and west.—Here is to be seen, tho' almost in ruins, the hall where King James the Sixth, and some of his nobles, are said to have dined with the

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Earl

Earl of Gowrie, not long before the alledged conspiracy. In the gardens are many nut trees of considerable height, which are said to have been brought from Spain, and planted by the Earl of Gowrie.

About two miles further on, we arrived at Methven-castle, the seat of David Smyth, Esquire. Methven gave name to an ancient family, who had their seat and property there *, as early as the reign of Alexander the III. and flourished in this country with great lustre, for several generations afterwards; but the principal branch of the family removing to England, is now represented by Paul Methuen, Esq; of Corsham, in Wiltshire. Of this family also was the famous Sir Paul Methuen, who held many offices of importance in the state, during the reigns of King William, Queen Anne, and King George the I. —Methven, through the Earl of Strathern, became a royal appanage of the crown; and in 1528, on the marriage of Henry Stewart, a cadet of the royal family, with the Queen Dowager of King James the IV. was erected into a Lordship in his favour, whose posterity failing in the male line, the Lordship of Methven reverted to the crown, and by King James the VI. was bestowed on the Duke of Lennox,

* Douglas' Baronage, p. 141.

Lennox, one of whose successors sold the same to the family of Smyth of Braco, ever since designed of Methven. Here we could not pass over these grounds without remembering of the fatal battle of Methven, which is thus related by our historians:—Soon after the coronation of King Robert Bruce, at Scoon, in 1306, he encamped his small force, near Methven, where he and his army were unfortunately surpris'd in the night of the 19th of July, by the English, assisted by the Scots malecontents, under the command of the Earl of Pembroke. They forced, and made themselves masters of the camp. The greater part of the Scots army being newly levied, and consequently raw and unexperienced, fled at the first onset, and left the King and the Gentry to withstand the attack of the English army. They made a glorious defence though at length obliged to retreat before their numerous assailants. King Robert was nearly made prisoner, but bravely rescued by Sir Christopher Seton. He fled to the Highlands, where he remained till next year, that he took the field, matters being changed in his favour.—The castle of Methven, which is situated farther west than formerly, is a very elegant building, kept in good repair; from it's situation to the south, has a commanding prospect

spect of the adjacent country; and, on account of a handsome turret on each side of the four angles, has the appearance of a square fortrefs or castle.—The proprietor is very assiduous in making improvements upon his estate; and I could not help observing to my companions as we rode along, that the man that could raise ten ears of corn, where only one grew before, or six blades of grass, deserved more of his country than all the race of politicians put together. Before leaving Methven, it may be observed, that here there was a collegiate church, erected in 1433, by Walter Stewart Earl of Athole, one of the younger sons of King Robert the II. who afterwards proved the infamous murderer of his nephew King James the I.

Four miles north-west from thence, stretches the moor of Methven, and we arrive at Buchanty, cross over the water of Almond upon a bridge of one arch. Here the river runs between two jutting rocks forming a very deep lin or pool. We stopt at a village named Kinchraggan, eight miles from Perth; here we found the inhabitants spoke the Gaelic language, being on the north side of the Almond, while those on the south side spoke English: we breakfasted here so well, that we believe the entertainment
would

would not have been disagreeable, even to Dr Samuel Johnson!

Here we got intelligence from a fox-hunter concerning the hill of Dun-mhor, or Castle Dun-mhor*.

After breakfast we proceeded upon our journey, accompanied by the miller of the next village, an intelligent honest man: about a quarter of a mile west from thence, we came to a plain moor, where we saw a great number of cairns †, or graves of the Caledonians or Danes; some of which are placed regularly in rows, one in particular, was on a rising ground, and the stones raised above it were more numerous than any of the others; hence we conjectured that it behoved to be the grave of one of their chief officers; nigh this spot are visible the burying-places of the Romans, or small *tumuli*, covered with turf:—had our time allowed, it was our intention to have opened one of them in order to discover any Roman weapons, &c.

About a furlong from these cairns and *tumuli*, we arriv-
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* From *dun*, hill, and *mhor*, great,—the castle of the great hill.

† Rude monuments consisting of small stones heaped together, upon the graves, very irregular in bulk: their great men were distinguished with great cairns, and so in order, according to their degree of subordination, their respective monuments present us with their rank and station.

ed at the Roman camp, which is taken notice of in the map of the county, published last year by Mr Stobie. This camp is situated upon a high sloping moor; part of the remains of the ditches and trenches are visible. I could also perceive, where the *prætorium* stood. Hard by it runs the water of Almond, along the banks of which, there is a deal of natural wood.

After having satisfied ourselves with viewing the Roman camp, we cast our eyes to the other side of the river, where is to be seen a Roman house, in ruins, of a circular form, the walls of which are about two feet above the surface of the ground.—Having contemplated these objects, we proceeded towards a new bridge, which crosses the water of Almond, and marched up the hill of Dun-mhor, which we found to be two miles of ascent, obliquely, and about a quarter of a mile perpendicular height; near the top of which are visible, the remains of a great many Caledonian * houses, placed

* In ancient times the Scots, or Caledonians, placed their habitations upon the top of the highest hills, in order to prevent any sudden surprize from their neighbouring clans: and to illustrate this, we find the vestiges of ploughs, or ridges, and furrows, upon the highest hills, where grass will not grow at present, the reason of which may be owing to this, That in these early ages this country was intirely overgrown with woods, the trees began to grow first in the vallies, and increased so as to reach the tops of the hills, by which means, the tops
of

placed in an irregular manner. We then ascended to the top of the hill, in order to view what the country people call a *Giant's castle*, but which I found to be a Caledonian, or Danish castle, of great strength; it is surrounded with two rows of walls, the inside part of the inner wall may be about two hundred feet in diameter, and about eight or nine feet thick, and the outer wall, about one thousand feet in circumference. This hill has a commanding prospect of Perth, where there was a Roman station, and it may be conjectured, with some degree of probability, that the Romans took possession of the hill, and placed an out-post here, in order to give their armies intelligence when the Caledonians were coming over their mountains. There is another Roman out-post upon the top of a hill two miles, north-east from this fortification:—here we had

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of the hills were kept warm; having chosen their situation here, they naturally collected their cattle nigh to their habitations, the dung of whom served for manure, for the purposes of agriculture; within thirty or forty years, these woods growing upon hills generally decay for want of moisture, and fall down of themselves; on which account, the tops of the hills are so much exposed to the cold air, so as to prevent any kind of vegetation: the inhabitants, in this case, were under the necessity of removing from mountain to mountain, until such time as the country became more civilized, then they began to descend to the vallies, with their families and cattle; the consequence was, that the hills were neglected, and the woods falling down to the vallies in such number, so as to obstruct the brooks, and drink in the winter rains, thereby rendering the soil soft and spongy, which has occasioned peat mosses.

a view of the Caledonian, or Grampian-hills, from whence the famous Galdus, or Galgacus, descended in order to repel the Roman arms. Descending from the hill upon the north, we found the snow very deep, and in some places we went to the knees in snow and moss.—Having arrived at the foot of the hill, where our road was, we computed the hill to be about one mile of descent; here we parted with our kind guide, and prosecuted our journey to Amalrie * where there is a neat modern church, and manse, as also a good inn: about two gun-shot from this place, on the other side of the water of Bran † is St Mary's chapel in ruins; from whence the place is said to have derived it's name.

About two miles distant is Dean's-haugh, where there is a Druid's temple, twenty feet in diameter; not far from which is a village named Findoue-beg, where there is an old chapel dedicated to Fiann, or Fingal. In the same village lived a Duff, or Macduff, ground-officer to the Earl of Gowrie, in Strathbran, at the time he was unfortunately slain; he is said to have been active in collecting the town's people of
Perth,

* This place is called *Amalrie*, from it's being at a ford, called Ath-Mari, Mary's Ford.

† This water probably has it's name from Fingal's favourite dog.

Perth, with a design to rescue the Earl of Gowrie, his master. At Findowie-more, in that neighbourhood, there is another Druid temple, upon a rising ground, where, upon the first day of May, or Balden *, a fire was kindled in honour of the god Belus, or Baal, and where delinquents, transgressing the rules of the Druids, were obliged to walk bare-footed upon hot cinders, and likewise to do other penance.

There is an ancient Popish chapel named *Stuchd-chaib-bal*, in the west-end of Wester-Glenalmond, where sixty men took the sacrament, and went with their leader to the battle of Luncarty, of whom only three returned.

At Easter-Shian, in Glenquaich, there is a Popish chapel of some antiquity, and not far from which, on a fine plain, is Ach-na-cloich, i. e. *Stonybaugh*, where there is a well, called *St Coittag's-well*, which was held in great veneration; for, long since, a great concourse of people, both from England and Ireland, are said to have assembled, and made use of this water, in order to be cured of their various diseases: But

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* The present name of Balden, is Beltane, and it is a custom in some parts of the Highlands, to celebrate a feast upon this day; there is another custom which prevails amongst the youths upon this day, they kindle fires, and make up an image in form of an human body, and throw it into the fire, as a kind of sacrifice to Baal, or Belus.

it appears, that the virtue of this water, is now principally confined to one disease, namely, the bloody-flux; at this well there was a small chapel and cemetery. There is another well, not far from thence, called the *Well of Corcach*, to which some virtues are likewise ascribed.

Having satisfied ourselves with these objects, we returned to Amalrie; this place is well situated for game and fishing, and affords agreeable sport in the proper season. The scenes which alternately present themselves to view, are of the most romantic and agreeable nature: those confined to large cities will find here a pleasant variety. This country is abundantly supplied with hares, foxes, partridges, wild-ducks, moor-fowl, and woodcock. Loch Fraochy abounds with fine trout, pikes, and perches, which are caught both with rod and nets; the waters of Bran and Almond, are also plentifully supplied with fresh-water trouts, perches, &c. There is a moss betwixt Dalreoch and Amalrie, where are a great many otters, but vastly difficult to catch, because the moss abounds with small rivulets, which run, for the most part, below the surface in a thousand labyrinths, so that it is impossible to hunt them out of their subterranean abodes, unless by chance they venture too far from the moss: about four years ago,
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Glenalmond abounded with wild-deer, roebucks, &c. Having dined at Amalrie, and enjoyed the agreeable company of the minister of the place, we returned upon our road to Perth; the first object that attracted our attention upon the right-hand, was Loch Fraochy, or Loch Bran, a beautiful basin of water; in the south-part of the Loch, is a small island, in the middle of which is a tuft of trees; this Loch and island is the scene of the beautiful poem of Fraoch, which Mr Pennant makes mention of, but which he has, by misinformation, placed at Lochow in Argyle.

We rode on until we arrived at the Newtown, a small village, overtopped by a high stupendous rock, at the back of this rock, and three miles south from Amalrie, is Glenlochan, in a beautiful situation, in the middle of which is Loch Lochan, wherein are plenty of fresh-water trouts, pikes, and perch, also plenty of moor-fowl and woodcock, upon the adjacent moor. Cross over Almond, upon an old bridge of one arch, and ride down the narrow Glenalmond*, each side of which is for three miles overtopped

* Daniel de Foe, in his Tour through Britain, Vol. IV. p. 210. observes, That the hollow through which the road to Inverness passes, is so narrow, and the mountains on each side so high, that the sun is seen but two or three hours in the longest day.

topped by high impending rocks : the next object that drew our attention, was Clachan-Offian, or Cloch-Offian *, *i. e.* OSSIAN's stone, of uncommon size, it measured seven feet and an half in length, and five feet in breadth : about two feet from this stone are still remaining the four gray stones, in which his bones are said to have been deposited,—this monument, and coffin, are surrounded by a circular dyke, two hundred feet in circumference, and three feet in height, through the middle of which, the military road to Inverness passes. One of the soldiers, when employed under the command of General Wade, in making the road, died near the spot, and was buried at the back of Cloch-Offian : it is a custom to this day, when the soldiers are employed in repairing the military road, through this glen, that they lay fresh turf on their brother soldier's grave. This monument is two miles distant from any habitable place.

Many of the ancient Gaelic poems, make mention of Offian having resided upon the water of Bran †, and at the head of Glenturret, in Monivaird parish, there is a shealing called *Rennacardich*, or the *Smith's-sheal*, where is to be

* Or Cloch na h Uifeaig, the Lark's stone.

† Manuscript History of Monivaird, p. 36.

be seen the foundation-stones of houses, and what are said to be large heaps of ashes; and some of the old Gaelic poems of the country inform us, that there was an iron-work here, and that the swords and arms for Fingal's army, were made at Lochenlour, four miles in the valley below; that the iron was brought from this place, is further confirmed, from the peats cast in that part of the country when burned in kilnpots, they leave a plate of yetlin amongst the ashes, which the country people call a *dander*; a tradition also prevails, that Ossian was proprietor of part of Monivaird, a place that must in ancient times have been famous for Bards*.

About the middle of Glenalmond, and about three miles distant from Cloch-Ossian, in a glen, named *Corriviarlich*, or the Glen of Thieves, is a cave known by the name of Fian, or Fingal's cave, though afterwards possessed by a race of thieves; the entry to this cave, is five feet in height, and four feet in breadth; the roof of which, in the middle, is about eighteen, or twenty feet high, and the length of this cave, is about thirty feet; this cave is overtopped by a high rock, or hill, and on the left side of the

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* Monivaird, signifies the Bards-hill, or a Hillock of Bards.

door, or entry, is a large flat-stone, which is said to have been drawn by the Fians, or Fingalians, to the mouth of the cave, as a defence from the cold, or wild-beasts:—before the cave is a fine green plain, and an high pine-tree, three feet in diameter; the glen is proper for pasture, and may be about one mile long, and two miles broad.

There is another high hill, or rock, in Glenalmond, that overtops all the rest, with a proud extended crest, known by the name of *Sron na huath bhidh*, or the Nose of the Cave; there is a great hollow under-ground, where it is said, a giant once resided, who entertained a malicious grudge against Fingal, when he dwelt at Fian-Theach.

Great many of the poems of Ossian, translated by Mr M'Pherson, chiefly relate to Fingal's exploits in Ireland, and upon the north and west coast;—the rapid progress which the Saxon language made in the low country, from the days of Malcom Caenmore, not only rooted out the Gælic language in that part of the country, but has also with it, no doubt, occasioned the loss of many of Ossian's poems; there are still, however, fragments in the same translation, where frequent mention is made of Fingal's exploits upon the banks of Carron, in the county of Stirling.

“ Beneath

“ Beneath the voice of the king, we moved to Crona *
 “ of the streams, Toscar of grassy Lutha, and Ossian,
 “ young in fields. Three bards attended with songs.
 “ Three bossy shields were borne before us : for we were
 “ to rear the stone, in memory of the past. By Crona’s
 “ mossy course, Fingal had scattered his foes : he had
 “ rolled away the strangers, like a troubled sea †.”

Herodian, Dio, and other writers, make mention of the Emperor Severus’ having passed the two walls, and fought in person with the Caledonians, and their leader, which beyond all probability must have been Fingal, and perhaps the above poem relates to that part of the history ; it cannot, however, be imagined, that Fingal, who, at that time, anno 207, was chief of the Caledonians, could have remained inactive, when such a powerful army was at hand ; and indeed it appeared, that the invasion of Severus had such an effect upon the Caledonians, that they sent ambassadors to sue for peace, which was rejected : the
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* Mr M’Pherson observes, That the word *Crona*, signifies *Murmuring*, and was the name of a small stream which discharged itself into the river Carron ; it is often mentioned by Ossian, and the scenes of many of his poems, are on it’s banks.—The enemies whom Fingal defeated are not here mentioned.

† Ossian’s poems, Vol. 1. p. 220.

consequence was, that a bloody engagement commenced, in which the Caledonians proved victorious, and the Emperor returned with the loss of about fifty thousand men.

The Romans again made another effort against the Caledonians, under their leader Caracalla; Fingal met them upon the banks of Carron, where a battle ensued, in which the Romans were again defeated, with considerable loss.

Alongst the whole south front of the Grampian-hills, the antiquary will meet with incredible remains of Roman camps, forts, (caufeways, *tumuli*, &c.) raised against the Caledonians; which being the frontier country, it cannot with any degree of probability be contradicted, but that Fingal and his army might have often fixed their residence nigh these mountains, in order to watch the enemy. Selma, in Morven, which is said to have been Fingal's chief residence, is only about sixty computed miles distant from Glenalmond; and Ossian, Fingal's son, would, no doubt, continue to rouse the army after his father's death, by his martial example and warlike song; and probably choosed to have his residence near the spot where there was the greatest danger: the Roman camp, the forts and *tumuli*, nigh to Cloch-Ossian, are evident proofs

proofs that this part of the country was the scene of action, so early as the time the Romans came into this part of the island.

Besides what is above narrated, it may not be improper here to notice, That I made inquiry at several respectable clergymen, and others, in the neighbourhood of Glenalmond, who all agree in affirming, that the stone in question, was known by the name of *Cloch-Ossian*, beyond the memory of any living person; and, indeed, the names of places nigh this spot, will, in some instances, serve as further proofs: upon the other side of the Almond, and not far distant from the camp, is a small village named *Fian-Theach*, i. e. Fingal's Thatch-house, or Hall, and at the west-end of Loch Fraochy, is a place named *Dail-Cbillin*, or Fingal's Burial-place; whether this was Fingal's burial-place, or not, shall be left to the determination of the Gaelic critics.

The poems of Ossian are acknowledged by every lover of the *beautiful* and *sublime*, to contain in them the most animating and lofty ideas, calculated to inspire the mind with heroic courage and virtue: the poets of after ages, fall far short of the spirit and energy of Ossian; hence it is, that the heroes of their poems, and their actions, are

not described in so bold and lofty a manner: from this falling off, has arisen the many fabulous stories of giants which are so frequently to be met with in the Highlands. The Fingalian age is described as the age of giants: the warriors of after ages became gradually reduced from larger stature to smaller, until they were reduced to the present common stature: great actions and great bodies consequently follow each other.

The many caves which we find in the Highlands, and which, to this day, are said to be caves for the giants to reside in, are with them strong proofs for the authority of their fables; whereas, it is evident, that those caves were places of safety in ancient times, when pursued by their enemies, or probably for places of residence, as we find is the case in Iceland, and many other countries even to this period; where the inhabitants live in caves, or dens, under rocks and under ground, which are not only the most proper places for security from their enemies, but are likewise better adapted for their preservation from voracious animals, with which this country abounded at a period so early as the days of Ossian; this country being at that time over-run with woods, afforded shelter to wolves and bears, enemies to the human race, and they had no
other

other place of safety for their residence, but either in these caves, or upon the tops of the hills. Hence it is, that there are few hills in the Highlands, but what have, to this day, vestiges of castles and houses; and which, in conformity to the former received notion of giants' caves, are called *Giant's-castles*, or the *Fian's-castles*, which may be easily understood to be castles possessed in the Fingalian age, or age of giant's, or mighty warriors. Agreeable to these notions, we often meet with long hillocks in the Highlands, which are called giants' graves; and which fables, if contradicted, will give them a considerable degree of displeasure. In Glenalmond, there is a hillock of about one hundred feet in length, covered with heath, which is said to be the grave of a child nine months old. Their idea of the ancient giants is such, that they tell us some of them had spears, with which they could at one leap, go over to Ireland or Denmark; such stories are better adapted for children than men of early years. These hints will, however, in some measure, serve as a contrast betwixt the fabulous and genuine poems of Ossian, which can easily be distinguished, in regard they bear in their front, the marks of the earliest antiquity; and, where genuine, will be found to be a real, not a fabulous history.

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The Irish harpers, who frequented this country many years ago, brought over with them, many poems ascribed to Ossian, in which they frequently introduce *St Patrick*, as if he was cotemporary with Ossian, who lived about the end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century; whereas, St Patrick is said to have flourished at the end of the fifth century. This, with their other fabulous legends, they have been so kind as to circulate in this country, are sufficient proofs to induce the Irish to resign every pretension to the boasted merit of their country, as having given birth to OSSIAN, PRINCE OF GAELIC BARDS!

Before concluding the account of this glen, and neighbourhood, it may be observed, That the woods here were a harbour for wolves, so late as the beginning of the last century; and I have in my possession, an authentic manuscript, which mentions, that during the reign of King Charles the I. when the plague raged in this country and neighbourhood, a number of men in arms, were seen passing by the infected persons' tents at Ochertyre, in the parish of Monivaird, chasing two wolves from the wood of Strowan, which they followed to this part of the High-lands

lands before they were slain ; and these are said to have been the last wolves heard of in this country.

Eagles of a very large size, built their nests in the mountains of Glenalmond, and committed great devastations amongst the young kids and lambs, until of late, the inhabitants contrived methods to deprive them of their young, in the old eagle's absence ; by which means, they have forsaken their nests, and left this country to the no small joy of the inhabitants.

Having now finished our one day's journey, with a great degree of satisfaction, we rode on to Perth, where we arrived about ten o'clock at night, after a ride of near forty miles.

F I N I S.









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