THE

AUTHENTICITY

OF THE

POEMS OF OSSIAN:

A LECTURE

BY PETER M'NAUGHTON.

TULLIPOURIE.

EDINBURGH:
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1861.

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Any attempt to revive, in the present day, the controtroversy that raged so fiercely one hundred years ago, regarding the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, may be considered out of place, nor would I now take up the subject did I not feel convinced that "Fingal lived and Ossian sung," notwithstanding all the sophistry with which the treatment of it was then mixed up. My only object, however, being to record the grounds of my own conviction, I shall have nothing to say against those who disbelieved in the genuineness of these productions, and who wielded their powerful pens to bring others to their way of thinking.

In a world where impostures of all kinds flourish, at least for a time, it is essential that everything claiming recognition as truth should be severely scrutinised before being accepted as such. That the process may be carried too far, is true—for there is scarcely an invention or discovery that has proved useful to mankind that has not had to go through this fiery ordeal. Still, adverse criticism has done immense service to mankind. It is, if I may use the comparison, the tonic bitter by which the human mind is kept in a state of health—many have been the delusions of the past which it has dispelled. In our own day, Agapemonism, Mormonism, Spirit-rapping, and Table-turning, are among the things it assails, and keeps in check. It is a condition in the nature of things, wisely appointed, no doubt, that whatever cannot stand this test must sooner or later perish. And, as with everything else, so must it be also with these poems. If we cannot prove them to be what they are represented to be—genuine compositions of Ossian of old—we must make up our minds to have them disbelieved in.

Having premised this much, it will be necessary, in the first place, to give a brief narrative of the circumstances connected with their collection and translation. In the year 1760, Mr James M'Pherson, at the request of several gentlemen of Edinburgh and its neighbourhood, among them Professor Adam Ferguson, the Roman historian, himself a native of the village of Logierait, in the Highlands of Perthshire, and acquainted with the Gaelic language, was, after much unwillingness on his part, prevailed on to make a tour through the Highlands and Islands, for the purpose of collecting remains of ancient Gaelic poetry, of the existence of which they were cognizant. Accompanied by Mr Lachlan M'Pherson, of Strathmashie, a good Gaelic scholar, we first hear of him obtaining from Mr M'Donald of Kyles, a gentleman of Cuoidart, a leabhar dearg, (red book,) or Gaelic manuscript, in the old character, containing many of Ossian's poems.

We next hear of him in Skye, where he was directed by the Rev. Dr M'Queen to one Alexander M'Pherson, who was noted for his knowledge of Ossian's poems, and from whose recitation he continued to take them down for four days.

Being informed by the landlord of the inn at Portree that this man had a manuscript of old Gaelic poems, he prevailed on him to give it up, urging that as he could repeat the poems from memory, he did not require to have them in writing.

It was in this Island that he fell in with Captain Alexander Morrison, who afterwards assisted him in translating and transcribing. It was here, too, that he met with Ewan M'Pherson of Badenoch, who was prevailed on by M'Leod of Talisker, and M'Lean of Coll, to accompany him to Uist, and others of the Islands, for the purpose of taking down from recitation, he being an excellent Gaelic scholar. In Uist this man attended him for three or four weeks, during which he wrote down, from recitation, several of Ossian's poems, which he delivered to M'Pherson, who was seldom present. He also procured for him, from Neil M'Murrich, the representative of the celebrated bard of that name, a Gaelic manuscript, containing, along with historical matter, several of the poems of Ossian. M'Murrich also gave him several manuscripts belonging to Clanranald, and one of his own—"as thick as a Bible, but longer;" for this last,

which, among other poems of Ossian, contained "Berrathon," M'Pherson gave him a written missive promising to return it.

From Uist he returned to Badenoch, his native district, where he lived for some time with the Rev. Mr Gallie of Laggan, who had access to his papers, and who, when interrogated, about forty years after, by the committee of the Highland Society, as to whether M'Pherson found the poem of Fingal as he gave it to the public, declared that at that distance of time he could not positively say, but that he remembered thinking so when the translation first appeared.

We next find M'Pherson at Ruthven, where, on the 27th of October, he writes a letter to the Rev. Mr M'Lagan of Amulree, (Perthshire,) requesting him to favour him with his collection of ancient poems. In this letter he informs Mr M'Lagan that he intended visiting the coast of Argyle, for the purpose of enlarging his collection. That he did visit the Island of Mull is evident from the fact that he obtained manuscripts from the Fletchers of Glenforsa, in that island. He arrived in Edinburgh about the beginning of January, 1761, and took lodgings immediately below Dr Blair, whom he saw very frequently, and to whom he often repeated such parts as he had translated. Dr Blair, who was unacquainted with the Gaelic, never looked into his papers; but Professor Adam Ferguson, and the Rev. Alexander M'Caulay, chaplain to the 42d Regiment, often did, and, on comparing the translation with the original, found it faithful.

More than this, after the translation had been published and objected to, Dr Blair, at the request of Mr Hume, wrote to many persons of credit and honour in the Highlands, requesting them to give their opinion of the translation, the testimonies from all of whom were favourable. Colonel MacKay of Bighouse, Campbell of Aird, MacIntosh of MacIntosh, and Captain M'Donell of Keppoch, testified to their knowledge of the originals. Mr Campbell declared that he had heard many of them, and Captain M'Donell that he had heard parts of them recited.

The testimonies of M'Leod of M'Leod, M'Farlane of M'Farlane, Professor Ferguson, and Mr Alexander M'Farlane, minister of Arroquhar, the latter a very superior Gaelic scholar, were to the same effect. Grant of Rothiemurchus, and Grant of Delrachny,

both remembered to have often heard the poem of Fingal in Gaelic, and they were positive that M'Pherson had given a just translation of it. Colonel Archibald M'Nab, of the 88th Regiment, had, very lately, heard a very considerable portion of Tighmora rehearsed in the original, with which the translation agreed.

Dr Blair himself, read over the greater part of the translation of Fingal to Mr Kenneth M'Pherson, merchant of Stornoway, in the presence of Mr M'Caulay. In going along, Mr M'Pherson vouched that he well knew the original of what was read to him. In many places he remembered, and repeated the Gaelic lines, which, on being interpreted by Mr M'Caulay, were found to agree with the translation.

I might go on multiplying evidence of this kind, of which there is abundance, as any one may see, who will take the trouble of consulting the collection of them, by the Highland Society, or M'Gregor's introduction to his translation of the poems, from which I have chiefly copied. But I have given enough to convince every unprejudiced mind, that old Gaelic poetry did exist in the Highlands at the time referred to, of what age, or by whom written, I will not here stop to inquire.

Here was a business gone about in no hole or corner fashion, but honestly, and openly in the face of day. Nobles, ministers, and peasants, every one known to possess any of the olden relics being applied to, and all of whom must have been parties to the imposture before it could be effected. Granting that M'Pherson had conceived the design of imposing on the public, how could he have succeeded in securing the testimony of such a number of witnesses as had been called in, most of them persons that he had never known nor even heard of? Is it within the range of possibility, I would ask, that such men as Professor Ferguson, all the ministers of the gospel, and all the learned and honourable men named, could have been brought over to back him in his unprincipled enterprise? But my business being chiefly with the internal evidences of the poems, I shall pass on.

In the year 1762, the translation was published, when a host of objections was raised against it, in which Mr Laing and Dr Johnson took a leading part. "The ancient savage Caledonians could not have produced such poems;" "They could not have been

orally transmitted through so many barbarous ages;" "Fingal was a myth, Ossian was a myth, M'Pherson was an impostor, the English nation had been grossly imposed on."

I will not attempt to follow the discussion raised on these objections, I will simply take the objections themselves, and see whether they are relevant. The charge of savageness, as applied to the ancient Caledonians, has, in my opinion, been carried too far. The term, in its modern signification at least, seems to convey the idea of a people ignorant of the mechanical arts, and destitute of the comforts their possession secures. Now, let us see what incontrovertible facts testify, as to the condition of the Caledonians in this respect.

The large and massive remains of stone forts and other buildings, of a pre-historic period, to be found scattered over the face of the country, show that they were not ignorant of masonry. "So huge," says Chambers in his Caledonia, "are the stones in many of these hill forts, the ingenious construction of many hands, that they could not, even now, be taken by storm, and it was impossible that they could have been set in their present position without the aid of machinery, had the ancient Caledonians thrice the strength of their descendants." Of these forts, several are to be seen in Glenlyon, and along the valley of the Tay. On the estate of Pitcastle, in Strathtay, the ruins of one are to be seen, and those of another, on the estate of Tullipourie adjoining, both traditionally designated *Caisteal dubh*, (black castle.) Another, bearing the same designation, but of much larger dimensions, stands on a spur of the hill above Grandtully. This latter, from its very commanding position, extent, and strength of walls, must have been very formidable. On an eminence on the low grounds of Tullipourie, there is to be seen an immense circular excavation, the forming of which, must have taken a great amount of labour, such as savages would never have undertaken, even had they possessed the requisite tools for it. It is called "*an daigh-neach*," (the stronghold,) a burn passing close by is called "*ald a bhlar*" (the battle burn), while a field adjoining is called "*dal a bhlar*" (the battle field,) thus indicating that the besieged, probably pressed by want of provisions, had made a sortie on the besiegers, when a general engagement took place.

Archeology too, is throwing its light on the subject, for while in the tombs of the Allophylians, the immediate predecessors of the Celts in the occupation of the country, only stone weapons and implements are to be found, in those of the latter, who were their conquerors, weapons of bronze are met with, corresponding in this respect with the Greeks of Homer.

One of Johnson's objections to the genuineness of the poems, was on the score of the great delicacy and respect shown in them to women; whereas, in the remote and savage times to which they pretend to belong, women must have been treated barbarously. But archeology is proclaiming from the tombs of the Caledonians, of the pre-historic time, that the women were buried with the greatest care, with their bracelets on their arms, and their combs in their hair, thus indicating a degree of civilization and refinement, not inferior in this respect, and which may have been superior to that of wife-beating England in the present time. "When we consider these facts," says Chambers, "together with the gallant and systematic resistance offered to the Romans, we are obliged to admit that the Caledonians had attained to a higher state of civilization than classic writers uniformly allowed them." Instead of imagining a condition of society to suit our prejudices, and then labouring to overthrow these writings, because they do not harmonise with our theory, let us rather allow them to be illustrative of what actually existed, and many difficulties will thus be got over that must otherwise remain unreconciled. Should we be permitted to attach due importance to the compositions of Ossian, this state of things will be further confirmed. In these poems, we find very frequent allusion made to the forge of the smith, to the sword, the spear, and the shield, none of which could have been fabricated without considerable mechanical skill, and without which, resistance to the disciplined Roman legionaries could not have been sustained for a single day. Of the nature of this resistance, we are not left in ignorance. Over and above what classic writers have left on record on the subject, the extensive remains of Roman camps, to be seen at Ardoch and elsewhere along the Caledonian frontier, clearly testify that the kings of the world, after having conquered all else, had, at length, met with a formidable foe. Nor will it do to oppose this conclusion by asserting

that the Caledonians were more indebted for their independence to their inhospitable region, than to their valour in arms. Had mere bleak mountains, and a few naked savages, only to be encountered, these extensive works would never have been constructed, these protecting walls would never have run across the country.

Dunfhinn, pronounced Dunning, and now spelled so, seems to signify a stronghold of Fingal. This I explained a few years ago, to a popular writer, in the *Perth Advertiser*, who was puzzled what to make of an old fort at that place, the structure of which he declared to be neither Roman nor Danish, nor anything else that he had ever seen before. There is every probability that it was a stronghold of the Caledonians, of the days of Fingal, as the name implies, whence they resisted the advancing Roman invasion of the land. "In the reign of Hadrian," says Gibbon, in his History of the Decline and Fall, "the Roman empire extended from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, and from the pillars of Hercules to the foot of the Grampians," where, doubtless, her arms were held in check.

We all know how easy a thing it is to raise a cry of savageness, or rather an ignorant, savage cry. To the Greeks, all other nations were barbarians. To the Chinese, we are all outside barbarians now. Even the *Scotsman* newspaper indulges in abusing the Highlanders as a race of "savages who leap on their dykes, and shout out, 'ho, ho, lonoch!'" ignoring—purposely, I am afraid—his knowledge of the great numbers of them engaged in conducting the learning and enterprise of the lowland towns, the inhabitants of which he styles the people *par excellence*, "the intensified betters of the English themselves."

It is a doctrine of ethnologists that the mixing of different races tends greatly to the preservation of constitutional vigour. Should this doctrine be correct, as I believe it to be, may not the great numbers of Highlanders who are driven off from their native straths and glens, and who are obliged to take shelter in these towns, account for the very perfection attributed to their inhabitants by the *Scotsman?* The language of the Highlanders, too, instead of being a barbarous jargon, as the *Scotsman* would have its readers believe, had attained to classical perfection long before the English language came into existence.

In one respect their independence militated against them. Capable of holding their own against Rome, they were necessarily shut out from the more advanced civilization to which the conquered nations had access. In the present day, with a Highlander (lately deceased), Lord Macaulay, as a great English historian; with a Highlander, Lord Campbell, as Lord High Chancellor of England; with a Highlander, Lord Clyde, as late Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in India; and with a Highlander, Dr Livingstone, as a great African explorer, to bring the charge of savageness against the race is, to say the least of it, in extremely bad taste. In making these remarks, however, I must not be understood as instituting any invidious comparison between Celt and Tueton, my opinion being that, with equal advantages of training and opportunity, the result with both peoples will be much the same. What I have to complain of is unfairness. We are bravely fighting with you the battles of our common country in every part of the world; we are bearing with you our fair share of its public burdens; we are moving along with you in every modern improvement; in every sense an integral portion of the British nation, adding strength to its arm and glory to its name; and the journalist who can stoop to make literary capital out of such wholesale abuse and misrepresentation, is unfaithful to his mission, which should be to remove the antagonism of different races, and heal the divisions of society. So much for Caledonian savageness, both ancient and modern. But to our subject.

When Stephen and his companions, after exploring the ruins of Copan, in Mexico, sat down on a wall, one hundred feet high, to contemplate the mysterious scene around them, the question was very naturally put, "Who were the people that built this Mecca, this Jerusalem of the American continent?" In the ruined cities of Egypt, even in the long lost Petra, the stranger knows the story of the people whose vestiges are around him. America, say travellers, was peopled by savages, but savages never reared these structures, never sculptured these stones. When they asked the Indians who made them, their dull answer was, Quien sabi—Who knows?

Happily for the establishment of belief in a remote American civilization, the Copans, though, according to travellers, ignorant of the use of the harder metals,

succeeded in building and sculpture. Had they not left these to speak for them to after ages, any one who should be daring enough to assert, on other grounds, that civilization once flourished there, would soon be put to silence by the voice of incredulity.

Unfortunately for the Caledonians, that in which they chiefly excelled consisted in historic poetry; which, though it exercised the highest civilizing influence on society, was, in the absence of writing and printing to perpetuate it, less tangible to the senses than the stone walls of the Copans. No doubt the Caledonians were ignorant of most of the refining arts of modern times, but I cannot see in this any obstacle to their cultivating poetry with the greatest success. Possessed of a lively imagination, which is still characteristic of their descendants, and inhabiting a country like the Highlands, where nature is exhibited on a scale calculated to impress the mind strongly with a sense of the grand, I can see in the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed every incentive to poetic composition. Simple in manners, with only war, the chase, and such domestic animals as they possessed to attend to, they must necessarily have had much leisure time at their disposal, which would be devoted with eagerness to anything that greatly delighted them. And when the composition and recitation of poetry became, in the absence of science, religion and commerce—subjects that now so largely engross the minds of mankind—their only intellectual pursuit, one can understand in some measure the perfection to which that single branch could be carried.

And if in addition to all this we found a class styled the bards existing, whose persons were held sacred on account of their calling, who were publicly supported, wholly for the purpose of cultivating this branch of literature, the mind ceases to wonder if poetry among them attained to the greatest perfection. Now if we examine the subject in the light of Ossian's poems, what I am merely supposing for the sake of illustration will be found to have been the actual state of things. The learning, the religion, the commerce, the various branches of trade and industry, in all their ramifications and subdivisions, which did not exist, are not mentioned, which could scarcely be the case were the poems a production of modern times. Among the Caledonians, bardship did exist as an institution. To

have been a great warrior among them secured to a man high honours, but to have been a great bard raised him to higher still.

Cairbre, who could without remorse imbrue his hands in the blood of kings and princes, shrunk from shedding the blood of the bards, their confinement being all he durst venture on, even when he knew them to be inimical to his ambitious designs.

> "A Chairbre fuasgail—sa na bàird,
> Is iadsan clann an àm 'chaidh sios,
> Clunnear an guth—sa air àrd,
> 'Nuair dh' aomas gu làr ar siol,
> Siol righrean Thighmora nan crann,"

Said Cathmor to his brother Cairbre, who had held the bards in durance, through fear of the influence they would exert on the minds of the people, in causing them to revolt against his unrighteous usurpation of the throne of Cormac, the young king of Ireland, whom he had basely murdered.

As a proof of the importance attached to the order, I may state, that in the poem of Fingal alone, and it is a specimen of what the rest are, there are forty-one allusions to the bards;—five of them are to Ossian by himself, in the first person, as the *ego* who composed these poems; four of them are to him by others, as the greatest, the sweetest of all the bards; the remaining thirty-two are to Ullin, Carril, and others—to the bards in general, their office and doings—but none of them in the first person.

Let us endeavour to penetrate this mighty institution of the Caledonians, to discover the secret of its power, and the purpose it subserved. Any one who has carefully studied the characters of men cannot have failed to discover that the love of fame, approbation, notoriety, is that which is most strongly developed in our nature. Has a general obtained a great victory, is not the approbation of his countrymen his greatest, his dearest cherished reward? Has a man published a book, or poem, or even delivered an address, how anxiously does he watch the expression of public opinion, as uttered through its great organ, the press, his spirits rising or falling according to the tone it takes in regard to his performance?

Sir Walter Scott, at a great dinner to which he was treated, and where his praise was sounded without stint, could say, "It was your breath that filled my

sails." Keats, it is said, was killed by the effect produced on his mind by Jeffrey's adverse criticism of his poems. It was on this element, so deeply rooted in our nature, for the purpose of inciting us to the achievement of whatever is great and noble—which must and will be ministered to, if we are to be anything more than the brutes that perish—that the bardic institution rested. Other duties came to be associated with it in the course of time, but it was in this that it had its origin—for this end that it was upheld through so many ages, with a stability that the Caledonians believed could never be shaken. "Our names," said Cuchullin, "shall live in the songs of the bards while ocean continues to pour its waters into the channel."

On every occasion they exercised their calling, at friendly feasts, in their hunting excursions, and even in the intervals of battle. The Caledonians are engaged fighting with Swaran on the plains of Lena, and hard pressed. "Go," says Fingal, who had retired with three bards to the height of Cromla, to watch the engagement, "Go, Ullin, my bard, carry my words over the field—carry them to Gaul, (the commander,) remind him of war; remind him of his departed sires; strengthen his hands with song." When darkness has fallen on the combatants without victory having decided for either side, and both have retired to their place for the night, "Go, Ullin," says Fingal, "invite Swaran to our feast, the night shall be passed with song; to-morrow we shall break the spear." Oscar has fallen in the war of Tighmora. The bards are first enjoined to give his name to song. This done, "Ullin, my aged bard," says the sorrowing Fingal, "take a small ship, carry Oscar to Selma of woods;" and so on through the whole poems, everything of importance being entrusted to the bards. They were the teachers of morality, the inspirers of heroic virtue, the historians of the community.

Entrusted with such great interests, is it surprising that they were held in such high estimation; and, looking at the lofty position they occupied, need we wonder if they exercised their power in upholding reverence for their order, and enthusiasm for their productions? So much was this the case that we find all capable of repeating, from memory, long passages of their compositions. What a nursery for poetic training! What a premium on poetic excellence! And

yet, under the influence of such an institution, the Caledonians, it is said, could not have produced poetry.

Milton composed his great epic in poverty and neglect, under the frown of the court of his day, and could with much difficulty procure a publisher at £15, payable in three instalments, while his sovereign was paying court to other charmers than the beautiful Clio. "Ullin, Carril, Ossian," says Fingal, on the night after the victory of Lena, "raise the song—pleasant to mine ear is the praise of the mighty." It will be admitted that, as regarded patronage at least, the advantage was in favour of the ancient. Nor were the materials in which he worked far to seek—they were within him and around him, as they are to every man, though it is only genius that can interpret them.

That a school of the highest order did arise, as the result of such a system, acted on through many generations, and of which Ossian became the brightest ornament, is quite evident. He does not merely show us in the poems the high estimation in which he himself was held as a bard, he not unfrequently expresses his admiration of those who went before him, to whose compositions he may have been indebted for his own success. Indeed, his poetic vocabulary is too extensive and perfect to be otherwise accounted for than as the growth and development of successive ages of cultivation. The praises of Fonfhear, Carril, and Ullin are for ever on his lips, the same as we in our day speak of Shakspeare, Milton, Burns, and others. Nay, it is even possible that among these poems there may be some fragmentary remains of these other bards. But this, instead of lessening his own excellence, or weakening the arguments for the authenticity, rather strengthens them; for it is easier to imagine Ossian shining forth from a school thus nurtured than rising as a solitary star from a wilderness in which no intellectual life existed. I have said this much in refutation of the charge, that the Caledonians could not have produced such poetry. I have shown, by the light of such memorials as remain to us, that they were not so barbarous as some writers represent them to have been. I have also shown, by the light of Ossian's poems, that poetry was greatly cultivated by them; and the conviction forced on my mind is, that civilization of no mean order flourished among them, though of a kind very different from that of modern times. I am further

convinced that the asylum obtained, in a later age, for learning and religion in the island of Iona was in connection with a civilization the heroic age of which had passed away.

Indeed, the saddened spirit of Ossian in his old age, as often expressed in the poems, seems to have been deepened, if not wholly induced, by the knowledge that the glory of his line had departed—probably owing to exhausting wars with the Romans, the Danes, and Irish. Roinne, his youngest brother, had fallen in the war of Lena; Fillan, his next brother, and Oscar his only son, both in their youth, in the war of Tighmora; so that when Fingal, after that, the last of his fields, with great ceremony, in presence of the Caledonian army, put the sword of Treunmor into his hand, he was the only survivor of his race, after his father.

"C' uin a ghluais eas am bròn o Mhoir bheinn?
Thùit, o àm gu àm, mo chlann;
Tha Fionnghal an deireadh de' shìol.
Mo chlìù a' sìòladh sìos o luaidh,
Bithidh 'm aois-sa fo thruaigh gun chairdibh,
Mar nial de cheò 'am thalla feìn.
Cha chluinn mi tilleadh o' bheinn mhae,
'Am meadhon mòrchuis is smachd airme,
Tuiteadh deòir o ghaisgich Mhòr bheinn;
Cha 'n èirich Oscar òg a chaoidh."

This said Fingal, when lamenting the death of his grandson, the gallant Oscar, who had been treacherously entrapped and slain by the bloody Cairbre.

Having thus disposed of the objections to the composition of these poems, I shall now proceed to examine the objections to their transmission through so many ages. I have already quoted Ossian, to show the estimation in which the bards were held as the recorders of passing events, and will have to draw on him again, to show the esteem in which they were held as the preservers of whatever was valuable in the annals of the race.

"Tha solus mo chleibh-sa fo smal
Le gniomh 'raibh cas mo bhràthar,
Cha chuir bàird fonn air mo chliu;
Their iadsan,—Bha Cathmor treun,
Ach bha 'bheum air taobh Chairbre,
Theid iadsan thar m' uaimh gun leus;
Cha chluinnear mo chliù a chaodh,"

Said Cathmor, when moralizing on the anomalous position he occupied, as a man of generous and brave spirit, fighting on the side of his wicked brother.

What the press does for the literature of our day,

the bards did for the literature of the Caledonians. And when we know that the order existed, as a distinct class in society, down almost to our own time, wonder begins to diminish if a few compositions of rare beauty have reached us. What has perished we cannot tell. From the time of Ossian, (and long before that, the order must have been in full swing, for the praises of Treunmor, the grandfather of Fingal, and Trathal, his great-grandfather, were in the mouths of Ullin and other bards, who were old when Ossian was young,) till the utter extinction of the order, somewhere in the seventeenth century, they never ceased to exercise their calling, reciting old compositions, and composing originals of their own, the greater part of which, however has died out, while the productions of the great genius of the race were preserved with sacred care; just as in our own times, notwithstanding the aid of printing, all inferior compositions perish from popular use, while the superior productions of the great master minds are preserved. Nor need we be surprised at this, when it is admitted that, till after the battle of Culloden, the Highlanders were, by custom, manners, and above all, language, excluded from all intercourse with the other nations of Europe. So circumstanced, what could they do but fall back with doating fondness on the compositions of their own immortal bard, the tendency to which would be greatly strengthened by the customs of society, as I can show, by referring to what has prevailed within my own experience.

Thirty years ago, and more so previously, it was the custom in Strathtay and all over the Highlands for the young women of a district to meet with their spinning-wheels, on every day of the week except Saturday, at some house previously fixed on, every household taking its turn, to cheer each other at their labour. Thither the young women came, some in the forenoon and some in the evening, carrying their wheels on their shoulders. As the shades of evening fell, putting an end to the out-door labours in which the young men of the district might be engaged, they also came to the rendezvous, and during the long winter night the song went on unceasingly till about 10 o'clock. I remember distinctly how, on these occasions, he or she who could sing the greatest number of fine songs was regarded as the very life of the company. I was never a singer myself, and yet I still retain in my memory

the words of many of the songs sung on these occasions, none of which were seen in print. They were learned from hand to hand with great ease, though some of them, such as M'Intyre's Bendouran, were very long. The fact is, in the present day, with such vast quantities of printed matter at our command, we can form no correct idea of the tenacity of the memory when exercised on subjects, the sentiments of which please. And if this could be the case with those engaged in the ordinary pursuits of life, what must it have been with the bards who made the practice the profession of their lives, having nothing else to attend to? Besides all this, the peculiar construction of Ossian's verse makes the task of committing it to memory particularly easy; especially if sung, a purpose for which, I have no doubt, it was originally framed. It is in octo-syllabic measure, with the accent on the beginning of each line, instead of being placed towards the end as in all our English octo-syllabic poetry. Add to this the vigorous style, so nervous, so graphic, that not a superfluous word seems to enter, while not a telling one seems to be omitted, and you have poetry, the easiest committed to memory, perhaps, of that of any age or country. But whence the superiority of Ossian's poetry in this respect to that of all other poets? The reason is obvious. Having to live in the memory and be transmitted by recitation, it required to be stripped of everything superfluous and weak, to have nothing in it but the very essence and spirit of poetry, "thoughts that breathe and words that burn." That it is found so is, in itself, no mean proof that Ossian was the author, and oral recitation the means by which it has been handed down to us. Let me further illustrate this by referring to a bag-pipe player of the present time. With a strongly-developed musical talent it is quite possible that a young lad may become passionately fond of the instrument and its music, irrespective of any other consideration. Let that of pecuniary gain, perhaps fame, be added, and his enthusiasm will know no bounds. I know such a one who is at present undergoing training to be piper to one of the Highland regiments stationed in Edinburgh: his comrades complain that they cannot get him to accompany them in any of their excursions into the city, owing to the devotedness with which he pursues his favourite

object. Now, let us suppose such a musical enthusiast as having attained the object of his ambition.—He has established a name for good playing; some great lord, Panmure for instance, has taken him into his service. By and bye a Highland chieftain of whiggish politics like himself pays his lordship a visit. They dine together, during which our musical proficient acts professionally outside, on which the visitor remarks, "That man plays well. Ask him to play Reel Thulachan." Up flies the window—"Gordon, will you play Reel Thulachan for this gentleman?" "Cannot, my lord; never heard of it." What, I say, would be thought of the piper who could not play that foremost of Highland reels? and yet his case would in no way be different from that of the Highland bard who could not recite Ossian, the foremost of Gaelic poets. Powerful for this purpose must have been an institution, the last ripples of which are only dying out in the middle of the nineteenth century, amid all its new discoveries and inventions. In the Highlands there is nothing more common, at this day, than to hear people say of a man who can speak fluently—"Tha teangadh bard aig an fhear sin." (That man has the tongue of a bard).

One day, some ten or twelve years ago, there entered my house a robust-looking, middle-aged man, with a strong northern accent, who immediately commenced, with a stentorian voice, to chant some verses of Gaelic poetry. After going on in this way for some time, he pulled from his pocket a file of papers, which he commenced offering for sale. On examination I found them to be printed copies, on detached leaves, of what he had been reciting. My curiosity was excited by meeting with a specimen of what I believed to be an extinct genus, a strolling bard. On remarking that all his pieces were on the subject of religion, "Yes," he said, with a significant wink of his eye, "nothing else will suit the public taste now." On inquiry I found them to be his own compositions, and that he made a livelihood by going about vending them in this way, though they could not pretend to any merit. In parting, he requested me to write to him, and gave his address as John M'Kenzie, Bard, Muir-of-Ord Bridge, by Beauly.

I am now come to the key of the position—the charge of imposture, as perpetrated by M'Pherson.

Fortunately I have in my possession a Gaelic and an English version of the same thing, as any one capable of comparing them may see for himself. The Gaelic is represented as being the original, the English as being a translation. The Gaelic is in verse—verse, as I said already, of a very singular construction, with the accent on the beginning of each line, and flows majestically and smoothly along to the harmony of numbers and the jingle of rhymes. The English is in prose, but very diminished in force, and betraying at each step its vast inferiority. The Gaelic is very condensed, every line, very often, being a complete picture, which accounts for the short, epigrammatic sentences of M'Pherson's prose, at which many people wonder, as if he had been the originator of that peculiar style, whereas it was owing entirely to the necessity he was under in translating finished pictures expressed in eight syllables. The poem in English that most resembles the poems of Ossian in this respect—for in everything else they differ—is Burns' "Tam o' Shanter." Like that poem, they consist of a succession of vanishing scenes. No sooner is an object imaged vividly in the mind than it departs, to make room for others that shall disappear with equal rapidity. Translate that poem into the finest prose of any language, and there will be still no difficulty in finding that to be the original which contains

> "The storm without might rair and rustle,
> Tam didna mind the storm a whistle."

The poems of Ossian have been translated into many of the continental languages; but with them, too, that must ever be the original which contains

> "A ghaisgich dhubh ghruamach 'n a dheigh,
> Mar chomh-thional uisge nan stuadh,
> Mu'n cuairt do dhealain nan speur."

Literally—

> "His dark gloomy heroes behind,
> Like the congregate water of clouds,
> Around the red lightning of heaven."

And a thousand other passages of equal strength and beauty with which they abound. And yet this English version, so palpably inferior—so evidently what it is represented to be, a translation—has been called an imposture. If so, who composed the Gaelic? Did M'Pherson, when charged with dishonesty, feel bound, in order to maintain his honour, to produce something in Gaelic that could be referred to as the original from

which he translated? We have proofs, which I have given already, that the poems were old in the country before he was born. We have the testimonies of contemporaries, personal acquaintances of his, that he was quite incapable of composing them—one of whom declared that he could as soon have created the Isle of Skye, or written the prophecies of Isaiah, as written these Gaelic poems.

But laying all this aside for the time, let us deem it possible that he did translate his English into Gaelic. In that case what could have induced him to make it so very superior?—that which, so far as he was concerned, was allowed to perish; for it was not till many years after his death that the Gaelic was first published. The very supposition is preposterous. Every principle of action implanted in our nature revolts against such a course of procedure. We do not bury, as a foundation, deep down in the earth, the finely-prepared and polished stones that are to give grace and symmetry to our architectural edifices; neither do we expend our intellectual energies on that which is to bring us neither praise nor reward—that which we have to disown as being ours. That they were not so translated by any other is clear from the fact, that those of them which were lost in the interval have never been restored, and never will.

"But," say others, "M'Pherson did find some rude Gaelic fragments, which he embellished and brought out as his beautiful English version." There cannot be a greater delusion. The embellishment is all on the other side. I wish you could follow me at once into the beauties of the Gaelic. But this cannot be. I have therefore translated a passage literally and in the original verse, in order to give you a true idea of its construction and energy. This I transmitted to the Rev. Thomas M'Lachlan, of Edinburgh, one of the first Gaelic scholars of the day, and editor of the latest and by far the best edition of Ossian's Gaelic, and he has written me to say, that it is "both accurate and elegant."

It is the opening scene of Tighmora, where Cairbre, the murderer of Cormac, and the usurper of his throne, is represented as seeing his ghost, which throws him into a state of great agitation and perplexity, till he hears of the arrival of Fingal, the king of the Caledonians, to be avenged on him for the murder of his

relative, which Cormac was, when he prepares to resist him. It is as follows:—

The blue waves of Erin in light,
High hills 'neath the brightness of day,
Trees, dark-headed, waving with wind,
Grey waterfalls pouring from rocks,
Two hillocks green under an oak,
In its narrow and winding path
Sweet water through glens meandering.
On the bank of the burn is Cairbre,
His spear at command by his side,
His red eye affrighted and sad.
Cormac rose in the soul of the king,
Disclosing the wounds in his side;
Half seen was the sorrowing youth,
The blood streaming red from his breast.
Cairbre three times threw his spear,
Three times laid his beard 'neath his hand,
Oft suddenly paused in his course,
Shaking high his murderous arms.
Like a cloud in the desert the chief,
By the storms that raise it dissolved;
While the valleys around are sad,
Alternately fearing the blast.
The king took his soul to himself,
Grasped his mighty spear in his hand,
Turned his eye to the back of Lena.
The watchers of danger from ocean,
With terrified footsteps they came,
Oft looking behind on the deep.
Cairbre knew of the king of deeds
Dark, summoned his chiefs to his side;
Quick they came, with echoing tread,
Their swords gleaming bright in their hands.
There was Morla, with darkening face;
There Dalla, with locks on the wind;
Red Cormar leaned over his spear,
Looking fierce from his side-long scowl;
Savage were thy lowered eyes, Malthos,
Beneath the dark folds of their lashes;
Foldath stood like a rock in a stream,
Concealing its blackness in foam,
His spear like a pine of the hills,
That encounters the winds of heaven,
His shield bearing traces of combat,
His red eye a stranger to fear:
These, with other chieftains unnumbered,
Gathered strong round the king of Erin.
When the scout of blue ocean came,
Moranail, to the heights of Lena,
His eyes bursting squint from his head.
His lips shaking pale and awry,
"Stand the leaders of Erin inert,
Like a grove in the quiet night,
Like a forest silent in mist,
When Fingal descends on the coast,
Fingal of the terrible arm,
Great king of the valiant from Morven?"
"Sawest thou the hero," said Cairbre,
Emotion perturbing his breast;
"Are his followers many on shore;
Raises he forward the spear,
Or cometh the mighty in peace?"
"He comes not in peace, king of Erin—
Before him upborne is the spear;
Like the slow fire of death ascending,

Blood of thousands reddening its steel.
He, the first man to smite the land,
Vigorous 'neath ringlets of gray,
Large, sinewy the limbs of the king,
With ease striding over the heath;
His sword hanging slant at his side—
That sword that two strokes never needs:
His awful broad shield in his hand,
Like the round, bloody orb of the moon,
Rising bold through the darkening storm.
There Ossian, the sweet king of songs;
There Morni, the leader of hosts;
Conal sprung on his spear from the wave;
Diarmid loosened his locks of brown;
Fillan bended his bow in greatness;
Young hunter from the hills of streams.
But who is that moving before,
Like the rush of a mountain stream?
Who is it but Ossian's great son,
Like a fire in the midst of his locks,
In folds o'er his shoulders that fall;
His dark brows half hidden in steel;
His sword in a thong at his side;
His spear flashing light at each step:
I shunned the fierce eye of the chief—
I fled from it, king of Tighmora."

You have here a fair specimen of the poems as they stand in Gaelic, with the exception of the rhyme, which I could not manage without losing much of the strength of the original. Were the rhyme added, you can easily see that, instead of being "rude fragments," their composition must have been a difficult thing indeed, compared with that of M'Pherson's prose.

"But," say others, "M'Pherson first composed the Gaelic, and afterwards translated it." Let us see what must have been the qualifications requisite on his part for the accomplishment of such a task? As far as I can learn, he was only twenty-eight years of age when he first brought out his English, on which he had worked for two entire years, so that if he composed the Gaelic it must have been before he was twenty-six years.

We have then to suppose this young man of little experience, who has left nothing else, pretending to be original in either language worth reading, as stepping out of the world of reality in which he was placed, to create in his own mind, without history, all the great and small characters with which the poems abound, consisting of Caledonians, Scandinavians, Romans, and Irish, for each of whom he had to frame a distinct and strongly-marked individualism such as he could not have met with in his brief experience of life. He had to employ as illustrations of, or ornaments to, his

subjects, every appearance in nature which he applies metaphorically, many of them so occult in their operations, and others of such rare occurrence, as to require the closest observation of a long life to be discovered. Even in the passage I have laid before you, see how many of these occur—

> "Like a cloud in the desert the chief,
> By the storms that raise it dissolved."
> "Foldath stood like a rock in a stream
> Concealing its blackness in foam,
> His spear like a pine of the hills,
> That encounters the winds of heaven."
> "Stand the leaders of Erin inert,
> Like a grove in the quiet night,
> Like a forest silent in mist?"

And so on, through the whole poems, till you begin to find, if a native of the hill country, and given to observation, that nature, in all her diversity of forms, and phenomena, has scarcely an appearance to exhibit, that has not been used up. Were I treating of the beauties of these poems, instead of tracing out their authorship, I could easily point out the exquisite fineness of some of these similes; but this pleasure I must at present forego. Besides all this, M'Pherson, if the author, had to transform himself into the aged Ossian, blind, and the last of his race—no easy thing to be done successfully by a young man; for if it be a difficult thing for age to recall the feelings and emotions of youth, after they have once gone by, it must be more difficult still for the young to assume the character of age, which it has not experienced; but this latter we find brought out in Ossian as it is no where else. He gives picture on picture of what he once was, and contrasts it mournfully with what he has become.

"But why should Ossian sing of battles? for never more shall my steel shine in war. I remember the days of my youth with grief, when I feel the weakness of my arm. Happy are they that fall in their youth —in the midst of their renown! They behold not the tombs of their friends, nor fail to bend the bow of their strength."

On every fitting occasion, he gives vent to his grief, for the loss of his father, his brothers, his son, the companions-in-arms of his prime, with a tenderness that must ever strike a vibrating chord in the human heart, accustomed as it is, in every rank and station of life, to have its finest tendrils snapped asunder by the hand of death:—

"Cia meud a bhrdin tha air Oisian,
Is thusa, thriath thoisich gun deò?
Cha chluinn mi air Cona do ghuth,
Cha-n fhaicear do chruth le sùil dhall,
'S iomadh là agus oidhch' fhuar
A shnidheam aig t-uaimh fo n' chàrn
Dh'fairicheam fom' làimh i 's a' chruaich,
'S mi' ga d' mholadh le luaidh nam bàrd.
'N uair shaoilinn gu 'n cluinnear do ghuth,
'Se th' ann osag dhubh na h-oidhch;
'S fhada o'n là thuit thu 'n a d'shuain,
A shàr—cheannaird nan cruaidh—chòmhrag."

All this—all that the poems are—M'Pherson had to give, with a naturalness and simplicity which we know to be true, otherwise they could never have captivated so many great minds. Burns was passionately fond of these poems. Writing from the east coast, after returning from his Highland tour, he exclaims, "Warm as I am from the country of Ossian, where I have seen his very grave, what care I for fishing town or fertile carse." Napoleon Bonaparte was equally fond of them, and carried his admiration of them so far as to make the military tactics of Fingal, the leading hero of the poems, the model of his own generalship. Who does not see in his plan of devolving the command in battle on his most distinguished officers—thus stimulating them by such confidence to the greatest possible display of bravery—while he himself stood aloof, waiting to descend with his irresistible invincibles only when the issue threatened to be doubtful or adverse, a resemblance to the conduct of Fingal, as described in the poems? Sismondi, in his "Literature of Southern Europe," when treating of the writings of Ceasarotti, the translator of Ossian into Italian, says that "he was deeply penetrated with the spirit of the ancient Caledonian, much of whose dim and gigantic grandeur he has preserved in his translation." The writings of most of our modern poets are said to have been much influenced by Ossian. Scott, in particular, is pointed out as having acted on his method in the extreme localization given by him on that beautiful poem, "The Lady of the Lake."

I have brought forward these examples to show the extensive and enduring influence exercised by these compositions on the literary world, and I would ask, where in the annals of literature do we meet with another instance of writings, without a foundation in fact, exercising such power? But there is yet another feature about them which amazes me more than all

the rest, if M'Pherson was the author. It is the mastery they reveal of the language in which they are written. Without dictionaries—for at that time there were no Gaelic dictionaries—he employs in their composition the whole compass of the Gaelic tongue, with a fulness and perfection to be met with nowhere else. I have studied the writings of the best Gaelic poets, some of whom, such as M'Intyre, William Ross, and Robert Doun, were contemporaneous with M'Pherson. They were men of great intellectual powers; they devoted the whole energies of their minds to the composition of Gaelic poetry, and were greatly celebrated in their line. M'Intyre had a monument erected to him in Glenorchy, his native place, less than two years ago. Their vocabulary is very perfect, as regards the written and spoken Gaelic of modern times, but none of them bears any comparison, either in respect of language or dignity of style, to these poems. So much so is this the case, that even a good scholar in modern Gaelic has to study the language anew before he can fully comprehend Ossian; and this is the reason that he is not very generally read in the Highlands —most people being too slothful to take the trouble of mastering the language. Nor is going back to him like what we meet with in going to Barbour, and other old English authors. In them we find that we have a crude and half-formed language—one in every respect inferior to the English of our own times, whereas in Ossian it is quite the reverse. In him, and in him alone, is the Gaelic to be found in its greatest perfection, thus irrefragably pointing back to a period when, under the fostering influence of the Bardic Institution, and in the mouth of so transcendent a genius as Ossian, it had attained its highest development. Confirmatory also of this hypothesis is the fact, that the German philologists are finding in it—the Gaelic of Ossian—a key to several of the European tongues, which rest on a Celtic substratum; while, historically, the poems are illustrative of events recorded by the old Irish annalists. Shame on Scotland that, with so large a proportion of her people speaking the language, she should be without a professorship of it in any of her universities!

Hear Dr Hugh Blair's opinion, as to the impossibility of M'Pherson having been the author of the poems. "One of the principal difficulties which an

impostor would have to overcome would be to pourtray, in a lively, vigorous, easy style, the thoughts, actions, and manners of an unknown period, without betraying any marks of a different age, nation, or state of society. It often requires some genius to depict, in the most proper and vivid colours, even what we have ourselves seen or felt; and the greatest genius can only combine and arrange, he cannot create a single new, simple idea. Hence it is almost impossible for any man to give a description of an unknown state of society, which shall contain much that is original, and, at the same time, vivid and true to nature. There must likewise be a constant watch against inserting anything that would detect him. This must effectually cramp both the thought and the style. Now it is a fact, that the style of Ossian is most simple and unembarrassed, to a degree seldom or never surpassed. His words seem to flow from him without any effort whatever, while the thoughts are often original and uncommon, and at the same time natural. Such poems, therefore, never were, and never shall be composed by one who describes an unknown period, and is perpetually shackled by the dread of committing himself, either by thought or expression."

Had M'Pherson been the author of the Gaelic, it was at least to be expected of him that he would understand its meaning; whereas the translation contains innumerable proofs that he did not. Thus for

"Bha mi dluth
Ri m' chairdean 'an carraid nan sleagh,"

he has

"I was swift with my friends in fight."

In this case he mistakes the meaning of the word *dluth* (close) for *swift*, a sense in which it is only used locally, and even then incorrectly. Having done this, he had to put a wrong interpretation on *ri*, which means *to*. Instead, then, of *swift with*, it should be *close to*—thus,

"I was close to my friends in the battles of spears."

Again, for

"'S cosmhuil ri Gorm-meall am fuaim,
Mu'n eirich guillean a' chuain ard,"

he has

"Such is the noise of Gormal, before the
White tops of my waves arise."

Here he mistakes the words *mu* and *an* contracted

into *mu'n*, and meaning *around which*, for *mus* and *an*, contracted into the same form, namely, *mu'n*, but meaning *before that*.

It should be—

"Such is the sound of Gormal, *around which* the storms of ocean rise."

In the description of the left-hand steed in Cuchullin's chariot, for

"Bu shoilleir a dhreach, 's bu luath
'Shiubhal; Sithfada b'e ainm,"

he has—

"Bright are the sides of the steed; his name is Sulin-Sifadda."

Here he confounds the word *siubhal*, which means *travel*, or *pace*, with the horse's name, making it *Sulin-Sifadda*, when only Sifadda itself is applied to it in the Gaelic.

It should be—

"Bright is his figure, and swift his pace;
Sifadda his name."

For

"Theich Caracul, 's a shluagh om' lainn;
Theich e thall thar raoin an ardain,"

he has—

"Caracul has fled from our arms along the field of his pride."

Here he mistakes the word *ardain*, meaning a *little height*, for the same word when it means hotness or haughtiness of temper. It should be—

"Caracul and his people have fled from my arms;—they have fled over the field of the *height*."

These are a few instances of what is to be met with in every page of the translation, and which can be accounted for only on the score that M'Pherson did not thoroughly understand the Gaelic. The instances, again, in which words of difficult, or (at the time) unascertainable meaning are skipped altogether, are more numerous still, while passages, often of great beauty and even sublimity, are rendered in a very flat and insipid style, as when for

"'Nuair a dhùineas dorsan na h-oidhche
Air iolair-shùil gréine nan speur,"

he has—

"When the gates of the west are closed on the sun's eagle eye."

It should be—

"When the doors of the night are closed
On the eagle-eyed sun of the skies."

Thus in all these respects making the translation to be anything but a full and perfect rendering of the

Gaelic. But in all these there is no evidence of intentional fraud. They are the mere short-comings of one who was unequal to the task of giving an English version worthy of the original. One who was incapable of rising to the inspired poetic afflatus of Ossian.

We wonder at, and speculate incredulously on, the possibility of these poems having been composed by Ossian, who himself acted a conspicuous part in the events and actions he narrates, who must have busied himself through a long life in accumulating materials and forming similitudes for the great purpose he had in view—whereas we should reserve our astonishment, and incredulity too, for the self-denying and transcendently versatile modern genius who could originate all this out of nothing—in secret—for no one ever heard of him being engaged on such a work—taking such pains as evidently have been taken with this beautiful Gaelic version, consisting, not of one poem as an experiment, but of eleven in all (the rest have been lost), some of which are long, and that for no other purpose than the remote and uncertain one of becoming, at some future day, the mere translator of them into English prose.

Ossian, the compeer of the bards, and a Fellow of the intensely active Bardic Institution—Ossian, the son of Fingal, and his right-hand support in all his great campaigns—Ossian, who lived to an extreme old age, and who had thus an opportunity of singing mournfully and naturally of the loss of friends, and the departed glory of his line, could not, it seems, have composed these poems; but Mr M'Pherson, the young man of Badenoch, could! Really there is here the withholding of faith in Ossian as the author, on account of the impossibility of their composition having been by him, in order to its being attributed to Mr M'Pherson, by whom to be composed was a greater impossibility still. Faugh! I am almost disgusted with the work in which I am engaged. It is like labouring to prove that it is day, when the sun is in the meridian.

I have now proved the English version of the poems to be no imposture, but simply a translation from the Gælic. I have also proved, with equal clearness, I think, that M'Pherson was not the author of the Gælic. Who, then, composed it? This is the question to be answered. Fortunately we have a ray of light, sufficiently strong, to clear up this point also. There

are traditions which, I am aware, some would distort from their natural bearing, to make of them the foundation on which the imposture (still persisted in) was based, but which, in my opinion, speak the other way; for if traditions are to go for anything, it must be for that which they imply. Fionnghal an righ—Fingal the king. Fionnghal more—great Fingal. Cho treun ri Fionnghal—as mighty as Fingal. Cho glic ri Fionnghal—as wise as Fingal. Ossian Mac Fhionngal—Ossian the son of Fingal. Ossian dall — blind Ossian. Ossian am bard — Ossian the bard. Cho binn ri Ossian—as sweet as Ossian.

These are sayings that may still be heard on the lips of old people in the Highlands, who know little of English, and never heard of M'Pherson nor his translation. Now, depend on it, these sayings testify truly of the existence, at some far removed period, of such men who must also have been characterized by the qualities thus ascribed to them. Observe the virtues attributed to each are very distinct and definite.

Fingal is great, and strong, and wise, such as a leader of his people in war, and a ruler of them in peace, was likely to have been. Ossian, on the other hand, is not distinguished by any of these regal qualities. He is simply a great, a sweet, melodious bard. It is agonizing to think that it should come to this. That these slender records should be all that remain of the renowned of their day; but they convey a great amount of meaning. Both the names and deeds of the subordinate characters of their times are blotted out, erased from the scroll of fame. But these two names, and the qualities that respectively belonged to them, tradition will hold by, albeit it should be in nursery ejaculations, to frighten fretful children—a purpose to which, I know, they are at this day applied in the sister isle.

We go next to those from whom the poems were collected, and the uniform testimony we receive is, that they held them as the compositions of Ossian, the son of Fingal.

We have thus far threaded our way through the long night of tradition, with only one or two small stars—small, owing to the distance through which they send their light—to guide us; but the east brightens—the sun is up with his effulgent beams. The poems have burst on our astonished gaze, reveal-

ing a world of poetic beauty and grandeur such as never has been surpassed, confirming all that tradition declared—showing Fingal as a great warrior-king.

"Ghluais an righ na neart gu luath,
Mar thannas Thrèinmhoir, fuath gu bhàigh,
'Nuair thig e 'n crom-osag nan stuadh
Gu Morbheinn, tir sinn' sran a ghraidh.
Bithidh an daraig a' fnaim 's a' bheinn,
Tuitidh carraig na sleibh fa choir;
Ro'n dealan chithear e fein;
O chàrn gu càrn bithidh' cheuman mòr.
B' fhuileach leam m' athair 's an fhrith,
'Nuair thog e le chì a lann:
Bha cuimhn' air òig aig an righ,
'Nuair chathadh leis stri nan gleann."

In his encounter with Swaran, the viking Sea King, confirming also all that tradition declared of Ossian, the blind old bard:—

"'Stric a bhuail 's a thug mi buaidh,
'An comhrag nan ruaig le sleigh,
Gu dall, gu deurach, 's gu faoin,
Tha mo shiubhal le daoine gun chli.
Mhor Fhionnghail, cha-n fhaic mi thu chaoidh,
Thu fein no do shuinn, a righ;
Tha'n ruadhag a' spioladh air t-uaigh,
Righ Mhorbheinn, a 's uaine tóm."

All that now remains to be considered is, the exact time to which the poems refer. This chronologists make out to be the third century, and in this they are borne out by the frequent allusions in the poems to encounters on the Carun with "the strangers of the distant land." When the report—a false one—reaches Caomh-Mhala that Caracul has prevailed, that Fingal has fallen, she curses the son of the king of the world in these words:—

"Bruaillean air an raon a' d' dhéigh,
Cunnart dhuit féin, a righ mhoir;
Do'n naigh na bitheadh lionmhor do chenm,
Bitheadh aon òigh a' d' dhéigh fo bhròn."

It is night; and when she is asked by those around her what sound that can be on the hill, she exclaims—

"Co ach an nàmhaid aig Caomh-mhal';
Mac righ an domhain 's a shluagh."

It turns out, however, to be Fingal and his warriors returning from victory. They reach their waiting friends, when Fingal orders the bards to raise the song about the conflict on Carun:—

"Togaibhs' a bheula nan dan;
Togaibh gu h-àrd am blar aig Carun;
Theich Caracul, 's a shluagh om' lainn;
Theich e thall thar raoin an ardain."

The song of the bards commencing with—

"Taom, a Charuinn, taom do shruth;
'A n aoibhneas an diugh, sinbhail sios;
Theich coigrich, a b' àirde guth,
Cha-n fhaicear an stend—each 's an t-sliabh"—

follows, and is very beautiful; but I cannot think of inflicting any more of these quotations on you. After the victory of Lena, the words of Cuchullin to Fingal, who is trying to comfort him, are—"Fingal, it was not thus that thou sawest me in thy land, when the warriors of the world fled from our arms."

In Ireland afterwards, too, when Cairbre, in compassing the destruction of Oscar, the son of Ossian, sends his bard Olla to invite him to the feast, at which he purposes to kill him; he directs the bard, among other flattering compliments, to say that they had heard of his mighty and far-famed deeds on the banks of the Carun.

Now, when we read of all this, in connection with the fact that Antoninus, nicknamed Caracalla, the son of the Emperor Severus, was the general who commanded in Britain in the early part of the third century, I think we are shut up to the conclusion that the period above named is the correct one. Speaking of this very subject, and of the terrible struggle carried on between the Romans and Caledonians at this period, under the bloody order of Severus, to have them (the Caledonians) not subdued, but extirpated, Gibbon says:—"Could we with safety indulge the pleasing supposition that Fingal lived and Ossian sung, the striking contrast of the situation and manners of the contending nations might amuse a philosophic mind. The parallel would be little to the advantage of the more civilized people, if we compared the unrelenting revenge of Severus with the generous clemency of Fingal—the timid and brutal cruelty of Caracalla with the bravery and tenderness, the elegant genius of Ossian—the mercenary chiefs who, from motives of fear or interest, served under the Imperial standard, with the free-born warriors who started to arms at the voice of the king of Morven—if, in a word, we contemplated the untutored Caledonians, glowing with the warm virtues of nature, and the degenerate Romans, polluted with the mean vices of wealth and slavery."

Having now brought my subject to a close, let me

here remark, that Mr M'Pherson was a very ill-used man. He unwillingly undertook the work of collecting, and translating the poems, alleging his unfitness for the business. In accomplishing it, he conferred a great benefit on literature; for had the thing not been done at that particular time, it would have remained undone for ever—the poems would have been lost. He never claimed to be anything else than the translator of Ossian, and was even indignant with those who charged him with being the author himself, while the very faults of the translation are proofs of shortcomings, rather than of perversions of the text. In the circumstances, he did the best he could, and, on the whole, wonderfully well. Nor should he be over severely criticised for not having done perfectly what no man can ever do—what even the English language is incapable of, being too defective in elasticity, ever to give a perfect translation of Ossian's Gælic. Mr M'Pherson, instead of being honoured in his lifetime, as he ought to have been for the great work he had accomplished, had every imputation cast on him that prejudice and even personal spite could invent, till his temper got soured, and he became indifferent to the fate of the poems altogether; while his name, instead of being held in grateful remembrance, as that of one who had deserved well of the nation to whose pleasure he had contributed, has been loaded with infamy as being that of an impostor. Had he been appreciated as he deserved, a monument would, ere now, have been erected to his memory.

I have examined the poems in every possible light, with a view to eliminate the truth regarding them, whatever it might be, but the more I searched for proofs of their spuriousness, the more was I confronted with evidences to the contrary, which cannot be overturned. The only imposture I can find, is that which has been perpetrated by Johnson and others, in making the English public disbelieve in their genuineness.