# DISSERTATION

ON THE

# AUTHENTICITY OF THE POEMS OF OSSIAN

WITH AN

ACCOUNT OF THE VARIOUS GAELIC EDITIONS,
TRANSLATIONS, ETC., WHICH HAVE
BEEN HITHERTO PUBLISHED

By
Archd. Clerk
Minister of Kilmallie

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# DISSERTATION.

Knowledge of Gaelic poetry before the days of Macpherson.

It has often been brought as a reproach against the Gäel that any knowledge of Gaelic literature possessed by the world is due to the labour of strangers; that the people themselves were indifferent to the subject. And it must be admitted that the reproach is in a great degree deserved. I am glad, however, to be able to show that the first known proposal to make the English public acquainted with the poetical treasures long buried in the obscurity of the Gaelic language, was made by a genuine Celt.

Alexander M'Donald.

Alexander M'Donald, well known to his countrymen as perhaps the ablest of their modern poets, published in 1751 a volume of original Gaelic songs; and in an English Preface to his work he makes the following remarks:—

. . . "The other reason of (this) publication at present is to bespeak, if possible, the favour of the public to a greater collection of poems of the same sort in all kinds of poetry that have been in use amongst the most cultivated nations from those of the earliest composition to modern times; their antiquity either proved by historical accounts, or ascertained by the best tradition, with a translation into English verse, and critical observations on the nature of such writings, to render the work useful to those that do not understand the Gaelic language. And if such a series can be made out, . . . nothing, perhaps, will better contribute to discover the progress of genius through all its different degrees of improvement—from extreme simplicity to whatever height we shall happen, upon examination, to find it amongst this people, . . . (an examination), one would think, not displeasing even to the inhabitants of the Lowlands of Scotland, who have always shared with them the honour of every gallant action, and are now first invited to a participation of their reputation for arts—if that, too, shall be found, on an impartial scrutiny, to be justly claimed by them.

"Nor need it surprise any one that this genius should be found among a people so remote from the commerce of nations famous for arts and sciences, and now relegated to an obscure neglected corner, who considers that the

Celtic nation, of which they are a small but a precious remain, once diffused itself over a great part of the globe. . . .

"It would be agreeable to trace the progress of their genius as far as it is possible now to discover it through all its modifications and changes—to observe what different tinctures, as one may say, it has received from the many different climates, people, and customs through which, as so many strainers, it has passed. We cannot, however, but testify our surprise that, in an age in which the study of antiquity is so much in fashion, and so successfully applied to so many valuable purposes, whether religious or civil, this language alone, which is the depositary of the manners, customs, and notions of the earliest inhabitants of this island, and consequently seems to promise, on an accurate review of it, the most authentic accounts of many things useful for us to know, should remain in a state not only of total abandon, but what is more astonishing in an age so happily distinguished from all others for freedom of thought, love of knowledge and moderation, this people and this language be alone persecuted and intolerated."

M'Donald was admirably qualified to carry into effect his own enlightened project. He was a man of general culture, and a true Gaelic poet. But he met with no encouragement, and his plan fell to the ground. He lived to a good old age, and published much poetry of his own composition; but it is remarkable that his name is never heard in the Ossianic controversy which sprang up so soon after.

Jerome Stone.

The next person who appears in the field is a pure Saxon, Jerome Stone, a native of the parish of Scoonie, Fifeshire. He was rector of an academy at Dunkeld, a Gaelic district, where he soon mastered the language of the mountains, and publicly made known his high estimate of its value. In a letter of date 15th November 1755, published in the 'Scots Magazine,' he complains of "the unfortunate neglect, or rather abhorrence, to which ignorance has subjected that emphatic language;" and adds, that "there are compositions in it which, for sublimity of sentiment, nervousness of expression, and high-spirited metaphor, are hardly to be equalled among the chief productions of the most cultivated nations." In the following May he published in the same magazine a translation of a Gaelic poem, called by him "Albin and Mey;" but soon after, this enterprising and able scholar was cut off by death at the early age of thirty.

John Home.

John Home, the author of the once-celebrated tragedy of 'Douglas,' is the third person whom we find interesting himself in Gaelic literature. We have no account of his having conversed

with Jerome Stone, but it is to be presumed that he read the 'Scots Magazine;' and we see him questioning Professor Ferguson of Edinburgh on the subject of Gaelic poetry. Professor Ferguson confirmed the opinion expressed by Stone; and Home some time afterwards, meeting with James Macpherson, held with him that conversation which eventually led, through the discernment and energy of Dr Blair, to the publication of the poems of Ossian—poems which have become celebrated throughout Europe, and the publication of which, whatever opinion may be formed of their authorship, must be allowed to mark an era in the history of modern literature.

I have been thus minute in showing what was known regarding the existence of ancient Gaelic poetry apart from Macpherson, because the idea is prevalent that he was the first to direct attention to it. He, no doubt, did far more than all others taken together to bring Celtic poetry into public light; but the existence of that poetry was known to others as well as to him, and it was not only accidentally, but reluctantly, as we shall see, that he was led to undertake the important work which has made his name so famous. An outline of his able and successful career will prove interesting to the reader.

Biographical sketch of James Macpherson.

James Macpherson was born in the parish of Ruthven, Badenoch, in the year 1738, of parents in humble circumstances, but well connected. He was educated at the Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh, where he distinguished himself in classical scholarship. In 1758 he published, in English, a poem under the title of "The Highlander," which has often been condemned as turgid and very destitute of good taste; and he wrote two others —one called "Death," the other "The Hunter"—which are much inferior even to "The Highlander." In 1759 he was tutor in the family of Mr Graham of Balgowan (afterwards Lord Lynedoch), where Mr Home met him, and changed his whole future course. He was employed during this and the three following years in collecting and translating the Ossianic poems, in the publication of which he was greatly assisted by the liberality of John, Earl of Bute, a patriotic Scotsman, then high in political power and office.

In 1764 he obtained, through the influence of the same nobleman, an important civil appointment in North America. He returned to Britain in 1766, and was employed by Government

as a political writer. In 1771 he published an Introduction to the 'History of Great Britain and Ireland;' in 1773 his translation of Homer; and shortly afterwards the 'History of Great Britain, from the Restoration to the Accession of the House of Hanover.' These are his undoubted compositions; and it is certain that, while they display scholarship and research, they are not marked by originality of thought, vigour of imagination, or tastefulness of expression. I mention this solely as it affects the authorship of Ossian.

In 1780 Macpherson obtained a very lucrative appointment as agent for the Nabob of Arcot. He was returned to Parliament as member for the burgh of Camelford, and, after some time, purchased the beautiful estate of Belleville in his native district, to which he retired, and where he died in 1796 at the age of fifty-eight. He left a sum of £300 to build a monument to himself on his estate, and by his own appointment was buried in Westminster Abbey.

I come now to speak in detail of what he did for the Ossianic poems, and must entreat the reader's patience while entering into minute particulars; for it is a careful study of these which will enable us to come to a just conclusion on the oft-discussed question of their authenticity.*

He publishes 'Fragments' in 1760.

Mr Home, as already stated, questioned Macpherson in the year 1759 as to the existence of ancient poems in the Gaelic language, and prevailed on him, after much solicitation, to translate two short specimens into English. Being much struck with their beauty, he showed them to Dr Blair, and they together

* The reader will find an interesting account of the Ossianic controversy in the fourth volume of Mr Campbell's 'Tales of the West Highlands.' There is a very clear and satisfactory monograph on Ossian by the late A. M'Neill, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh: but the fullest account of the whole subject is to be found in the Report and Appendix by a Committee of the Highland Society, published in 1805. It is drawn up with clearness and elegance by the accomplished chairman, Henry Mackenzie, Esq., and is so far removed from the strong partizanship elsewhere manifested in the controversy as to show not only judicial calmness, but something of the coldness of indifference as to the verdict. I will venture to remark that the Committee have erred in not analysing the full and important details given in their own Appendix, which, if analysed, would carry much more weight than they have laid upon it. The Report and Appendix, however, contain the chief materials for forming a judgment on the vexed question of the authenticity of Ossian. I quote it as High. Soc. Rep.

persuaded Macpherson to translate such others as he might remember. He submitted sixteen short pieces, which he said were episodes of a greater work that related to the wars of Fingal. These were published in 1760 under the title of 'Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland,' and highly commended by Dr Blair in a preface to the book.

Is sent to collect more Gaelic poetry through the Highlands in the same year.

The 'Fragments' were very favourably received throughout the kingdom; and Dr Blair, then in the zenith of his fame, interested other influential literary men in the recovery of further portions of this poetry, so fresh in its spirit, and so totally opposite to the conventional style of the day. The consequence was, that Lord Elibank, Drs Blair, Robertson, and Ferguson, with Messrs Home and Chalmers, prevailed on Macpherson to undertake a journey to the Highlands, in order to gather what he could of the Ossianic poems. There is ample proof that he undertook the task with reluctance,* repeatedly declaring his unfitness for it; but he did undertake it, and set forth, furnished with introductory letters to influential persons in the Highlands, and with means of defraying his expenses. He was accompanied in the earlier part of the journey by Mr Lachlan Macpherson, tacksman of Strathmashie in Badenoch, whose name is frequently referred to in the controversy, and in the latter by Mr Ewen Macpherson—both countrymen of his own, and competent Gaelic scholars.

Publishes English translation of "Fingal," &c., in 1762; "Temora" in 1763.

In 1762 he published "Fingal, an ancient Epic poem, in six books, together with several other poems composed by Ossian, the son of Fingal, translated from the Gaelic language by James Macpherson." And in 1763 he published "Temora," with five minor poems, bearing also to be translated by him. "Fingal" was published partly by subscription and partly by the liberality of the Earl of Bute—"Temora" entirely at his lordship's expense.

The publication of these poems excited the wonder of literary men throughout Europe. They were translated into French, German, and Italian, and speedily ran through various editions. They commanded the admiration of Napoleon, of Goethe, who, in his 'Werther,' gives the "Songs of Selma," and of Schiller, who speaks of the "great nature of Ossian."

In Britain they called forth loudest praises from some, but at

* High. Soc. Rep., App. p. 58.

Effect produced by the publication—poems highly praised by some; bitterly denounced by others as spurious and worthless.

the same time indignation and scorn from other critics. They were denounced as impudent forgeries, the composition of Macpherson himself; and, what is still more remarkable, condemned as destitute of all poetic merit—mere "bombast," "fustian," &c. They were assailed with a degree of rancour and even ferocity which, in the present day, it is difficult to believe in as reality, far more to comprehend. Political and national prejudices gave much of its bitterness to this attack. Sir John Sinclair says: "It will hardly be credited in these days (1807); but in the year 1762, when the poem of "Fingal" was published, there existed in many, both in England and Scotland, a great spirit of hostility to everything connected with the Gaelic language, and those by whom it was spoken, on account of the zeal with which the Highlanders in 1745 had supported the claims of the house of Stuart. Hence many were induced to decry the beauties of Ossian," &c.;* and at a later period still, there was much anti-Celtic feeling shown in the obstacles thrown in the way of the publication of the 'Myvyrian Archæology,' by the patriotic and indefatigable Welshman, Owen Jones.

A broader and a fairer spirit of criticism is now abroad. Increasing intelligence, the lectures of Professor Max Müller on the "Science of Language"—showing the Celtic to be a member of the great Aryan family—and the genial harmonising lectures of Professor Matthew Arnold on the "Study of Celtic Literature," have all tended to produce this better state of feeling. We are no longer silenced by the old cry, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" but may look to the decision of every literary question on the evidence it can produce, apart from the witnesses being Celt or Teuton.

Testimony of those who assisted Macpherson in collecting and translating.

1. Mr Macpherson, Strathmashie.

Trusting to be judged thus, I submit the following testimony from those who assisted Macpherson in collecting or translating these poems, and first mention Mr Macpherson, Strathmashie, who says, in a letter to Dr Blair, 22d October 1763:—

(1) "In the year 1760 I had the pleasure of accompanying my friend Mr Macpherson, during some parts of his journey, in search of the poems of Ossian. I assisted him in collecting them, and took down from oral recitation, and *transcribed from old MSS.*, by far the greatest part of those pieces he has published."†

* Dissertation, &c., note, p. 11. † High. Soc. Rep., App., p. 9.

(2) Mr Ewen Macpherson certifies, 11th September 1800, that he took down poems of Ossian from the recitation of several individuals at different places, and that he gave them to Macpherson, who was seldom present when they were taken down; that he got from Macvurich, the representative of a long line of bards of that name, . . . "a book of the size of a New Testament,* which, among some other things, contained some of the poems of Ossian; and further, that Clan Ranald senior gave to Mr Macpherson an order on Lieutenant D. M'Donald, Edinburgh, for a Gaelic folio MS." †

2. Mr Ewen Macpherson.

(3) Malcolm Macpherson, Portree, certifies that he gave to Mr Macpherson a 4to Gaelic MS., about an inch and a quarter in thickness. ‡

3. Malcolm Macpherson.

(4) The Rev. A. Gallie, minister of Kincardine, in a letter to C. Mackintosh, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh, 12th March 1799, says that Mr James Macpherson was his intimate friend. . . . "When he returned from his tour through the West Highlands and Islands, he came to my house in Brae, Badenoch. I inquired the success of his journey, and he produced several volumes, small 8vo, or rather large 12mo, being the poems of Ossian and of other bards." He speaks with great minuteness of one of these volumes, which he ascribes to the beginning of the fourteenth century, saying, "Every poem had the first letter of its first word most elegantly flourished and gilded—some red, some yellow, some blue, and some green. The volumes were bound in strong parchment." §

4. Rev. A. Gallie.

(5) Captain Morison's testimony carries us still further. He says, in a communication to the Highland Society, 7th January 1801, that Mr Macpherson came to his house in Skye, and gave him some ancient poems, which he afterwards translated and published; "that afterwards, in London, he had access to Mr Macpherson's papers, saw the several MSS. which he had translated in different handwritings, some in his own hand, some not, as they were either gathered by himself, or sent from his friends in

5. Captain Morison.

* This appears a very indefinite description of size in the present day, but in 1760 the only New Testament common in the Highlands was the Irish translation, printed in Roman characters. I have seen two editions, both large 8vo; and even in 1800 none was published below a small 8vo form—so that the MS. must have been one of considerable bulk.

† High. Soc. Rep., App. p. 94. ‡ Ibid., p. 93. § High. Soc. Rep., p. 31.

the Highlands." . . . "He saw many MSS. in the old Gaelic character with Mr Macpherson, which MSS. they found difficult to read." * Further, in a letter to Sir John Sinclair in 1804, he says: "I distinctly remember assisting the late Mr Macpherson in preparing a copy of Ossian in the Gaelic for printing. My knowledge of the original Gaelic I considered superior to Mr Macpherson's. I did see and collected a few of these MSS., as well as traditionary tales, both of which I considered as perfectly authentic, and as such I delivered to Mr Macpherson." †

6. Rev. Mr M'Nicol.

(6) Mr M'Nicol, minister of Lismore, in his 'Remarks on Dr Johnson's Journey,' speaks minutely of a large folio MS. which Mr M'Donald of Knoydart gave to Mr Macpherson (p. 461);

7. Mr Macpherson's own letters.

And (7) we have Macpherson's own acknowledgments to the Rev. Mr Maclaggan, Amulrie, in 1760-61: "I have met with a number of old MSS. in my travels." . . . "I was favoured with your letter enclosing the Gaelic poems, for which I hold myself extremely indebted to you." . . . "I have been lucky enough to lay my hands on a pretty complete poem, and truly epic concerning Fingal." . . . "I am favoured with your last letter enclosing four poems, for which I am much obliged to you. I beg you send me what more you can conveniently." ‡

Dr Johnson says, sneeringly, that the father of Ossian boasted of having two chestfuls of MSS. Macpherson did not so boast; but it is certain that he got many Gaelic MSS. I hope this will be kept in memory by the reader, as also that some of the gentlemen who saw these MSS. assisted him in translating them—that he made no secret of his MSS., or of his need of aid in rendering them into English.

His MSS. publicly deposited at his publisher's, and offered for publication;

Further, I call special attention to one fact which it appears to me has never had due weight attached to it. When the English translation appeared, Macpherson was very naturally and properly called upon to show his originals — to produce his MSS.; and it is a prevalent idea, a thing taken for granted, that he never did so. It is the truth, however, that he promptly and publicly answered the challenge. He deposited

* High. Soc. Rep., App. p. 176, 177.

† Sir J. Sinclair's Dissertation on Authenticity of Ossian's Poems, App. p. 125.

‡ High. Soc. Rep., App. p. 153-156.

the MSS. at his publishers, Beckett & De Hondt, Strand, London. He advertised in the newspapers that he had done so, offered to publish them if a sufficient number of subscribers came forward, and, in the 'Literary Journal' of the year 1784, Beckett certifies that the MSS. had lain in his shop for the space of a whole year.* One of the strangest things in this strange controversy is that, despite this opportunity of settling it decisively by examining the MSS. once for all, neither friend nor foe took the trouble of looking at them. Friends apparently thought it needless to do so, and foes, from their being utterly ignorant of the language in which they were written, could say nothing about them though they had examined them. It was easier to shut their eyes, and continue to maintain that as they did not see them they were not in existence. Macpherson's subsequent conduct in postponing from time to time the publication when urged to it by friends who had liberally furnished him with means for the purpose, and, more than all, allowing the MSS. to be lost or destroyed, is indefensible; but up to this time—to 1764—he acted openly and honestly, asked the aid of various friends in translating, spoke and wrote frankly of what he was doing, and then gave the public a full opportunity of examining for themselves. After this he treated his assailants with sullen scorn and contemptuous silence. Nor is it to be wondered at that a man of his irascible, proud, and disdainful temper should do so. He had done all that fairness could demand; yet he was called an impostor, a forger, a liar—denounced with blind unreasoning rage, and with such utter rudeness of manner as justly to place his assailants beyond the pale of the ordinary laws of regard or courtesy.

but never examined.

Opponents to the authenticity of the poems:—

Let us now look more in detail at what they actually said.

Dr Samuel Johnson was in name and authority the most formidable assailant; † and yet, with all respect for the great moralist, it

1. Dr Johnson.

* Dr Blair's Letter, High. Soc. Rep., App. p. 60. Dr Graham on the Authenticity of Ossian, p. 259.

† It is impossible to mention the names of all who engaged in the Ossianic controversy. But the principal supporters of the authenticity of the poems were Lord Kaimes, Sir John Sinclair, Drs Blair, Robertson, Graham, Gregory, with Mr John Home and the Committee of the Highland Society, of whom Henry Mackenzie was the accomplished chairman, and Dr Donald Smith, apparently the ablest and most laborious member. On the other side the leaders were Dr Johnson and Messrs Laing and Pinkerton.

must be said that anything he pronounces on the subject is utterly worthless. He was entirely ignorant of the language of the poems. Yet he lays down the law regarding it and them with absolute dogmatism. He says that it was "the rude speech of a barbarous people, who were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood"—adding, "there can be no polished language without books"—shutting his eyes to the fact that "speech precedes writing, and eloquence grammar." He says there was not a Gaelic MS. in the world one hundred years old, though there are in the Advocates' Library alone upwards of sixty Gaelic MSS. varying from three to five hundred years old, not to speak of the 'Book of Deer,' which is of still higher antiquity. Even in his own day two editions of M'Donald's Gaelic songs, as well as his vocabulary, and a volume of songs by MacIntyre, had been published, and these he might have seen had he wished. He says that Ossian's poems never existed in any other form than the English which Macpherson gave to the world—an assertion clearly shown by subsequent examination to be opposed to the truth. And he attempts to shut the door against all further evidence by speaking of "Caledonian bigotry," concluding with the unworthy but characteristic remark, that "a Scotchman must be a sturdy moralist who does not love Scotland better than truth." *

The dicta of Dr Johnson, contrary to facts as they were, carried great weight with the public, and many assailants of Macpherson appeared in Scotland as well as in England.

2. Mr Pinkerton.

A notable one among them was Mr Pinkerton, author of several literary works. Instead of denouncing the language of the poems as Dr Johnson had done, he denounced, in very unmeasured terms, the people who spoke it—nay, the whole Celtic race as lying beneath the level even of barbarism, and thus necessarily incapable of producing either poetry or prose. "The Celts are of all savages the most deficient in understanding. Wisdom and ingenuity may be traced among the Samoieds, Laplanders, Negroes, &c., but among the Celts none of native growth. . . . To say that a writer is a Celt is to say he is a stranger to truth, modesty, and morality." †

It is some satisfaction even at such a distance of time to read the sentence of this railer's condemnation by a judge at once so just

* Johnson's Journey, p. 177-84. † Pinkerton's Dissertation, &c., p. 102.

and so generous as Sir Walter Scott, who says: "Mr Pinkerton read a sort of recantation in a list of Scottish poets prefixed to a selection of poems from the Maitland MS., vol. i., 1786, in which he acknowledges as his own composition the pieces of spurious antiquity included in his 'Select Ballads' with a coolness which, when his subsequent invectives against others who had taken similar liberties is considered, infers as much audacity as the studied and laboured defence of obscenity with which he disgraced the same pages."* And in the 'Edinburgh Review' of July 1803, he is convicted of such falsification and fabrication of authorities, "as, according to his own judgment, ought to brand him with infamy."

3. Mr Laing.

I pass him by to mention Mr Laing, author of a 'History of Scotland,' and by far the most persevering and painstaking adversary in this contest. Truly marvellous is the minute care with which he examined every line and every word of Macpherson's translation, and of scores of other works—sacred and profane, ancient and modern—with the purpose of proving that translation to have been stolen from a hundred various sources, to be nothing but a patchwork of plagiarism. †

That there are passages in Ossian, particularly descriptions of the face of nature, and of battles, which bear a general resemblance to descriptions of the same objects by other poets, is beyond all question; and Macpherson, instead of seeking to conceal this, appears to me to make an ostentatious display of the extent of his reading in bringing forward similar passages, especially from classic authors. But it is obvious that two writers describing the same object must of necessity use terms which are similar; and if a general resemblance of one description to another is to be held as implying plagiarism in the second writer, it is clear that one only can be allowed the merit of originality in any given field. I have before me a curious book, with the title 'Homerus Hebräizōn,' written by Zachary Bogan of Oxford, 1658, in which 320 closely-printed pages are filled with a list of coin-

* Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders, ed. 1861, p. 75.

† Mr Laing had one apparent advantage over his comrades — he paid some attention to Gaelic; but his advantage was more apparent than real. He studied it only so far as to make his ignorance more glaringly conspicuous than if he had not attempted to explain it.

cidences between Homer and the Old Testament; and, what is still more remarkable, 86 pages with a list of coincidences between the bard of Greece and the New Testament. The learned author never alleges that there was any borrowing in these cases. He points them out simply as interesting illustrations of the resemblance between the utterance of one great mind and another, which is natural, if not necessary, when they deal with the same or with cognate subjects. I have carefully examined Mr Laing's charges, and I do not believe that an impartial judge will allow many of them to be conclusive even against the translation, savouring as it does far too much of classic learning, ancient and modern; and I am convinced that, as against the original of Ossian, none of them will hold.

His charges of plagiarism considered and answered.

There is an article in the 'Edinburgh Review' of July 1805 where the Report of the Highland Society on Ossian, and Laing's edition of Macpherson, are criticised with considerable ability. The reviewer is of opinion that Mr Laing has in the main proved Macpherson to be a fabricator; and he gives two quotations as conclusive examples of plagiarism. I submit these as the most favourable towards Mr Laing, and my selection cannot be questioned:—

*Laing.*—"'Like the darkened moon when she moves a dun circle through heaven, and dreadful change is expected by men.'

> "'Or from behind the moon,
> In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
> On half the nations, and with fear of change
> Perplexes monarchs; darkened so, yet shone,' &c.*

"But the dreadful change expected by men was suppressed in the first edition to conceal the imitation of Milton's *dim eclipse* —the dun circle of the darkened moon."†

Now let it be observed that Macpherson's words are not here fully given. They are as follows: "They stretch their shields like the darkened moon, *the daughter of the starry skies,* when she moves a dun circle through heaven, and dreadful change is expected by men." The words in italics, as well as the beginning of the sentence, are omitted by Laing; and it is to be regretted that throughout he acts as the special pleader without even the

* Milton's Paradise Lost, I. 596. † Laing's Ossian, vol. i. p. 75, 76.

semblance of the impartiality of a judge. I do not see that there is any conclusive proof of plagiarism on the part of Macpherson when the two passages are laid fairly side by side. But I submit the following as the true rendering of Ossian :—

"On high was seen the mighty shield of heroes
Like moon when darkening in frown,
Haughty sister of the stars of heaven,
As she travels duskily from east,
Foreboding evil change to minds of men."
—*Fingal*, Duan II. l. 321-25.

And I confidently ask if there be any such similarity between the two passages as to imply plagiarism ?

With the second instance I shall deal more briefly :—

*Laing.*—"'On the rising side of Cromla stood Erin's few sad sons like a grove through which the flame has rushed, &c. Distant, withered, dark they stand, &c., as restored in the edition of 1773.'*

"'Yet faithful how they stood,
Their glory withered ; as when heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks, or mountain pines,
With singed tops their stately growth, though bare,
Stands on the blasted heath.'"†

*Macpherson.*—"Now on the rising side of Cromla stood Erin's few sad sons, like a grove through which the flame had rushed, *hurried on by the winds of the stormy night;* distant, withered, dark they stand, *with not a leaf to shake in the gale.*" (The passage is garbled by Laing as usual.)

Literal translation—

"On the side of Cromla of high peaks,
Mournful, far away, the sons of Erin stood
Like a great forest burned to stems,
In night-wind rising on the cairn,
Far apart (and) scorched (and) brown,
Without a leaf to sound on high."
—*Fingal*, Duan II. l. 330-35.

These are the two most conclusive instances selected by the Edinburgh Reviewer, who goes on to say : "Nay, by the spirit of some of Mr Laing's extreme cases, we should think it very possible to convict Chaucer of pilfering from Homer, or Hafiz of

* Laing's Ossian, vol. i. p. 76. † Milton's Paradise Lost, I. 611.

imitating Horace and Tibullus. It is easy to vary description, but sentiment and passion must always be uniform." Mr Laing carries his criticisms to a truly ludicrous degree of minuteness, and I will not follow him further; but if any one wishes to see his objections completely answered, let him consult 'An Essay on the Authenticity of Ossian,'* by the Rev. Dr Graham, minister of Aberfoyle, a work of scholarship, of a calm dignified character, written in a remarkably concise and clear style, showing the author to be quite worthy of the learned brotherhood of Drs Macpherson, Sleat; Smith, Campbelton; Stewart, Dingwall; and others whose writings shed lustre on the Church in the Highlands at that period. I am convinced that any one who truly understands the language of Ossian will, instead of regarding him as a borrower from other men, acknowledge him as among the most original, the most directly in contact with nature, of all poets.

A *priori* objection from the barbarism of the Caledonians.

But though the charge of plagiarism must be withdrawn, there is a deep-seated conviction in the minds of many that the condition of the ancient Caledonians was so barbarous as to render the growth of such poetry as the Ossianic among them a matter of absolute impossibility; and, as far as I have observed, it is this foregone conclusion which prevents the majority of readers from duly weighing the actual evidence in favour of the antiquity of Ossian. I must therefore deal with the point at some length.

There are few terms standing more in need of accurate definition than "civilisation" and "barbarism," or which, from the days of the Greeks downwards, have been more misleading. And there are many witnesses whose testimony must be taken before the Caledonians in the first centuries of the Christian era can be condemned as absolutely barbarous.

Answers:—
1. Sculptured stones.
2. Vitrified forts.

1. "The sculptured stones of Scotland" have their tale yet to tell.

2. The "vitrified forts" bespeak some measure of knowledge in the builders. They are often formed of stone which was conveyed from a considerable distance when that at hand was not fusible, and are placed in situations showing military skill of the highest order. Dr M'Culloch, who often sneers at Highlanders and at Ossian, when writing of these forts, says: "If the Duke

* Edinburgh, 1807.

of Wellington chose to occupy Noath to-morrow, he would order his works on the same principles. . . . If the same great soldier were to fortify this hill (Berigonium, Dùn Mac Sniochain, or Uisneachain), he could only follow the plan of his predecessor General M'Sniochain, whoever he was." *

The "vitrified forts" in various instances bear names which connect them with Ossianic heroes and heroines—and these would tell much could their speech be understood,† while the many inland "strengths" and duns belonging to the pre-Christian period speak of considerable skill and power on the part of their builders.

3. Wilson, neither a Celt nor a Philo-Celt, clearly shows in his Prehistoric Annals that the Caledonians had made great progress in metallurgy during Pagan times, evincing both ingenuity and taste in the manufacture of bronze and gold ornaments —a fact abundantly vouched by the many specimens preserved in our museums.

3. Caledonians skilled in decorative art.

4. The influence of the Druids and bards ought also to be taken into account in forming our estimate of the extent of knowledge possessed by a people among whom they occupied a publicly-recognised and most honourable position. "We have the most weighty and explicit testimony—Strabo's, Cæsar's, and Lucan's—that this race (the Druids) once possessed a special, profound, spiritual discipline—that they were, to use Mr Nash's words, 'wiser than their neighbours.'" ‡ And we may add that they also possessed a high degree of intellectual and moral culture. §

4. Influence of the Druids.

5. Or let us take the witness of Tacitus on the subject. I pass by what he says in his Life of Agricola of the armour and the bravery of the "civitates," and the union, "sanctioned by religion," among the Caledonians. But let us look at the speech, full of patriotic and enlightened spirit, which he puts into the mouth of their commander Galgacus before the battle of the

5. Testimony of Tacitus.

* M'Culloch's Letters from the Highlands, vol. i. p. 293. (London, 1824.)

† Skene's Introduction to the Dean's Book, p. 81.

‡ Study of Celtic Literature, by Professor Arnold, p. 50.

§ It is disheartening to find writers of Scottish history even in the present day continuing to repeat the assertion, resting only on ignorance—that the Druids never had a place in Scotland. The ancient language of the country, its topography and traditions, afford the amplest proofs that the Druids exercised the highest authority there, and were reverenced as possessing supernatural power. I have adverted to this subject in note 8 to Fingal, Duan II.

Mons Grampius. It is scarcely needful to say that I do not for a moment believe Galgacus to have uttered those sententious sayings which have passed into proverbs among all civilised nations — "Atque omne ignotum pro magnifico est," "Solitudinem faciunt, pacem adpellant," &c. But I do believe that so very able a historian as Tacitus, writing in presence of thousands of educated Romans who were well acquainted with the state of Britain, would not make a chief, known to be a savage, utter enlightened and generous sentiments. His doing so is as improbable as that able historians of our age, Lord Macaulay, or Mr Froude, would make a Santhal chief lecture on political economy, or the King of Dahomey discourse on the advantages of constitutional government. The speech of Galgacus must, from the high character of Tacitus, be in keeping with what was believed to be the Caledonian character.

Brave resistance to the Romans.

6. Or let us look at the brave, persevering, and often successful resistance which these men offered for a lengthened period to the mighty power of Rome. From A.D. 81, when Agricola's forts were erected in the line between the Forth and the Clyde, until 370, when Theodosius really subdued the province of Valentia—the central district of Scotland—the space between the two walls —was a debateable land lost and won repeatedly by either party. And when in less than half a century after the conquest by Theodosius the Roman power was withdrawn, the Caledonians not merely retook this oft-disputed territory, but speedily pushed on across the wall of Hadrian, wringing from the despairing Britons the helpless cry to their old masters, "The barbarians drive us to the sea, and the sea back to the barbarians." The Caledonians may be called barbarians or savages; but it is undeniable that for full three centuries they quitted themselves like brave, patriotic, and resolute men.

The springing up of heroic poetry among such a people highly probable.

Surely it is not an improbable thing that heroic poetry should spring up among a people thus engaged. The improbability, in fact, is all the other way; for it seems that at a certain stage in the history of every people this description of poetry bursts forth naturally, and as if of necessity. The Eddas of the North, the Servian poetry, the Spanish Ballads of the Cid, the Niebelungen of the Germans, not to speak of the unrivalled productions of the Grecian muse, or of the Epics of the East, bear

witness to the uniformity of what appears to be a law of social and national development.

And we can see in the circumstances of the Caledonians at the time what may naturally account for the mournful tone of the Ossianic strains. The great Celtic family, of which they formed a branch, had at one time occupied most of the area of Western Europe, and had frequently driven back those who encroached upon them. One of their kings, "a Brennus, conquered Rome B.C. 390. Another Brennus threatened Delphi B.C. 280." They were, however, subdued in Italy. Gaul had become a Roman province. After many fierce and bloody struggles, the whole south of Britain also was compelled to yield to the mighty power of Rome. The last remnant, the "nobilissimi totius Britanniæ," as Galgacus calls them, fought resolutely amid the fastnesses of the mountains of the North against the insatiate aggressor; and if the national heart were at all to express itself in song, we might expect it to be in lofty but in wailing strains, mourning over the greatness and the glory of which the nation had been bereft. As to the tone of refinement to be seen in these poems, which is very remarkable, it is probably due to the superior learning of the Druids and the bards, already referred to; and we know from modern Gaelic poetry that, wherever the writers got their ideal of the character of rulers and chiefs, it was a very exalted one. They attribute qualities to them such as no chief in the North or the South has ever yet exhibited in real life:* further, there is still in the ordinary conversation of old Highlanders a degree of refinement and delicacy such as is not to be met with, I believe, among any other peasantry in the world.†

We thus see that the condition of the ancient Caledonians, as far as it is known, offers no serious obstacle to our receiving the Ossianic poetry as theirs; and that the question cannot be disposed of by mere *a priori* reasoning. There are few subjects on which it is safe to trust to this kind of argument, experience daily confounding the most plausible theories. No one would predict the production of the glorious Homeric poetry by a blind

* I have adverted to this fact in a memoir of Col. Cameron of Fassiefern. Murray, Glasgow, 1859.

† *Vide* Introduction to Mr Campbell's 'Tales of the West Highlands,' and 'Reminiscences of a Highland Parish,' by the Rev. Dr Macleod.

Ionian minstrel, or of noble and tender lyrics by an Ayrshire ploughman, or of the most surpassing poetry which the world has ever heard by a Warwickshire deer-stealer. Yet Homer and Burns and Shakespeare are realities. And I now wish particularly to present to the reader as a fact more remarkable than the production and preservation of the Ossianic poetry by the Caledonians the production and preservation of the "Kalewala," the great epic poem of the Finns. Professor Max Müller, whose authority will be acknowledged by all, speaking of this race, of whom only about a million and a-half remain in Finland, Olometz, and Archangel, says: "Their literature, and above all their popular poetry, bear witness to a high intellectual development in times which we may call mythical. . . . The epic songs still live among the poorest, *recorded by oral tradition alone*, and preserving all the features of a perfect metre, and of a more ancient language. . . . From the mouths of the aged, an epic poem has been collected equalling the 'Iliad' in length and completeness—nay, if we can forget for a moment all that we in our youth learned to call beautiful, not less beautiful. A Finn is not a Greek, and Wainamainen was not a Homer. But if the poet may take his colours from that nature by which he is surrounded, if he may depict the men with whom he lives, 'Kalewala' possesses merits not dissimilar from those of the 'Iliad,' and will claim its place as the fifth national epic of the world, side by side with the Ionian songs, with the 'Mahábhárata,' the 'Shanámah,' and the 'Niebelungen.'"* Now, if we are to admit that the Finns could produce such a poem as this, equal in length and in beauty to the 'Iliad,' and preserve it by tradition alone from mythical times to the present, it is very unreasonable to say that the Caledonians could not produce and preserve such poems as those of Ossian.

"Kalewala," the epic poem of the Finns.

Having thus answered the two main arguments against the authenticity of the Ossianic poems, I must now advert to various assertions against them made from time to time—assertions which, though unsupported by any evidence, have obtained currency with the public.

Allegation that the poems were composed in English by Macpherson.

I. It is said that these poems are Macpherson's own composition, written first in English and subsequently translated into Gaelic.

* Science of Language, first series, p. 330.

Answers.

(*a*) This theory charges with deliberate falsehood, in many instances with perjury, those respectable men whose testimony I have already quoted, for they declare most pointedly that they assisted Macpherson, before the publication of his English, in translating Gaelic MSS., which it is most certain he had. And I shall, in a subsequent section, show that a considerable portion of these poems was known before his day.

(*b*) Macpherson was not familiar with Gaelic. This is stated in the High. Soc. Rep., p. 29, and considering that he left the Highlands when young, and was busily occupied with public affairs in England and elsewhere, it was scarcely possible that he could be so. There are several Gaelic passages which confessedly he misunderstands, and these not the most obscure. He fails glaringly in the "sea-pieces," sometimes making the most graphic and stirring descriptions almost meaningless in his translation. I think it will be admitted that if he could not translate these passages accurately, he certainly could not have composed them.

(*c*) His poetical compositions in English are of a very inferior description, verbose and turgid. How can it be believed that while he writes thus in the language which he knew best, he would rise to true sublimity and pathos in the language which he knew least?

(*d*) Though it may sound paradoxical, yet I will say, that while the high excellences of these poems place them far above Macpherson's reach of talent, their obvious blemishes and defects place them just as far below the extent of his cleverness. There are obvious imitations of "Fingal" in "Temora." There are passages here and there utterly inconsistent with Ossian's manner. There are lines so very obscure and ill-arranged, that it is difficult to make any meaning out of them; and there are various blanks in the middle of lines here and there, all of which I point out in my notes. Macpherson was far too clever to fall into such blunders as these. But if we suppose him, with his imperfect knowledge of Gaelic, to have taken what he got from ignorant transcribers or reciters just as they gave it, these blemishes are easily accounted for, and similar to what we meet with in other ancient poems.

That he constructed them from old ballads.

II. It is said that he constructed his work out of the Ossianic ballads which are so numerous in the Highlands. But the history of the Homeridæ, and of other imitators of great poets, leads to the presumption that the authors of the Gaelic ballads were also imitators; and if any man take the trouble of comparing them with Macpherson's Ossian, he will not be long in doubt as to which is the original and which the copy, which the text and which the oft-disjointed and dreary commentary. They are frequently verbose amplifications of the concise and pointed narratives of Ossian. Sometimes they form sequels to the history given by him, in not a few instances as little like nature as Thackeray's sequels (in 'Punch') to Sir Walter Scott's novels. In many cases they are diluted and tedious, in not a few extravagantly absurd, while at times they plainly show their modern origin by allusions to the Christian religion. If any man fashioned Macpherson's Ossian out of these materials, he showed more mental power than if he had described from simple nature.

Macpherson's own statement.

III. It is hardly necessary to advert to what is called Macpherson's own direct claims to the authorship of these poems. He appears to me to have been judged harshly in regard to this, as well as in various other instances. In his correspondence, and in all the early editions of his work, he uniformly represents himself as the translator. In the preface to the last edition, published in 1773, he speaks of himself once as the "author," three times as the "translator." It is natural, then, to believe that he spoke of himself as the author of the translation, not of the original poetry. But however this may be, it is certain that no one who looks at the history of the original collection, or at the testimony of Captain Morison, Mr Gallie, and Strathmashie, who helped him in translating his MSS., would give the slightest heed to a claim of authorship by him, whether said or sworn. It is as certain as anything of the kind can be that he was the translator, and only the translator.

Authorship ascribed to Mr Macpherson, Strathmashie.

IV. But they who are determined to assign a modern origin to these poems maintain that, though James Macpherson did not produce them, his namesake Mr Macpherson at Strathmashie, a well-known poet, did it for him. Fortunately, there is as much known

of Strathmashie's poetry as is quite enough to dispose of this theory. He composed five or six songs which have been printed in various collections. They show familiarity with vernacular Gaelic, and considerable facility in rhyming, but no high poetic powers. They are, with one exception—an elegy to the brave Cluny of the '45—of a homely, humorous, satirical cast, and I regret to say in many instances coarse to indecency. They are in every respect entirely opposite to the pure and lofty strains of the "Voice of Cona;" and it would be as easy to believe that the author of 'Hudibras' wrote 'Paradise Lost,' or that "Peter Pindar" wrote the 'Idylls of the King,' as that Strathmashie wrote Ossian.*

Answer.

The only man of that period (1760-80) who could with any show of reason be supposed capable of producing Ossianic poetry is Alexander M'Donald, referred to in the opening of my Dissertation. But whatever his poetic powers may have been, we know that he never came into contact with Macpherson or the publishers of Ossian.

I will venture on one assertion before closing this part of the subject. Whether these poems were composed by Macpherson or M'Fingal (as Mr M'Gregor, in his translation, often designates Ossian), one thing is beyond all doubt or dispute to any rational man who understands both the Gaelic and the English languages —that is, that the Gaelic is the original, and the English the translation. There is a living freshness, a richness, a minuteness of colouring and detail in the similes of the Gaelic, of which not a trace is to be found in the indefinite, hazy generalities of Macpherson's translation, and which could not by any law of thought be learned from it. It would be as possible to construct Homer from Pope's translation as Ossian from Macpherson's.

Gaelic is certainly the original language of the poems.

There are points connected with this controversy on which it is still injudicious to speak with absolute confidence. But on

* A story has got into circulation about a MS. copy of the seventh book of "Temora" having been some time seen by somebody in Badenoch written out by Strathmashie, with several interlineations and corrections. Supposing this to have been the case, it is entirely according to Strathmashie's own public statement of his having copied out for his friend the greater part of the poetry which he published, and decides nothing as to authorship or antiquity. I must further say that I have been in the habit of visiting Badenoch for the last twenty years, and have made frequent inquiries on this subject, very minute inquiries recently, but never could get hold either of the MS. or of any one who had heard of it.

this particular point of the Gaelic being the original, I feel such thorough conviction as constrains me to speak emphatically. And I must be allowed to enter a protest against the utter unreasonableness of any one who does not understand Gaelic pronouncing a verdict on this question. What would be thought of a critic dogmatising on the genuineness and merits of the Homeric poems who knew them only through Pope's translation, and did not understand a syllable of Greek! Yet Pope's translation is truer to Homer than Macpherson's is to Ossian.

The transmission of the poems.

V. As to the difficulty of transmitting these poems from age to age, the institution of the bards is quite sufficient to meet it; and what Professor M. Müller says of the great Epic of the Finns more than meets it—shows us what is much more remarkable.

Objected that "cars" could not be used in the Highlands of old.

VI. One other objection I must notice. The mention of "car-borne heroes" and of horses in such a mountainous country as Caledonia, has been often laughed at as proving incontestably the poems to be a forgery; and Wordsworth, in his Essay on Poetry, is particularly severe on this point, saying that "Morven, if one may judge from its appearance at the distance of a few miles, contains scarcely an acre of ground sufficiently accommodating for a sledge to be trailed along its surface." With the ignorance which unfortunately characterises so many of the opponents of these poems—ignorance not to be wondered at when they never come nearer the subject than "a few miles' distance"—he mistakes the parish of Morven for the wide country of "the great mountains," and mentions, as a proof of modern origin, what is in reality an unanswerable argument in favour of the great antiquity of the poems of Ossian. For, Tacitus speaks expressly of many war-chariots being used by the Caledonians in resisting the Romans; but, for several centuries previous to the eighteenth, cars or carriages of any kind were almost unknown in the Highlands, and the brave fellows who in 1689 made such havoc at "Killiecrankie" were terrified at the sight of war-horses. If we give due weight to these facts, we must admit that the frequent mention of chariots and "snorting steeds" would never enter the imagina-

Answer.

tion of a modern forger of Gaelic poems—that this fact by itself undeniably carries Ossian back for many centuries.

Having now attempted, and I hope with success, to clear the ground for the examination of the Ossianic poems as we actually have them, I go on to prove that various portions of them are undeniably older than the days of Macpherson, and were widely known throughout the Highlands.

The 'Fragments,' containing from 700 to 800 lines, are now generally allowed to be genuine—*vide* Mr Skene's Introduction to the Dean's Book, p. 48,—and any one who takes the trouble of examining the circumstances in which they were produced, will find it impossible to adopt any other conclusion. But the Highland Society's Report carries us much further than the 'Fragments.' The Rev. Dr Macpherson of Sleat, a man of the highest character, writes to Dr Blair, 27th November 1763, that he had gathered around him all the persons who were able to rehearse from memory any parts of the poetry published by Mr Macpherson, that he compared with great care the pieces rehearsed by them with Mr Macpherson's translation, and that those pieces are as follows:—

Portions of Macpherson's poetry were collected by others in the Highlands.

Testimony of Rev. Dr Macpherson of Sleat.

1. The Description of Cuchullin's Chariot.—Fingal, Book I. p. 11.
2. The Episode of Fainne-Soluis.—Fingal, Book III. p. 45.
3. The Actions of Ossian at the lake of Lego, and his Courtship of Evir-alin.—Fingal, Book IV., p. 50.
4. Fingal's Combat with the King of Lochlin, p. 62.
5. The Battle of Lora, p. 111.
6. Darthula, p. 155.
7. The Combat between Oscar and Ullin, in the Fragments.
8. The Lamentation of the Spouse of Dargo, sung by thousands in the isles.*

Of Rev. A. M'Neill.

The Rev. Angus M'Neill, Hovemore, South Uist, in the same manner verifies the terms of peace proposed by Morla, in Swaran's name, to Cuchullin—Fingal, Book II. p. 6.,—likewise Fingal's orders for raising his standards, his orders to his chiefs before the battle, the chiefs' resolutions thereupon of fighting, each of them, a Lochlin chief, contained in p. 57, 58, of Fingal, Book IV.; the single combat between Fingal and Swaran, which perfectly agreed with the translation—Fingal, Book V. p. 62;

* High. Soc. Rep., App., p. 11, 12.

also Ossian's Courtship of Evir-alin, Book IV. p. 49-51; and the whole poem of Darthula.*

Of Rev. N. Macleod.

The Rev. Niel Macleod, minister of Ross, Mull, 22d January 1764, says: "From my own memory I can assure you that Morla's proposal to Cuchullin, Fingal, Book II. p. 26, with Cuchullin's answer and Morla's reply, is a just translation. So is the whole Episode of Borbar and Fainne-Soluis, Fingal, Book III. p. 45, 46, and Fingal, Book IV. p. 57, 58, from 'We reared the sunbeam,' and to 'Now like a hundred different winds.' I can still repeat some of these in the original. . . . All these and many more I heard in the island of Skye, when I was a little boy, from an old man, who used to repeat them to me for some tobacco. . . . This man died when I was but young, and I could never since meet with any person that could repeat so many of the poems of Ossian, and so perfectly."†

Of Rev. Mr Macaulay.

Mr Macaulay, military chaplain, Edinburgh, 25th January 1764, encloses a letter from Lieutenant Duncan M'Nicol of the 88th Regiment, living at Soccoch, in Glenorchy, in which he says: "I have found out as follows—Fingal, Book III. p. 45, 'Oscar, I was young like thee when lovely Fainne-Soluis' (Eviralin), &c., to the end of the third book. Fingal, Book IV. p. 50, 'Eight were the heroes of Ossian,' &c., mostly word for word, to p. 58, or the end of the fourth book. The story of Orla, in the beginning of the fifth book, to p. 71, 'Then Gaul and Ossian sat on the green banks of Lubar;' 'The battle of Lora,' mostly; 'Darthula,' p. 155, pretty well to the end of p. 171; 'Temora,' much the same, p. 172 to the end of p. 190; 'Carric-thura,' p. 207, 'Who can reach the source of thy race, O Connal!' &c., till you come to the passage that begins thus, 'Dire was the clang of their steel.'"‡

Of Rev. D. Macleod.

The Rev. Donald Macleod, minister of Glenelg, 26th March 1764, says, as I have quoted in one of my notes, that it was in his house Mr Macpherson got the description of Cuchullin's horses and car, "from Allan M'Caskle, schoolmaster, and Rory Macleod." He adds, "I have heard the poem in Book III., relating Fingal's voyage to Lochlin, the snares laid for him by Starno, death of Agandecca, &c. &c., when, p. 38, 'he eyed his valiant chiefs—his valiant chiefs took arms.'"§

* High. Soc. Rep., App., p. 18–20.
† Ibid., p. 21, 22.
‡ Ibid., p. 23.
§ Ibid., p. 28 32.

The testimony of these men, who were perfectly capable of judging what they pronounced on, and all of high character, proves incontestably that various portions of what was published by Macpherson in English was known in Gaelic by many people dwelling wide apart—in Skye, Mull, and Glenorchy. But we have still further evidence to the same effect. Gillies's Collection of Gaelic poems, which I very frequently refer to in my notes, was published at Perth in the year 1786. At p. 29, 30, we have "Malvina's Dream," and part of Ossian's answer to her (fifty-seven lines), which Macpherson gives in the beginning of "Croma."* There are slight verbal differences between the two versions, but they are to all intents and purposes the same poem.

Gillies's Collection, 1786.

At p. 34, 35, we have Fingal's words to Oscar quite the same in substance with what Macpherson gives in Fingal, Duan III. l. 426–446; but Gillies's is decidedly superior in strength and expressiveness.

Further, the last of the minor poems given by Macpherson is "Calhon and Cuhona," consisting of 197 lines. We have this poem in a Gaelic Collection by A. and D. Stewart, published in 1804. It contains some lines which are not in Macpherson's, omits others, gives much better readings in two or three instances, and consists of 185 lines.

Stewart's.

We have another version in the Irvine MS.,† consisting of 183 lines, in many instances badly written, but substantially the same with the other two.

Irvine MS.

In the same MS. there is a copy of the Address to the Sun, at the end of "Carhon," another in Stewart's Collection, and another in the Appendix to High. Soc. Rep., which the Rev. Mr M'Diarmid, minister of Weem, got from an old man in Glen Lyon, Perthshire, in the year 1765. This copy by Mr M'Diarmid may be the original

Rev. Mr M'Diarmid.

* The same poem is again given without any explanation at p. 210, 211, and bearing the barbarous title of "Mhaline's Brughdar le Ossain."

† This MS., which I often mention in my notes, is a collection made from 1796 to 1802, by the Rev. Mr Irvine of Rannoch, subsequently Dr Irvine of Dunkeld, taken principally from the recitation of the family of M'Donald of Dalchosnie, who got the poems from their ancestors, the M'Donalds of Keppoch in Lochaber. Many of these are the merest fragments, many very little worth recording, but occasionally there are lines which have the genuine ring of antiquity—couplets given by Macpherson, embedded in a great deal of what is commonplace and coarse. Its authenticity, however, is beyond all question.

of Irvine's and Stewart's. Mr Laing tries hard to show that the only copy of it known was got from Macpherson's papers; but this can be believed only on the supposition that Mr M'Diarmid, an aged and respected clergyman, deliberately and gratuitously asserted what he knew to be false. His letter of April 9, 1801, is clear and precise.* The brief Address to the Sun in "Carric-thura" has the same unquestionable evidence in its favour, as appears from the letter referred to, and from the Collections of Irvine and Stewart.

Now, let it be observed that Macpherson's Gaelic was not published until the year 1807, that the men who repeated these poems in Inverness-shire, in Argyleshire, and in Perthshire, some as early as 1763, and all before 1806, could not by possibility have had any access to it, and it will be seen that we have various pieces, amounting in all to about 900 lines (if we include the 'Fragments,' to 1700 lines), of Macpherson's poetry clearly proved to be known among Highlanders independently of him and his companions. This fact acquires much additional weight when we observe that among the pieces thus verified are some of the minor poems, the Gaelic of which Macpherson never published.

It is also of great importance to observe that among these pieces there are many of the very gems of the Ossianic poetry. The Sun Hymns, Malvina's Dream, &c., are among the finest of Ossian's compositions. Two things are thus undeniable—viz., that the power of producing poetry of the highest order must be conceded to the Caledonians before the days of Macpherson; and that there are several portions of the Gaelic Ossian which are unquestionably genuine.

Reasons why more was not collected.

It has been asked, however, when so much has been collected by oral recitation, why could not the whole of Ossian be so collected? To this question there are various answers.

1. It was never alleged that Macpherson collected his poems from oral recitation alone. What I have so often adverted to must be here remembered—that he got many MSS. When these were lost, all trace of their contents may have disappeared. We know that even printed books have perished. Professor O'Curry proves that several Irish MSS. have been lost within the last 200 years. "In Germany the 'Lay of the Niebelungs' had been long

* High. Soc. Rep., p. 71, 72.

utterly forgotten, when, in the eighteenth century, it was for the first time printed from a MS. in the old library of a noble family. Eighty years ago England possessed only one tattered copy of 'Childe Waters and Sir Cauline.' Spain only one tattered copy of the noble poem of the 'Cid.' The snuff of a candle or a mischievous dog might in a moment have deprived the world for ever of any of these fine compositions." *

2. It should be considered that Macpherson's Ossian is far more elevated in sentiment and compressed in diction—thus more difficult to remember—than are those ballads of which so many are still preserved in the Highlands. I doubt not that if the noble works of Milton were by any evil chance destroyed, it would be impossible to recover them among the peasantry of Britain, while many inferior poems are engraven on the memory of thousands. Ossian is very Miltonic in many respects.

3. The Ossianic poetry was not recited or sung as a whole, but in detached portions, as were the various parts of the 'Iliad.'

4. It should also be remembered that the Highland Society committed a grave mistake in the manner of recovering these ancient poems. They contented themselves with addressing letters of inquiry to special persons here and there. Had they sent forth young and active searchers like Macpherson, who would make themselves at home with the common people, and who had something of the marvellous talent of Mr J. F. Campbell for drawing out their stores of tales and traditions, a very different harvest would have been gathered. And while Dr Blair made his inquiry in good time, the Society allowed about forty years to elapse before completing theirs—forty years not of mere change, but of complete revolution in the circumstances of the Highlands.

Other collections of ancient Gaelic poetry.

I must now direct attention to other collections of Gaelic poems, which are not few. And while these do not directly prove the genuineness of Macpherson's Ossian, they throw great light on the state of poetry among the ancient Celts. They are necessary to be known in order to form a fair judgment on the question before us. I have first, however, to mention a very interesting statement regarding the Douay MS. as it is called, which unfortunately is not now in existence, but the history of which is too remarkable to be passed over in any discussion of the Ossianic poems.

The Douay MS.

* Lord Macaulay's Preface to 'Lays of Ancient Rome,' p. 11, ed. 1866.

The full account of this MS. is to be found in Sir John Sinclair's Dissertation, prefixed to the Society's edition of Ossian, 1807, p. 40-58. I give the substance of it briefly. Dr Cameron, Roman Catholic Bishop of Edinburgh, along with four Roman Catholic clergymen, all Highlanders, who had, however, been educated in foreign colleges, certify the following facts:—

The Rev. John Farquharson, of the family of Inverey, Balmoral, latterly Prefect of Studies in the colleges of Douay and Dinant, was in his younger days missionary in Strathglass, Inverness-shire. Urged by Mrs Fraser of Culbockie, an enthusiastic admirer and collector of old Gaelic poetry, he also began to collect before 1745, and filled a volume of folio size, about three inches thick. He took this volume abroad with him, and all these gentlemen repeatedly saw it in his possession from the year 1763 to 1777. In 1766 Macpherson's translation was sent to him at Douay. They saw and heard him often comparing it with his Gaelic originals; saw him comparing the poems of "*Fingal*" and "*Temora*," as well as others. He said that he had all which Macpherson had translated, and several other poems quite equal to them in merit. He complained of the inferiority of the translation throughout. Mr Farquharson returned to Scotland in 1773, and left the MS. at Douay. Mr M'Gilvray, one of the declarants, saw it there in 1777 much tattered and torn, tossed about by the students, who knew nothing of its value, and who tore leaves off it to kindle their fires. Bishop Cameron thinks that shortly after this period, when all the papers of the College were carried off by the revolutionary government of France, it must have been destroyed.

It appears from the same correspondence that Mr Farquharson made a second collection in Braemar, which, with equal thoughtlessness, he left there and lost; also, that Captain Simon Fraser, on accompanying his regiment to the American war, carried with him the collection made by Mrs Fraser of Culbockie, his mother, that he died in prison there, and that the collection was lost; once more, it is declared that the Rev. Peter Macdonald, chaplain to Lord Macdonald, had, after the Restoration, made a collection of Gaelic poetry, of which, however, nothing further is known.

I am quite aware that some deduction must be made from all this, as being in a certain sense testimony at second hand. But

after making every reasonable deduction, the testimony must be allowed to have great weight in deciding the authenticity of Ossian. For it cannot be supposed that five intelligent and respectable gentlemen, should, without any apparent object, all conspire to tell deliberate falsehoods. The letters of Mr M'Gilvray especially are so minute and circumstantial as necessarily to convey the conviction of truthfulness, and great carefulness of statement.

Dean of Lismore's book.

I. The oldest of the collections actually preserved is that commonly known as the Book of the Dean of Lismore. It was written between the years 1512 and 1526 by Sir James M'Gregor, Dean of Lismore and Vicar of Fortingal. The MS. is in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. An account of it is given in the High. Soc. Rep. and Appendix by Dr Donald Smith, who printed and translated three of the poems contained in it. Ewen M'Lachlan of Aberdeen made two transcripts of it, which have not been published. But the merit of making it accessible to every Celtic scholar belongs to the Rev. Dr M'Lauchlan of Edinburgh, who, in 1862, published by far the greater part of the original text, transferred into modern Gaelic on the opposite page, accompanied by an English translation, and by many valuable notes. "It is hardly possible to convey to the reader an adequate conception of the labour of the task undertaken by Mr (Dr) M'Lauchlan, or of the courage, perseverance, and ability with which it has been overcome." * The book, enriched by an able Introduction from the pen of Mr Skene, now forms a necessary and a valuable portion of the library of every student of Celtic.

The Dean's MS. is a literary commonplace-book, or miscellany, consisting of 311 pages of the most varied contents, ascribed to no fewer than forty-seven different authors, among whom are an Earl of Argyle, Countess Isabella Campbell, Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, and other persons of rank, while many pieces are anonymous. The great bulk of it consists of poetry either in Irish or Scottish Gaelic, embracing the heroic, religious, humorous, and satirical styles. There are some pieces in Latin, some in Scotch, and there are various genealogical and historical abstracts.

Of the poems, nine are ascribed to Ossian, and several to con-

* Mr Skene's Introduction, p. 12.

temporaries, or immediate successors. They are very inferior to the Collections of Macpherson and of Smith, and cannot for a moment be referred to the same authorship. But several of them are possessed of considerable poetic merit, among which may be mentioned "The Evening Complaint;" "The Death of Oscar," bearing considerable resemblance to what is found in Kennedy's Collection, and in other versions of the same story, but widely differing from Macpherson's account in the first book of "Temora;" "Sliabh nam Ban Fionn" ("The Hill of Fair Women"), well known throughout the Highlands; "Dyre Borb," very like Macpherson's "Maid of Craca," Miss Brooke's, Dr Smith's, and Kennedy's versions; "The Death of Fraoch," closely resembling what was published two hundred years later by Jerome Stone; the poem attributed to Conal Cearnach, published by Mr Campbell in his 'West Highland Tales,' and widely known as "Laoidh nan Ceann," or the "Lay of the Heads;" and the "Character of Fingal," very well written, but portions of which are found in other collections describing the character of Gaul, the son of Morni.

The orthography of the Dean's Book is unfortunately purely phonetic, and I would say, with deference to others better acquainted than I am with old writings, by no means regular or systematic. I see the same characters bearing different values in the same line; but I content myself with giving the verdict of Ewen M'Lachlan on the subject, who says: "Our language, exhibited in the uncouth garb of Anglo-monkish orthography, is so disfigured and caricatured, that hardly a vestige of its grammar or philosophy can be traced."

But whatever may be the value of the collection in a linguistic point of view, it is interesting and important as throwing clear light on some of the questions raised in the Ossianic controversy.

1. It effectually disposes, as already observed, of the ignorant assertion that there is no Gaelic writing one hundred years old.

2. It shows that more than three hundred years ago Ossian was held to be the "king of song," and Fingal "the hero of heroes."

3. It shows that several of the events mentioned by Macpherson were the subject of popular poetry at that period.

4. In the close similarity of several ballads collected by Stone,

Kennedy, and others, to the versions in the Dean's Book, very remarkable proof of the fidelity of tradition for a period of more than two centuries is afforded; and,

5. It shows, though very inferior to other collections which I shall notice, that Gaelic poetry was carefully cultivated in the Highlands three centuries and a half back.

It would be unfair, however, to end my notice of the Dean's Book without mentioning what it is not pleasant to dwell on, that it is disfigured by several compositions which are gross to utter indecency, and by satires on women both coarse and bitter; and if the collection be a fair index of the style of composition popular in his day, it shows a woeful falling off in the Celtic mind from the days when the purity and dignity of Ossian commanded universal admiration.*

Jerome Stone's MS.

II. The MS. Collection of Jerome Stone comes next in order of time, having been written from 1750 to 1756. It contains ten long Ossianic ballads very similar to those found in other collections, and which, as I advert to them in my notes, I will not dwell on here further than saying that they are highly interesting as an independent collection made in the centre of Perthshire by a man to whom they could have had no attraction but their intrinsic merit, he being not a Celt, but a Saxon.

Rev. Dr Smith's 'Sean Dàna.'

III. The most important by far, however, of all the collections of Gaelic poetry which have yet been made known, excepting Macpherson's, is that by the Rev. Dr Smith, minister of Campbelton, a man well known for high scholarship and for Christian character. Following the example of Macpherson, he first published an English translation in measured prose, 1780; but fortunately he, some time thereafter, 1787, published his Gaelic originals under

* Modern Gaelic poetry is, I believe, fully freer from immoral taint than English poetry; but there are, I regret to say, several compositions in print which are disgraceful to any people. M'Donald's volume in 1751 contains pieces which no language is sufficiently strong to condemn. "Rob Donn," edited by a clergyman, is full of very disgusting coarseness; Allan M'Dougall has some songs deserving of the severest reprobation; and a recent edition of the very beautiful songs of W. Ross is utterly disfigured by one or two pieces of the lowest character. The stainless purity of Ossian is a very conclusive proof that he belonged to a different era from Macpherson's or the Dean of Lismore's.

the title of 'Sean Dàna,' 'Ancient Lays,' in an 8vo volume of 348 pages. My limits forbid any minute examination of these poems; but I will venture to say, that he who studies them carefully, and examines their history impartially, will not consider the genuineness of Macpherson's Ossian impossible or improbable. They profess to be the work "of Ossian, Orran, Ullin, &c., collected in the Western Highlands and Isles, by John Smith, D.D.," &c. The names of the persons from whom they were collected are given. The manner in which they were corrected by selections of the best passages from various editions, and joined together by a few lines where a gap occurred, is freely told, and various readings are given at the foot of the page.

This frank statement by Dr Smith has been laid hold of in order to prove that the poems are in no sense genuine, but are to be treated as mainly his own composition. Let any one, however, look at the editing of Percy's Reliques, and say if this be a reasonable conclusion; or I would rest the case on Sir Walter Scott's Introduction to the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,' and even on what he says of the one celebrated ballad of "Otterburn, or Chevy Chase" (Edinburgh, 1861). He gives various readings widely different—nay, he tells that by copies got from the recitation of old persons residing at the head of Ettrick Forest, the first edition had been much improved. If Dr Smith's 'Ancient Lays' are to be rejected, so must Percy's Reliques, and the Minstrelsy also, not to speak of the 'Iliad,' which contains many passages that are pronounced by the warmest admirers of Homer to be interpolations.

The 'Ancient Lays' refer entirely to Ossianic heroes, and are far more finished in form than Macpherson's Ossian, showing the work of a master of Gaelic who wrought leisurely and skilfully at the materials before him. I do not notice even one line that is harsh or unintelligible, whereas there are scores of such in Macpherson. Further, in point of picturesqueness of description and true pathos, they are equal to the very finest portions of Macpherson's; but they are, notwithstanding, very different in many respects, wanting in the rugged abruptness and in the gloomy grandeur which characterise the Macpherson Collection. They are as Claude Lorraine's paintings to Michael Angelo's. They well deserve a better English translation, and will richly repay the most careful examination.

Clark's Caledonian bards.

IV. Very similar to the 'Lays' is a beautiful poem called "Mordubh," a translation of which, with several others, was published in 1780 by Mr John Clark, land-surveyor in Badenoch, an early companion of Macpherson, and a very judicious writer on the Ossianic controversy. A portion of this poem was published by Gillies in 1786; and of its antiquity there can be little doubt.

Kennedy MS.

V. The only other collection deserving of any lengthened notice is the Kennedy MS., now in the Advocates' Library. He was a schoolmaster at Kilmelford in Argyleshire, and collected his poems during various journeys through Morven, Sunard, and Lochaber from 1774 to 1783; and he gives the names of the persons from whom he obtained them. He lent his MS. to Dr Smith, who made considerable use of it, and thereafter he sold it to the Highland Society. It contains thirty poems of very unequal merit; but some of them are of a high order.

Argument for the genuineness of these poems from their excellence, and the prosaic character of the collectors.

Now, let it be observed that, whatever be thought of the authorship of these poems, they are entirely independent of Macpherson. He had nothing whatever to do with them. Supposing, then, that his Collection were entirely given up, the difficulties found in believing that poetry of a very high order, refined in feeling, exquisite in description, was produced by the old Caledonians, present themselves over and over again. The main question of interest to him who studies the development of mind among the various races, and the varied circumstances of mankind, does not approach a solution by the condemnation of Macpherson. The high poetic power of the Caledonians remains in a great degree untouched by any judgment which may be pronounced on him. And further, suppose we adopt even Pinkerton's low estimate of Celtic veracity, and consider all the witnesses in this case as unblushing liars and forgers, we land in a still greater difficulty. None of these collectors gave any evidence of poetic power; not Jerome Stone, assuredly, who had only begun the study of Gaelic, and whose English poems are very stiff and tame. Dr Smith made some very judicious improvements on an older edition of the Gaelic Metrical Psalms, but I am not aware that he ever attempted original poetic composition; and his English translation of the 'Ancient Lays' will form a permanent proof of his utter

want of poetic taste. John Clark was a plain practical man, making no pretensions to literary attainment; and Kennedy gives under his own hand and seal, in Arguments, Notes, &c., abundant evidence that he was ignorant of composition, whether in poetry or prose. How is it, then, to be explained that these men of prosaic minds should all, as soon as they attempt to forge ancient Gaelic poetry, become suddenly gifted with "the vision and the faculty divine"? The supposition is irrational and absurd, and the common method of disposing of the difficulties connected with the ancient poetry of the Caledonians leads to infinitely greater difficulties.

Did my space permit, I might enumerate various other collections, which show a gradually deteriorating series of imitators of Ossian down to a comparatively recent period, when a modern school arose—weak and tame in comparison with that of the "king of music and of song," but yet natural, and therefore interesting.

Modern Gaelic poetry.

Of this modern Gaelic poetry—what has been composed within the last two hundred and fifty years, from Mary Macleod and John Lom downwards, and published in various editions—I must content myself with saying in one word that there is a quantity of it which I suspect our English neighbours are not in the least aware of. I can name at least sixty authors who have "sacrificed to the muses" during that period, and whose writings amount to fully sixty thousand lines. The quality of all this miscellaneous poetry varies greatly, but much of it shows true poetic feeling, and descriptive powers of no mean order. The late Mr Patison of Islay has, in his 'Gaelic Bards' (Glasgow, 1866), very happily translated several of these into English; and an examination of his work would help to remove much of the misconception that still exists regarding Gaelic song, ancient and modern. The truth is, that Macpherson's Collection forms but a small portion of the mass of Gaelic poetry which has been written down by several others as well as by him, and of which, while a great deal has been lost, a considerable quantity has been preserved. It is of consequence to keep before us the fact that the bardic spirit has always manifested itself, and does still manifest itself, strongly among the Caledonians as among other branches of the Celts.

I have thus endeavoured to answer the objections which have

been generally brought against the authenticity of the Ossianic poems, and pointed to a greater amount of external evidence in their favour than has hitherto been done, as far as I am aware. I come now to the internal evidence, the ground on which the question must be finally decided.

Internal evidence from the nature of the poetry.

There is one branch of this evidence which a person, though ignorant of the poet's language, may to a great extent judge of by means of a faithful translation—that is, the very primitive, simple, original character of the poetry. We have nature pure and primitive dealt with by man in a very primitive state, and treated in a manner without example elsewhere, as far as I know. There is no allusion to agriculture or commerce, to arts or sciences, to laws or ordinances. There is not the remotest reference to Christianity, or to any of the great moral and social changes which it brings in its train. There is no abstraction or generalisation of ideas. Objects are dealt with individually as they present themselves at the first glance. And least of all is there a trace of that subjective, self-reflecting, moral picturing of the outer world—of that use of the "pathetic fallacy," as Mr Ruskin calls it—which we find in the poetry produced by the high culture of modern days. The mind is, in a sense, passive in the act of perception, and the poetry reflects the face of nature with the unimpassioned fidelity of a mirror. I have sometimes seen Ben Nevis on a day of calm brightness reflected from head to foot in the waters of Loch Iel. I have seen every rock and ravine—nay, every tuft of fern and of heather — clearly mirrored at such moments in its depths. There is of course a vast variety of life, vegetable and animal, stirring in the loch, yet not a fin of fish, or leaf of sea-tangle, mingles with the picture of the mountain. It is reflected with perfect faithfulness, without any change, even as from a sea of smooth, cold glass. And thus does Ossian give back the face of nature simply and purely as it impresses itself on his eye, without a trace of self once colouring the image; but he depicts the image so vividly and clearly as to show the true poetic vision. Many of his descriptions are unsurpassed, if not unequalled, by any other poet, ancient or modern.

It may perhaps be possible for a man who has been trained under the power of Christianity, of classical learning, and of the endlessly-diversified influences which unconsciously mould

us to what we are in modern days, to divest himself of the effects of all these—to travel back on his journey of life, stripping himself of every fold of being which gathered round him as he advanced—to step beyond the sway of every acquired mental habit and association, and occupy ground entirely new and strange. This may perhaps be possible; but it will not be credible until stronger evidence of the accomplishment of such a marvellous feat be afforded than any which the world has yet beheld. And therefore I hold the improbability of modern or medieval authorship for Ossian's poems to be incalculably greater than that of an ancient one.

From the language.

But there is a second branch of internal evidence on which a translation throws no light, which can be judged of only by a Gaelic scholar—and that is the language in which the poems are written. That language is in its vocables confessedly the language of modern times. There are a few obsolete words, such as *os* for "deer," *sionaidh* for "master," *iuthaidh* for "arrow," &c., but they do not amount to one in three hundred. They are scarcely worth taking into account. It is at once pronounced impossible that this should be at the same time ancient—a language fourteen or fifteen centuries old. The impossibility is not so certain when we look to facts in regard to other languages. The Norse language, as Professor Müller testifies, remained unchanged for seven centuries. The Greek has undergone no vital change for two thousand years. The Highlands have been so isolated as to give every chance of permanency to their ancient tongue, and we see that to this day Scottish Gaelic is far freer of foreign admixture than its cognate tongues in Wales and Ireland. The public and frequent recitation of ancient tales and poems by the bardic order helped greatly to preserve the language from any violent change; and we have some documents showing that the change has not been great for the last four hundred years.

In the second part of the National MSS. of Scotland, so very ably edited by Cosmo Innes, Esq., No. 59 consists of a charter of certain lands in Islay, granted by Macdonald, Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, to Brian Vicar Mackay, the only charter in the Gaelic language which is known to exist. It is dated May 1408, and is written in Gaelic, which any intelligent Highlander will

readily understand. In fact, it contains only one word that has become obsolete.

Again, there is a song frequently printed called the Battle-Song of the Macdonalds on the day of Harlaw, 1411. It probably is a century later, and is entirely destitute of poetic merit, being a long alliterative composition, more tiresome and less talented than the once well-known "Pugna Porcorum per Publium Porcium, poetam;" but it is decidedly modern in its terms. What is still more remarkable is that, "in the older life of St Kentigern, written prior to 1164, it is said that Servanus at Culross, when he heard of Kentigern's birth, exclaimed, '*A dia cur fir sin*, quod sonat Latine, O utinam sic esset.' In modern Scotch Gaelic the phrase would be, 'A Dhia gur fior sin,'"* (probably "*A Dhia cuir fior sin*," or "*cuir sin fior*,"—"God make that true. Be it so!")

These scraps are similar to the Gaelic of Ossian, the Gaelic now in use; and scanty as they are, they show, as far as they go, that Gaelic has undergone little change for several hundred years back. At the same time there are other and more numerous documents which, on the other hand, seem to show the changes within the same period to have been very great. The Dean of Lismore's Book, on account of its very peculiar phonography, can scarcely be quoted as a competent witness on the question. But the 'Book of Deer,' in the twelfth century, and several of the MSS. in the Advocates' Library, are widely different from any modern Gaelic.

I am not aware that this subject has been thoroughly examined yet, but I have no doubt the solution will be found in the fact, pointed out by Mr Skene and others, that a monkish and a bardic Gaelic ran side by side—that in the one case we have the "vernacular" of the people, in the other the learned dialect written by scholars. In our comparative ignorance of the matter, then, I found nothing on the mere vocables of Ossian. It is possible that they are as old as the tenth century, and even much older. In the absence of other writings of those ages, this cannot be proved. But the structure and arrangement—the syntax of the poems—I believe to be most certainly ancient. It is undeniably very different from what we find in any modern Gaelic. Having frequently pointed out instances of this difference in my notes, I

* Mr Skene's Introduction to the Dean's Book, p. 45.

will not enlarge on it here, but merely observe that there is a remarkable absence of secondary or subsidiary words, of pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions; that generally, instead of an adjective qualifying a noun, we have two nouns in regimen; that the same word is used in an extraordinary variety of different meanings—homonymy, as linguists call it;* and that there is an almost utter disregard of inflections, whether of nouns or of verbs, as there is also of the present order of syntax. I am quite aware that at a certain early period in the history of language, before "phonetic decay" has made many ravages on it, inflections are much more abundant than at a later stage, when the friction of long-continued use has worn down all its distinctive marks. But there is a period older than this still, "when language knows no inflections;"† and the language of Ossian seems to me clearly to belong to such a period as this.‡

The seventh Duan of "Temora" appears to have been copied from some ancient MS.

Unfortunately nothing can be deduced from the spelling of these poems, as they were modernised before being published, and we have not even Macpherson's own transcript of them. The only specimens of his Gaelic which, as far as I know, remain to us are the seventh book of "Temora," which he published at the end of his Collection in 1763, and a portion of "Carric-thura," given in High. Soc. Rep. The orthography of the seventh book of "Temora" is different from any other Gaelic which I have met with; and there are two peculiarities belonging to it which I would briefly point out:—

1. There is a "destitutio tenuium"—the hard consonants *c, p, t,* are used where the soft ones *g, b, d,* are now written; and let it be remembered that this use of the hard instead of the soft

* My attempts to explain this variety in regard to such words as *cĕl, tuar,* and many more, compel me to such repetition in my sidenotes as must be wearisome to the reader.

† Professor M. Müller's Science of Languages, second series, p. 84-87.

‡ It has been objected to Ossian that he frequently places the adjective before the substantive, in entire opposition to modern Gaelic usage. *Lòn-bhroilleach òigh,* &c., has been called bad Gaelic. I notice, however, in the few Gaelic entries of the 'Book of Deer,' written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, that this disposition of noun and adjective frequently occurs. The modern *maor-mòr* is uniformly written *mòr-maor.* At the same time I am sorry to observe that the remarkable looseness which is still a reproach to Gaelic orthography dates as far back as the days of the clerics of Deer, who, in the same sentence, use two or three spellings of the same word.

consonants is the test which Zeuss has applied to determine the age of Celtic writings.

2. There is a very troublesome rule laid down by Irish grammarians as to the harmony of vowels, enjoining that if the last vowel in a syllable be broad, the first vowel in the next syllable must be so also, and *vice versa*. Professor M. Müller states that the same rule is followed in Turkish, and in some other languages of the Turanian family; but it seems to be unknown in any Aryan language except the Gaelic, as it is wholly unknown in Semitic. The writers of Scottish Gaelic have frequently protested against it; but all modern Gaelic observes it, nevertheless. Now this rule is disregarded in the seventh Duan of "Temora," while it is followed in other writings of the same period, and in the specimen of "Carric-thura" by Macpherson. Strathmashie gets the credit of writing this book, and is frequently used as the "deus ex machina"—the good fairy to solve difficulties by those who adopt a theory of compromise in regard to the authorship, a theory very characteristic of the spirit of the present day. Here, however, apart altogether from his own distinct testimony, we have full proof that he cannot stand sponsor. In Gillies's Collection we have some of his songs, and as Gillies knew nothing of Gaelic, we must conclude that they were printed from the author's own writing. Their orthography corresponds in all things with that of the period, and is widely different from "Temora."

Macpherson says, in a prefatory note, that he altered the orthography in many instances; but the striking peculiarities of this Duan afford at the least a presumption of its having been transcribed from an old writing; and it certainly deserves a more searching examination than has yet been bestowed on it.

There are various other points of considerable interest connected with these poems which, for want of space, I must touch on very briefly:—

Are the poems historical?

1. Are they historical? I believe they are historical in the sense of truly depicting the manners of the times in which they were written, but that the reality of the special battles which they describe, whether with Caracul or with Swaran, cannot be proved.

Many persons, according to the tendency of the age, make them myths—astronomical fables; and it does not require a very

They may be mythical, but are probably historical.

vivid imagination to give some colour to this theory. The great hero Fingal may be "white-white"—*i.e.*, "dazzling." He is, according to the tales, a son of the "Clann Baoisgne," "the children of brightness;" his sword, which never sought a second stroke, is the son of Luno, or of "shining;" his great standard, irresistible when "she spread her wing on the wind," was *Deò-grèine*, or "sunbeam;" his wife was *Ros-gréine*, *Roscrana*, or *Grainè*, also signifying "sunbeam," or the "eyelid of the sun." According to the tales, she eloped with *Diarmad*,* in whose name we have at least "light and atmosphere," whatever more, possibly "the god of the court of the sky"(?) This Diarmad is wounded and deprived of his paramour for a time by a grim giant called *Ciuthach*, or *Citheach*, very like *Ceathach*, the common name for "mist." Diarmad at last destroys him, but is himself, through the contrivance of Fingal, slain by a venomous boar—"on Ben Gulbin," or "the pointed hill," "the Ben of peaks;" and etymology would find it no hard task to connect several other Ossianic names with the sky. All this looks astronomical and mythical. And Professor M. Müller says that "the story of Helen is a dawn myth;" † while elsewhere he says, "the siege of Troy has no historic basis."‡ It is certain that the 'Æneid' has no historic basis; and it appears to me that the real value of the Ossianic poems is very slightly affected by either view as to their historical character.

Evidence of Mr Skene;

But a statement will be found in Mr Skene's 'Essay on the Highlanders,' vol. i. p. 206-216, which is of very great importance in deciding this question. The sum is as follows: The account given of the Irish kings in Ossian is diametrically opposed to that given by the Irish historians, who quoted from the monkish chroniclers of the fourteenth century. But the Annals of Tighernac, first published in 1825, agree entirely with Ossian. These Annals, written in the eleventh century,

* The following account of the perseverance and ingenuity of this lady in carrying off Dermid is given in some of the tales: He had repeatedly rejected her proposals for an elopement, and at last declared that he would not accompany her on foot, or on horseback, indoors or out, by night or by day; when lo and behold! on the following morning, mounted on a foal, and standing midway in his door, she called to him just at the dawn of day, and told him that here she was, neither on foot nor on horseback, neither indoors nor out, neither in night nor in day. Overcome by this appeal he yielded—to his final undoing.

† Science of Language, second series, p. 472. ‡ Ibid., p. 399.

were absolutely unknown in Macpherson's days. He could not possibly have had access to them. It follows, then, that the historic portion of Ossian is older than the fourteenth century, and is based on truth. He adds, in a note (p. 213), a striking confirmation by the celebrated antiquary Finn Magnussen, who proves that the religion of the Lochlanners, as described by Ossian, is a correct picture of the ancient religion of the Scandinavians, and that the real nature of that religion could not have been known to Macpherson, being unknown to modern scholars at the time.

I do not see how such testimony as this can be set aside; and I will add that a native of the Highlands, to whom almost every mountain and glen repeat Ossianic names and speak of Ossianic hero-deeds, to whom Ossianic maxims and proverbs are familiar as household words from his earliest youth, finds it hard, if not impossible, to believe in the mythical theory. He must believe that "Fingal fought" at some time, as well as that "Ossian sang." I am quite aware that our early Scottish annals or histories are not to be relied on for accuracy of statement, but it is worth observing that Barbour (1375) mentions both Fingal and Gaul the son of Morni; and, not to speak of Boece, Bishop Leslie (1578) places Fingal, the son of Cuhal, in the fifth century,—which shows that the belief in the existence and antiquity of these heroes prevailed among the Saxon inhabitants of Scotland as well as among the Celts.

Evidence from topography.

The prevalence of Ossianic names throughout the topography of the Highlands should enable us clearly to identify the localities; and I submit the following statement by Dr Smith on this subject: "There is an astonishing correspondence between some of these poems and scenes which they are found to describe, but which were too distant and too obscure for the translator ever to see or hear of, and concerning which there is not even a tradition, so far as ever I could learn; so that Mr Macpherson must have found them in MS., otherwise they had never appeared. I mention one instance chosen purposely from the part least known in Gaelic of the whole collection. It is one of the songs of Selma. The names of Daura and Erath, there spoken of, are so uncommon that I am confident we may defy anybody to produce any instance of their being heard in name, surname,

or tradition; yet in an obscure and almost inaccessible part of Argyleshire, which it is certain the translator of Ossian never saw, and which, from his own silence—the silence of tradition upon that story—and the distance and obscurity of the place, it is equally certain he never heard of,—in this place can be traced out the very scene, and the very uncommon names of that episode which, of all the collection, is perhaps the least known to a Gaelic antiquary. The island to which the traitor Erath beguiled Daura still retains his name of *Innis-Eraith*, 'the island of Erath.' The ferry and farm contiguous to it derive from him also their name; and about a mile distant from it is another farm consisting of an extensive heath, bounded by a large mountain-stream, and still retaining from that unfortunate lady the name of *Dura'inn*, the 'stream of Daura;' and what further confirms that this is the scene described by Ossian is, that several places within sight of it are denominated from Connal and others of his heroes whose names are better known. As nobody can suppose that the translator of Ossian could thus stumble by chance on names the least common, and places the least known, so as to make so many circumstances exactly correspond with his poems without his ever knowing it, we must certainly allow this a most confounding proof of their authenticity."*

The places here mentioned are situated in the parish of Dalavich, on Loch Awe, in Argyleshire; and it is interesting to find that the outline of the sad story of Daura is still to be heard from old people in the locality; but I have been unable to recover any part of the poem among them.

Further, I consider it highly probable that the modern "Connal," "raging flood," near Oban, represents Ossian's *Lora*, or *Laoire*, "rapid stream," for we still have *Beinn-Laoire* in the immediate neighbourhood; and it is certain that "hero-deeds," in memory of which the "mossy stone" was raised, were done in this district of country at some remote period.

Dun Mac Uisneachain (or Sniochain) is said to be the ancient Selma, and is only two miles from Lora. A little to the north of it, towards the old castle of Barcaldine, are two farms called *Achacharra* and *Cùil-charran*, names which bear witness to the *cairns* which once stood there, and some of which have been

* Smith's Dissertation on Authenticity of Ossian, p. 97, 98, footnote.

barbarously removed within a few years back. There is also *Tom Oisein*, or Ossian's hill. But there is much more to be seen on the southern side. In the moss of *Achnacrithe*, at the foot of Ben Laoire, are several *cromlecs*, pillars, and circles, which fortunately have attracted the notice of the Antiquarian Society of Edinburgh; and some few miles further south still, at the head of Loch Nell, there is a large pillar known as "Dermid's stone," while the neighbouring farm is called *Toir an Tuirc*, "the Boar's hill," on which is a spring known as *Tobar nam bas toll*, "the spring of the leaky palms,"* referring to the cause of the hero's death.

Again, if we follow Loch Etive to the north, a few miles above Connal or Lora, we find *Ru-nan-càrn*, "the point of cairns;" and far up the wilds of Glen Etive, on the farms of Ardmaddy and Inverliver, are several circles and memorial stones. At the very end of the loch is a hill called *Grianan Dheard'uil*, "Darthula's sunny spot." In the loch is the island of Usnoth, and near its shore the wood of Nathos his son.

It is also deserving of remark that Selma is the first to the south of these remarkable strongholds known as "vitrified forts," which, while to be found in various places in Scotland, extend north in a continuous line through the great Glen of Alba to the Moray Firth. I speak of several of the above localities from familiar personal knowledge; and it is possible that more careful research would enable us to recognise other Ossianic scenes; but I cannot venture to pronounce with confidence on any other specific places.

The general features of the Ossianic scenery are, however, very clearly defined. And as certainly as the Homeric poems mark an Ionian sky and a "many-flashing sea," or Shakespeare's writings English fields and deer-parks, Ossian's poems mark the north-west Highlands as the place which gave them birth. The

* The common account of the immediate cause of Dermid's death is that Fingal refused to give him a drink out of his magic healing-cup. But the version localised in the neighbourhood of this spring bears that a drink of pure water from any source would suffice to heal him. His companions pretended to fetch this for him, but either jealous of his great fame, or afraid of offending Fingal, they allowed the water to escape between their fingers, whence the name of the well. And there is still another version of the story, saying that the women of the party, with all of whom Dermid was a favourite, ran to the well to succour him, but in their haste and agitation spilled the water, and thus he died of thirst.

serrated mountain-peaks so frequently shrouded in mist which assumes all conceivable and inconceivable forms; the narrow stormy firth, with its raging, roaring currents; the generally lonely, sombre, and stern aspect of nature, varied here and there, however, by spots of greenest verdure and brightest beauty in the hidden corrie or remote glenlet, have all a local colouring which is felt to be true by every one who compares the description with the reality.

Ossianic measure.

It may be proper, for the sake of completeness to my Dissertation, to state what has already been frequently stated regarding the measure of the Ossianic verse, that generally it consists of octosyllabic quatrains; but both measure and rhythm are very frequently disregarded.

I have now endeavoured to clear the ground for a fairer and fuller discussion of the authenticity of these remarkable poems than it has ever yet received. I have striven to show that there is no such *prima facie* evidence against them as to throw them out of court without a hearing—that they are entitled to an impartial examination, and ought to be considered far more apart from Macpherson's conduct and character than they have been—that many of them are entirely independent of him—that they must be looked at in connection with a great mass of other Gaelic poetry, as also in the light of Scottish history — above all, that they must be judged of in their native dress, not in a foreign disguise, and that the internal evidence in their favour deserves consideration which has never been bestowed on it. If they be treated thus, I believe they will be found, as to proofs of genuineness, to stand on the same ground with many other ancient poems. I admit freely that no demonstration can be given of the existence of Fingal or Ossian—no certain proof that the poems were composed in the third, or fourth, or fifth century. Further, while there is a striking resemblance between the general style of the whole, some appear to be older than others. "Calhon and Colvala," "Conloch and Cuhona," as well as "Carhon," appear to me to have more of hoar antiquity about them than any of the rest. There is a good deal in the cast of "Covala" which bespeaks a different authorship from the others. There are, as I have already pointed out, imitations of "Fingal" in "Temora," which, I think, clearly show a later hand

making up the second of these poems; while, at the same time, it is, on the whole, as thoroughly Ossianic, and as rich in poetic beauty, as any in the whole collection. There are repetitions of the same descriptions, occasional lines which I have no doubt are spurious, and which I have marked as such. But do we not find every one of these difficulties, and many more, besetting the 'Iliad' and other old poems?

Parallel between the difficulties surrounding the authenticity of these poems and other ancient poems.

Let us for a moment look at some of these. Lycurgus is said to have brought the Homeric ballads from Ionia three hundred years after the death of Homer. Who vouched or countersigned his MS.? Pisistratus is generally said to have "arranged" them, "disposuisse" according to Cicero—and widely-different significations have been attached to this word—many maintaining that he constructed them anew, even as Macpherson is said to have done with the Ossianic ballads. But while Cicero attributes this work to Pisistratus, Diogenes Laertius gives the credit of it to Solon, Plato to Hipparchus. In short, old Homer had several "Strathmashies" to bring him to his present shape. Again, Zenodotus, and particularly Aristarchus, revised the poems, rejecting what they considered spurious; and the Alexandrian grammarians seem to have given them a further polishing. Who can tell what additions and subtractions have been made by all these hands? Taking the text as we have it, however, the warmest defenders of Homer admit that it contains many interpolations. Professor Blackie applies the bracket freely, and even Mr Gladstone says that in the eleventh book alone there are 150 lines absolutely irrelevant. There are various discrepancies pointed out; and a glaring contradiction, far surpassing any blemish in Ossian, is to be seen between Book V. (v. 576), where Pylaemenes is out and out killed by Menelaus, and Book XIII. (v. 658), where this slain warrior appears in life and vigour; and a literal repetition of lines in Book IV. (v. 446) is to be found in Book VIII. (v. 601). These facts are admitted by the strongest advocates of the authenticity of the 'Iliad.' Wolff, Lachmann, and a host of other learned men, scout the idea of its authenticity as strongly as Laing did that of "Fingal." But notwithstanding all this, the Homeric poems were received by the Greeks, are received by the general public in every civilised country, as the genuine utterance of the ancient Grecian muse,

The 'Iliad.'

and will be received in all time to come, notwithstanding the gainsaying of the very critical and very learned.* Let the same broad common-sense view which pronounces this opinion in the face of many difficulties and objections be taken of the Ossianic poems, and they also will be received as truly "the voice of Cona,"—the genuine utterance of the ancient Celtic muse.

The 'Edda.'

Or let us look at the 'Edda.' It is said to have been composed in the sixth, carried to Iceland in the ninth, written down in the eleventh century. The prose portions of the old 'Edda' may be of more modern origin. "They betray in many instances the hand of a Christian writer. . . . How do we know, for instance, that Sœmund (1056-1133) collected the old, Snorro Sturleson the young, 'Edda'? How do we know that the MSS. which we now possess have a right to the title of 'Edda'? All this rests, as far as we know, on the authority of Bishop Brynjulf Swendsen, who discovered the 'Codex Regius' in 1643, and wrote on the copy of it with his own hand the title of 'Edda Sœmundar hinns froda.' None of the MSS. of the second or prose 'Edda' bear that title in any well-authenticated form; still less is it known whether Snorro composed either part or the whole of it." † Elsewhere he says,—"The 'Edda' is not well authenticated, but depends on internal evidence."

Surely there is as good a case for Ossian as for the 'Edda.'

The 'Niebelungen Lied.'

Or let us look at the 'Niebelungen Lied.' Professor M. Müller traces it back to the 'Edda,' and, still further, to Grecian and Persian myths, about the unceasing contest between darkness and light, winter and summer. ‡ But taking it in the historical view generally given of it, it is said to refer to events of the fifth century, to have been written down in the end of the twelfth, and entirely forgotten, when a MS. of it was accidentally discovered in the library of a German noble in the eighteenth century (*vide* p. xxix.) There is no attestation or countersigning of that MS. — nothing of the lawyer-like proof demanded of Ossian. Yet the 'Niebelungen Lied' is justly received as an ancient poem, and a very noble one.

* I am indebted for most of the facts here stated regarding the 'Iliad' to the very able Homeric Dissertations of Professor Blackie.

† Professor M. Müller, Chips, &c., vol. ii. p. 196, 197. ‡ Ibid., 109-114.

The Welsh poems.

I will not speak of the Eastern Vedas, concerning the age and purity of which there are still such wide diversities of opinion. But let us look at what is nearer home—the works of Taliessin and other Welsh bards. There is no ancient MS. of these to be found more than of the others. But whoever reads Mr Skene's able Introduction to the 'Four Ancient Books of Wales,' will be very unreasonable if he admit not that these were, as Welshmen maintain, composed about the sixth century, and written down in the twelfth.

Miss Brooke's 'Reliques of Irish Poetry.'

Or, once more, let us examine Miss Brooke's ballads in her 'Reliques of Irish Poetry.' These were published in 1788, long after Macpherson had published Ossian. Her English translation is very poetical, yet far more paraphrastic than even Macpherson's. But what I point attention to is, that her Irish originals were printed from the writing of Mr O'Haloran, who had no ancient MSS. to show, and who was never asked to show them. The ballads were received as genuine, and I have no doubt they are so; but they are so received without any of the evidence demanded of Macpherson.

Probable period of the composition of the Ossianic poems.

No one can tell the precise period in which any of these poems was composed. No one can tell what changes rhapsodists, skalds, and bards may have wrought on them. So of Ossian nothing precise concerning him can be proved in a court of law; but the whole character of his poetry declares it to belong to pre-Christian times—that is, in Caledonia before the end of the sixth century; while any historical reference which we have in our Scottish annals to the period of Fingal confirms this view But we have some further evidence to guide us back to times which, if not quite so far away, are at least very remote from ours.

Mr Skene, quoted p. xlii, shows that the historic portion of these poems is older than the fourteenth century; and I think we may safely venture to assign to them a still older date. It is an undoubted fact that Malcolm Canmore, in the eleventh century, banished the Gaelic language from his court. It is altogether improbable that poems claiming to be national should be composed in a language placed under royal ban. Further, and what is still more conclusive, we find in the same century the names of regularly-constituted offices appearing in the Celtic kingdom of Scotland—*Maormor*, *Toiseach*, and *Tighern*. No mention of

such occurs in Ossian; and had it been written at this, or at any subsequent period, it is impossible to believe that it would omit all reference to the highest dignities in the land. Still further, Scotland was united into one monarchy by Kenneth MacAlpin in the ninth century; but Fingal does not appear to have possessed any civil power, or to have exercised any general authority over the state. He is presented to us as a leader armed with supreme authority in times of great exigency, and then only. In ordinary circumstances the tribes seem to have been subject each to its own chief. The description of Fingal's position corresponds exactly to that assigned by Tacitus to Galgacus; and it could not have found a place in national poetry composed after a permanent sovereign had acquired the sway of the whole kingdom.

This reason appears to demand the carrying of these poems back to the ninth century, and sanctions, if it do not absolutely demand, their being referred to a still earlier period—that of the sixth century — before the light of Christianity shone on the islands of the West. In the eleventh century, as we have seen, they were banished from the high places of the land; but they continued to live in the hut, and in the shieling, and in the corrie. The common people, as in other similar instances, cherished the old heroic songs. It is certain that at least a portion of them was committed to writing long ago, while other portions were so engraved on the memories of many as to be independent of writing. Macpherson got much from MSS. and much from oral recitation. It is most probable that he has given the minor poems exactly as he found them. He may have made considerable changes on the larger ones in giving them their present form, although I do not believe that he, or any of his assistants, added much, even in the way of connecting-links between the various episodes; for, any attentive reader will see that these are generally introduced with an abruptness which is startling and confusing, rendering it very difficult to see a connection between them and the context. Macpherson, in his translation, gives such a cast to them as to make them fit in some degree into the place which they occupy. But in the Gaelic, it is often difficult to perceive any special fitness for that particular place.

It is to be remembered, at the same time, that the remarkable story of the Douay MS. leads to the supposition that some Gaelic

Pisistratus had anticipated Macpherson in the work of arrangement. But we may readily believe that he arranged and connected various ballads in the larger poems, yet ask acknowledgment for them as genuine remains of Celtic poetry on grounds in all respects similar to those on which the claims of the 'Iliad' and 'Edda' rest; and I would again refer to the "Kalewala," the epic of the Finns, preserved by oral tradition alone for a much longer period than is claimed even by Macpherson, as meeting every rational objection ever brought against Ossian.

I do not wish to overstate the evidence in favour of Ossian; and I am quite aware that, in the present state of our knowledge, the question is far from being ripe for a final decision. The internal evidence to be derived from the language in which the poems are written must be examined much more carefully than it has been before we arrive at this stage.* But the following conclusions appear to me to be fairly deducible from the evidence now before us:—

Summary of conclusions arrived at.

I. It is certain, and according to the unanimous verdict of Celtic scholars, that the Gaelic is the original language of these poems.

II. It is also certain that considerable portions of them, and those the very gems of the Ossianic poetry, were known in the Highlands to many who had no communication with Macpherson. —*Vide* p. xxv, xxvi.

III. It is equally certain that Macpherson got many Gaelic MSS. older than his day; that he openly employed others to assist him in translating them; that, under public advertisement, his MSS. lay for twelve months in the shop of his publishers, Messrs Beckett & De Hondt, Strand, London, and with an offer of publication, on condition of subscribers coming forward.

IV. There is nothing to prove that he gave other than the con-

* The few who seek a knowledge of Celtic are deeply indebted to the Germans, who carefully study this as they do all other languages. Zeuss's 'Grammatica Celtica,' so wonderful for its patient research, is a very storehouse of knowledge, though unfortunately shedding no direct light on the language of Ossian, as it does not treat Scottish Gaelic apart from Irish. Dr August Ebrard, of Erlangen, has this year written a grammar and vocabulary specially to illustrate Ossian. In Scotland, on the other hand, any one attempting to bring Gaelic writing to such order as is established among other civilised languages, meets with much unreasonable and unreasoning opposition.

tents of these MSS. The account of the Douay MS. renders it probable that he found even the longest of the poems arranged in the order in which he has given them; while at the same time it is possible that he may have done much in arranging and connecting their detached portions.

V. The era of Ossian cannot now be ascertained with any approach to minute accuracy, nor can the strictly historical character of the poems be proved. But there is as much external evidence in favour of their antiquity and genuineness as there is in favour of the 'Iliad,' the 'Edda,' or those other old poems which I have mentioned; and the reasoning which would strike the name of the Bard of Selma from the roll of venerable national minstrels, would also blot out the names of the authors of all those other grand old national songs; while the internal evidence is decisive in favour of the very great antiquity of the Ossianic poems.

Lastly, Everything connected with the subject proves to demonstration that, while Macpherson was the active, intelligent collector, and the very spirited translator, he was not the author of any of these poems—that the theory of his being the author is utterly absurd.

The alleged Irish origin of the poems.

I have purposely abstained from adverting to the claims frequently and strongly advanced by our Irish cousins to the exclusive authorship of Macpherson's Ossianic poems; for I hope that the time is not distant when the Scotch and Irish Gäel will rejoice in all old Celtic literary treasures as common family property. Nay, the time should be at hand when every inhabitant of Britain will acknowledge the ancient productions of the Celtic muse as part of the national stock; for unquestionably the Celts were occupants of Britain before Roman or Teuton set foot on it, and their blood mingles freely with that of the later settlers in the kingdom.

The claims of Ireland are discussed by Mr Skene with his usual ability in his Introduction to the Book of the Dean of Lismore, and very fully and fairly argued by Mr Campbell in the fourth volume of his 'West Highland Tales.' It is enough for me here to state that Macpherson never was in Ireland, nor got a MS. from it; that, while Ireland possesses a quantity of what is called Ossianic poetry, none of the poems given by Macpherson have

been found there. I have, both in my notes and in this Dissertation, referred at sufficient length to Miss Brooke's 'Reliques.' Several of the poems are similar to portions of Macpherson's Ossian, but in no instance are they identical with them. It is altogether unreasonable, then, to say that these poems, undoubtedly collected in Scotland, and never found in Ireland, belong to the latter country.

History of the Gaelic text of Ossian.

I now give briefly the history of the Gaelic text before us, of the Ossian which we have actually got, and of the principal English translations made from it.

The proposal of publishing the Gaelic by subscription having failed, Macpherson, as formerly mentioned (p. xi), withdrew from the controversy in sullen silence. After some time, however, his friends urged him to the publication. He pleaded the great expense as an insurmountable obstacle in the way; whereupon Sir J. Murray M'Gregor, and other Highland gentlemen, then in the East India Company's service, subscribed and sent to him £1000 for the purpose. He now alleged want of leisure for the task, and allowed year after year to pass without doing what he had promised. He did not, however, wholly neglect the work. He sent to John M'Kenzie, Esq., of the Temple, London, left as executor under his will, the Gaelic poems which we now possess, and left the £1000 for publishing them. These Gaelic poems were all written either in his own hand or in those of amanuenses employed by him. No one can tell how the MSS. which he had collected in the Highlands were disposed of; but it is the strange and the sad fact that not a leaf of them was left behind, or any explanation given of their fate.

Mr Mackenzie delayed the publication from day to day, and finally handed over the MSS. to the Highland Society of London, who showed a noble liberality in making the fullest inquiry regarding the poems, and in publishing them in a very handsome form. This was done in the year 1807, the Gaelic being accompanied by a Latin translation from the pen of Robert Macfarlan, Esq., A.M., and by various notes and dissertations—a particularly valuable one from the pen of Sir John Sinclair, Bart. of Ulbster.* The editing of the Gaelic was committed to the

* The Society published all the Gaelic poems left by Macpherson. Besides these, however, he published short poems bearing the following titles: "The War

Society's edition by Dr Ross,

Rev. Thomas Ross, subsequently well known as Dr Ross, minister of Lochbroom, the correcting of the press being intrusted to the Rev. Dr Stewart of Dingwall, both men of talent and scholarship. The Society ordered them to conform the orthography of the text to that of the Gaelic Scriptures, an unfortunate injunction in many ways—for it would be interesting, and might be instructive, to see the Gaelic which Macpherson himself wrote down; and the 1801 edition of the Gaelic Scriptures, the model proposed, is an extremely faulty one. Founded to some extent on Bishop Bedell's Irish version, it retains many phrases and spellings which never belonged to Scottish Gaelic. It conforms to a most vitiated phonetic style of writing, following colloquial pronunciation in running two words together, and dropping subsidiary words without giving any sign of elision. And throughout it is written with great looseness, different constructions of the same phrase being met with not only in the same page, but even in the same verse. Subsequent editions have been issued which have in some instances avoided some of these errors, but even that which obtained the sanction of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland retains hundreds of them. People speak of the Gaelic Scriptures being the standard for Gaelic writing; but if they ever have examined what they speak of, they must use the word standard in a very different meaning from that commonly understood by it—for there is in the authorised version a total want of the uniformity to be found in all languages whose orthography has become settled. There are many foreign idioms, and what probably is worst of all, the frequent use of those colloquial and unscholarly contractions which I adverted to above.

of Caros," "The War of Inisthona," "The Battle of Lora," "The Death of Cuthullin," "Darthula," "The Songs of Selma," "Lathmon," "Oithona," and "Berrathon," along with "Fingal"; "Cathlin of Clutha" and "Sulmalla of Lumon" along with "Temora,"—all bearing, like the others, to be translations from Gaelic. As these are not in the Society's edition, it does not fall within my province to discuss them, but I must observe that generally they are quite equal in beauty and in strength to the rest of the collection; and I think it right to call attention to the fact briefly stated at p. xxviii, that, as appears from the three immediately preceding pages, several of these minor poems were recited in Gaelic by various persons throughout the Highlands. But as Macpherson never published them in Gaelic, the proof of their genuineness is beyond contradiction. The extract from Dr Smith, p. xliii, xliv, appears to me as conclusive as anything of the kind can ever be.

Dr Ross did not obey the injunctions given him. He did better. Still there is a great deal of looseness in his edition. He is very careless in marking elisions, and he has introduced a few Ross-shire conversationalisms which do not find any general acceptance. Dr Ross's Gaelic, however, is all that we have of the original of Ossian; for, with the fatality which has attended all dealings with these poems, even Macpherson's Gaelic MS. has disappeared. It was at one time in the Advocates' Library, but every trace of it is meantime lost.

Mr E. Maclachlan's.

A second Gaelic edition was published in 1818 by Mr Ewen Maclachlan of Aberdeen, who makes considerable changes in phraseology, fills up the blanks left by Dr Ross, without any indication of doing one or the other, and also writes the whole in a very careless style. I wish to speak of Ewen Maclachlan with unfeigned respect as a Celtic and as a general classic scholar. He was a man of very rare attainments, yet it is undeniable that his Ossian is no standard of Gaelic writing; and his very eloquent preface is, as far as orthography is concerned, written with extreme slovenliness.

Rev. D M'Lauchlan's.

A third edition was published in 1861 under the editorship of the Rev. Dr M'Lauchlan, Edinburgh, who has in many respects improved the orthography; but he follows the text of his namesake of Aberdeen, and his scope did not lead him to give explanatory notes, which his extensive scholarship would have rendered so valuable.

The present edition.

I felt myself bound to follow the Society's text, and in so doing have written with much of that irregularity which I condemn in the writing of prose. I was obliged to do as I have done; for the attempt to bring Ossian's sentences under the rules of modern grammar would, in thousands of instances, thoroughly change their structure, and uniformity of spelling would often utterly destroy the rhythm which gives them so much beauty and impressiveness. I have, however, corrected hundreds of typographical errors. I have banished those modern softenings evidently introduced by Dr Ross, such as "na bhuail?" for "an do bhuail?" "dha 'n duine" for "do 'n duine," "roimhe" ("through") for "troimhe." I have written these as I find them in every grammar and dictionary, as well as in other writings. I have, in numerous marginal notes, pointed out words which I consider doubtful. I have indicated every blank which I have filled up, bracketed such lines

as I consider spurious, and have been at very great pains in separating words improperly run together, according to the unscholarly method of writing Gaelic which is so common. I have also marked elisions with an apostrophe. I have thus written the language so that a student can see what the words are, or have been; and have succeeded, I trust, in giving a better text of Ossian than has hitherto been given, though very much remains yet to be done in purifying and correcting it.

Translations: Mr Macfarlan's;

As to translations, a Latin one by Mr Macfarlan was published under the sanction of the Society in 1807. It deserves great praise for its laboriousness; but the author realises, more completely than any one I have ever met with, Horace's "fidus interpres," most conscientiously doing what the judicious critic forbade—giving the "verbum verbo" throughout. Thus it is of little help towards reaching the true meaning of the original, and the Latin is anything but classical or tasteful.

Macpherson's:

It is needless to speak of the many translations into foreign languages which have given Ossian so high a place among Continental nations; but of English translations Macpherson's justly holds the first place, and, with those ignorant of the original, will in all likelihood continue to hold that place, just as Pope's Homer continues to be the favourite with the general public, notwithstanding its unfaithfulness to the original. Macpherson is open to the same most serious objection. As a rule, he passes by obscure and difficult phrases; he frequently tones down the boldest images of his author; he unhesitatingly adds not merely epithets to round his periods, but sentences to bring out the meaning. At the same time he omits words and lines, and sometimes mistranslates very glaringly. Notwithstanding all this, as I have said at some length in Note 11 to "Fingal," Duan I., he deserves very high praise for giving so striking an outline of the leading features of a remarkably difficult author. He has done a signal service not only to Celtic but to general literature, and "has left his mark upon the mountain-side." I have thought it in every way proper to print his translation by the side of my own.

Mr M'Gregor's.

The only other complete translation which I have seen is by Mr M'Gregor, London, 1840. I cannot say that it is fitted to make Ossian better known; but the preliminary Dissertation to it is well worth perusal.

There is a translation of "Fingal" by Dr Ross, in many respects very good; yet, singularly enough, while very severe on Macpherson for his additions and omissions, he himself often drops important epithets without an attempt to give an equivalent.

Of Fingal, by Dr Ross;

I think passages of higher beauty than any in "Fingal" are to be found both in some of the minor poems and in "Temora;" but "Fingal" seems to have been the favourite poem with the public; consequently various translations of it have appeared from time to time—one, in very smooth-flowing rhymes, by the Rev. J. Wodrow, minister in Islay, 1771; another by Mr Ewen Cameron in 1777, not deserving of the same praise: and both being founded on Macpherson's English, they are paraphrases of a paraphrase.

by Mr Wodrow; by Mr Cameron.

The only translation of any portion of Ossian justly deserving the name which I have seen is contained in Smith's 'Summer in Skye' (Strahan, London, 1866), and is the work of the Rev. Mr Macpherson, minister of Inveraray. It is literal and spirited, well fitted to give a true idea of the strength and beauty of the Gaelic; and, had he translated the whole, there would have been no place left for my work; but unfortunately he has given only a few detached fragments.

Fragments by Rev. Mr Macpherson, Inveraray.

In my work I have been led, both by the excellences and the blemishes of Macpherson, to give a more literal rendering than I otherwise would have done. I have aimed at preserving the peculiarities of the original, and thus the reader must be always aware that he has a translation before him. In the earlier part of my work I endeavoured, as far as possible, to preserve the very order of the words as they are in Gaelic; but I abandoned this plan as leading to excessive stiffness and obscurity. I discarded all restraint of rhyme or measure, and honestly sought to make the meaning of Ossian truly known to the English reader. In doing so I can say with Cowper, "I have invented nothing; I have omitted nothing."

In translating I studiously excluded from my mind all question of authenticity, as well as of time and place, seeking only to make the "voice of Cona" intelligible to the English reader.* In

Account of the present translation.

* In my endeavour to explain every passage by itself, I have made statements in my Notes which may sometimes appear inconsistent with each other; for I consider it the first duty of a translator to give the original as he finds it.

my earnest desire to do this, and this only, I have done what, as far as I know, has not been done by any other translator of so large a work. I have not merely restricted myself to the same number of lines with the original, but I have not allowed one line to run into another. I have given each as it stands.

I am quite aware of the many disadvantages of such a plan—of the rugged and abrupt character it imparts to the translation—but I believe that its advantages on the whole overweigh the disadvantages; and I trust that, imperfect as my rendering is, it will give the English reader a more faithful idea of that original than has been hitherto given.

Some apology may be necessary for my frequent use of words which are more Gaelic than English—such as *ben, glen, strath, corrie,* &c.—but they are to some extent already known in English, and they are far more expressive than the "hill" and "vale" so constantly occurring in Macpherson.

On the other hand, I have followed his example in changing the form of proper names, so as to bring them within the powers of a Saxon tongue. I think the giving them in pure Gaelic form would render them absolutely unpronounceable to the English reader. *Aghaidh an t sneachda, Dubh-mac-Roinne,* and many others, will be recognised and may be pronounced as Agandecca, Du mac Roin; but if left unchanged, would have small chance of being ever named by a Saxon tongue.

The marginal explanations which I have given will enable the reader to follow the thread of the story throughout, and the notes at the end of each Book will, I trust, throw light on some obscure expressions and similes; while I would specially mention Note 8 to "Fingal," Duan I., where I show that the clan system, said to be unknown to Ossian, is over and over again mentioned by him in clear and unmistakable terms. I have also shown in Note 2 to "Fingal," Duan III., that there are frequent allusions to some kind of worship at the *Cromlec.*

Difficulties of translating Ossian.

I need not enlarge on the great difficulty of translating an author whose whole mode of thought is so remote from that of modern times—a difficulty greatly increased by the absence of contemporary literature to throw light on his meaning. There are thus passages in themselves very obscure, and there are others which are rendered so by an imperfect and corrupted text. In

the present state of Gaelic philology the meaning of several of these must be a matter of mere conjecture. It is probable that in various instances I may have erred. All I will say is, that I have given the meaning which appeared to me the most probable.

I am most painfully conscious of the utter inadequacy of my translation to give a full representation either of the grandeur or the pathos of the original. But if it prove the means of attracting greater attention to Ossian, and of inducing men to study him in his own expressive tongue, I am sure that my imperfections will be freely forgiven by them, and I shall consider my labour well bestowed.

General remarks on some of the characteristics of the poetry of Ossian.

I do not propose to enter into a formal or lengthened criticism of the Ossianic poetry. Dr Blair and others have done this, and done it well, long ago. But I will venture a few remarks on points which appear to me to have been in some measure overlooked, and advert to some of the objections brought against its general character.

It is very remarkable that there is no allusion whatever throughout the whole poems to the voice of singing birds with which the woods of the Highlands must have been tuneful in the days of old as they are now. There is mention made of the "hum of the mountain-bee" and the "droning dance of the evening fly." In the seventh Duan of "Temora" the birds of night are startled by the loud sound of Fingal's shield—and the flight of sea-birds is noticed; but no reference is ever made to lark, or thrush, or blackbird—to any bird of song. The eagle ("the true bird," according to its Gaelic name, *fir-eun*) is the only bird ever specially named. Of this omission I can give no explanation.

It has been remarked that, of all the dwellers in the waters, the whale alone is mentioned—the reason sometimes assigned for the omission being the fact that the ancient Celts, like the Homeric heroes, ate no fish. I do not think this a sufficient reason in a poet's estimation, but I can give no better. It is to be observed that modern Gaelic poetry abounds with descriptions of thrush and lark, as well as of the salmon, "the monarch of the flood."

Much has been said of the sublimity of the Ossianic poems—and they are deserving of it all—but they contain singularly faithful and beautiful descriptions of nature in her calm and more genial moods, which are sometimes used to illustrate the bright and gentle side of human character. These have not, in my

opinion, been sufficiently appreciated. I subjoin a few of them as examples. At p. 461, vol. i., we have the following description of early morning:—

> "Pleasing the tale of the time which has gone,
> Soothing as noiseless dew of morning mild,
> On the brake and knoll of roes,
> When slowly rises the sun
> On the silent flank of hoary Bens—
> The loch, unruffled, far away,
> Calm and blue on the floor of the glens."

At p. 211, vol. ii., the youthful prince of Ullin is thus described:—

> "Stood Cormac in their midst, as bright
> As a young star, when, rising in the sky,
> It looks in gentle gladness
> From the back of misty mountains in the east,
> Its fresh brightness shining through the dew
> That travels in pureness from ocean;
> In silence moves its path on high,
> Without a cloud in frown to dim its light."

Then, again, Fingal's joy in beholding the bravery of his young son is thus spoken of, vol. ii. p. 309:—

> "Joy, like a gentle breeze from the glen,
> Comes over the countenance of the king
> . . . . . .
> While he sees his son in renown.
> Like the joy of the cloudless sun,
> When he looks on a tree which grew
> Beneath his light on the brow of the hill,
> As alone it waves its head
> On the side of the glen; so was the king
> In joy for Fillan his son."

Once more, the description of Ossian's gladness in listening to "sweet voices from the march of bards" is thus described, vol. ii. p. 323:—

> "Even so heareth a tree,
> In the narrow gorge of desert Bens,
> The voice of spring approach its side;
> Its foliage springs around its head
> And opens to the shining of the sun;
> It shakes its branches all alone—
> The hum of the mountain-bee is nigh;
> The hunter with joy beholds it wave
> Amid the blight and baldness of the crags."

An "evening scene" at Dora, vol. ii. p. 209, is too long for quotation, but is singularly beautiful; and the first twenty-two lines of "Temora," Duan I., vol. ii. p. 171, 173, contain a very striking contrast between the peacefulness of outward nature and the turmoil of a guilty mind.

Scenes of touching pathos in describing the softer emotions of the heart, presenting "tenderness beyond all tenderness," have been so frequently pointed out that I need not particularise them.

Answers to occasional criticisms.

But, as to objections often made to the general character of the poetry, I would remark that—

1. The charges of exaggeration and bombast, however applicable to Macpherson's translation, do not lie against the original. Ossian's words do not overbalance his ideas.

2. The poetry is said to be very obscure. In some places it is so; and perhaps I may in my Notes have complained rather too frequently on this point. I doubt not, however, that much of its darkness to us is due to the antiquity of the poems, referring, as they often do, to matters which have passed away; much to the confusing effect of the episodes which mingle in the narrative with distracting frequency; much to our comparative ignorance of the language, which has received hitherto very inadequate illustration, whether in grammar or dictionary; and very much, I am certain, is owing to imperfect recording. The text is in many places corrupt. These facts frequently obscure the meaning; but there are everywhere throughout the poems couplets, and even individual lines, showing such remarkable grasp and pictorial power as to prove that the author was capable of forming full and clear views of his subject.

3. It is alleged that the characters are monotonous, and all cast in the same mould. An attentive study of the work, however, will remove much of this objection.

Ossian has not the wonderfully vivid and varied descriptive power of Homer, but he has much more of it than Virgil, and his heroes have more distinctive characteristics than the "fortemque Gyan, fortemque Cloanthum" of the Roman. Fingal, one of the noblest and best heroes described either in ancient or modern poetry, is not merely the resistless warrior, or the great king. To the very close of his life he manifests an unchanging affection for Agandecca, his first love; a never-failing interest in the friends of

his youth ; a lively sympathy with the young ; and a freshness of love for his sons, which are intensely human and attractive. Hear him, for instance, lamenting the fall of Ryno (vol. ii. p. 67) :—

> " Farewell, thou foremost on the field !
> No more shall I keep thine arrow from straying :*
> Thou who wast fairest of the heroes,
> I shall see thee no more—farewell ! "

Or again, when calling his sons to the chase, the familiar name of the dead comes as usual to his lips—he exclaims :

> " Ryno—he is in the grave,
> My son is in the sleep of death ! "

I would also mention his touching lamentation for Fillan—his starting back and leaping over the river when Bran, the favourite dog, sprang up from beside his young master's broken shield (vol. ii. p. 499, 501). All these are traits which bring him within the range of human sympathy in every age. He is fully more interesting and winning than Tennyson's " blameless king."

Thoroughly opposite to the picture of Fingal is that of Starno in " Ca-Lodin," the very embodiment of a savage ruthless viking and pirate. Again, we have Conan (vol. ii. p. 127), true to his currish name, snarling and biting as wont. Car-hon (in the poem which bears his name) is grave and sombre, always carrying the " great grief which has saddened his age." Oscar, Fillan, and others are cheerful and hopeful. Malhos and Folda (vol. ii. p. 347, 349) are fierce and quarrelsome, yet withal generous ; while Duntalmo, in " Calhon and Colvala," and Cairbar, in the first Duan of " Temora," are treacherous and bloodthirsty. Totally unlike these are Ca-olt (" Fingal," Duan II.) and Hidala (" Temora," Duan VII.), gentle and accomplished, lovers of music and of song. But it is worthy of remark that even the fiercest of these warriors occasionally show " a touch of nature," which prevents us from abhorring them. Thus Starno, savage as he was, " trembled at the slaying of his son." Cairbar always cherished love and fidelity to his noble brother Ca-mor.

> " Brightness clear, at all times, shone
> On Ca-mor, from his gloomy mind,
> Like the moon looking forth from a cloud,
> Through the dark-red thunders of night."
> —Vol. ii. p. 273.

* A most touching allusion to the training of his boy in the use of the bow.

And Folda, whose joy in death was the prospect of often descending from his cloud to view the graves of those he had slain, yet preserves in his heart one green spot, in which dwelt the image of his only daughter Lena :—

> " On her shone calmest light
> From his soul at the height of the storm."
> —Vol. ii. p. 399, 401.

So of his female characters—all of them in purity, dignity, and tenderness immeasurably superior to the coarse, scolding, fighting goddesses of Homer—too many of them die in despair over their lovers' graves ; but we see Oi-nam-mor-hul happily united to Tormod of the waves through the generosity of Ossian, as Uha is to Fro-hal (in " Carric-thura " ) by the kindness of Fingal. Golnandona secures Toscar by following him to the chase. The fate of Morna ( " Fingal," Duan I.) is tragical enough to excite deepest interest. Sulvalla (in " Temora " ), the most queenly of them all, closes her career in sadness ; but the poet, with great art, throws a veil of darkness over it—

> " Let there be no remembrance of her grief,
> It sorely wastes the soul of age."

And to show that, with all his pure and noble chivalry towards women, he did not believe in their absolute perfection, he presents to us in Ded-gel a thorough specimen of female perfidy and heartlessness.—( " Fingal," Duan II. l. 389-443.)

The descriptions of Stri-nan-dona ( " Ca-Lodin," Duan III.) and of Agandecca ( " Fingal," Duan III.) have often been quoted as surpassingly beautiful. I would refer to that of Golnandona in the beginning of the poem bearing her name, and to an example of truly fine poetic fancy in the three following lines regarding Roscrana ( " Temora," Duan IV. l. 87-89) :—

> " I saw her mild blue eye
> Move like a pure and playful spirit,
> Half hidden in fringe of dark clouds."

Ossian's descriptions of scenery.

The truly sublime, however, is the grand characteristic of Ossian. I will not quote instances of what may be found on almost every page ; but I would observe that his sublimity is often of a peculiar kind—arising from his blending the material and the

spirit worlds in a manner entirely his own—not employed by any other poet. Indeed he rarely, if ever, separates them completely. He does not, like Milton, ascend to the pure empyrean, or, like Dante, descend to an *inferno*. He has created a dim border-land, visited by the inhabitants of both worlds, who meet and hold converse, if with some reserve and awe, yet without any of the dread, and even horror, with which poets generally invest the presence of dwellers in the invisible world. His heroes are, on every occasion of danger or difficulty, surrounded by spirits — undoubtedly spirits, for the "stars are seen through their forms"— but they take a deep and kindly interest in all that pertains to their friends on earth. "They shine on the wind when glory wakes their sons anew" (vol. i. p. 265); they sorrow deeply when these suffer; they warn them of impending danger, and soothe them to sleep amid anxiety. They are more etherealised human beings than thoroughly disembodied spirits, and the description of their constant presence produces a feeling of *eeriness* such as is not produced by any other poetry—but *eeriness* entirely distinct from dread or horror.

His poetry suggested by, and a reflection of, Highland scenery.

It is true there are spirits of the storm and of the flood apparently of a different order from men, who "ride the horse of the whirlwind," who "rouse the waves of the raging sea," and shroud the world in gloom and terror; but, generally speaking, the ghosts of Ossian are those I have been describing; and I have often thought that his representation of them might be illustrated, or even explained, by an attentive study of the face of nature in her wildly-varying moods in the north-west Highlands. What strange effects, for instance, are often produced by those dense banks of white mist which come rolling in from the Western Ocean! They at times envelop the summits of the loftiest mountains in thickest folds of cloud; at other times sinking downwards into the glens, and shrouding from view the habitations of men, they leave the lofty peaks in the pure brightness of the skies standing out like lonely islands in some mystic sea. How powerful in its effects on the imagination is this wondrous blending of sea and land, of earth and sky, sometimes, as on a day of storm, in dark and weird confusion, sometimes in soft and bright repose! At times "the bursting of the storm" suddenly scatters the mist, at others the "eddying breeze" gently raises

corners of the white veil, and you obtain glimpses of sea and land, earth and sky, which you recognise as real; yet you have not that feeling of the solidity and permanence of things around you possessed by the dweller on level land under a clear dry sky. You feel a "presence and a power" of something belonging to a higher sphere, yet not wholly foreign to that in which you move —a power linking both together, and awing but not overwhelming the spirit within you.

I believe that a careful analysis would resolve very much of Ossian's most weird imagery into idealised representations of the ever-varying and truly wonderful aspects of cloud and mist, of sea and mountain, which may be seen by every observant eye in the Highlands; and it is no fancy to say that the perusal of these poems, as we have them, may well be illustrated by travelling a range of the Highland mountains. The moor is often dusky and dreary enough. The ascent to the peak is arduous; but once there you find yourself entirely separated from the bustle and conventionalism of the ordinary everyday life of the world, face to face with nature in her grandest and most solemn aspects. The storm arises, and the clouds thicken round you. In the moaning of the wind among caves and corries, or in its shrieking through fissured clefts of rocks—in the sound of many waters made by rushing cataracts—in the *thud* of the great sea on the shore—or in the prolonged echoes of the thunder over many mountains and glens, you hear voices which cannot fail to solemnise and awe you. But anon the clouds are chased away by the wind, the blue sky is seen, and the mountains again reveal themselves in their old familiar forms. You descend the other side, and you come to a hidden glenlet or sheltered corrie, bright in sunshine, clothed in greenest verdure, with its "wimpling burn" winding through it, and fragrant birches waving around it—the haunt of the mountain-deer, the very abode of purity and of peace. So in these pages, after passing occasionally over dreary flats, we are many times led to the loftiest heights—"the bed of the clouds"—where we are among all the elements of sublimity and grandeur; but we are not asked to tarry long among their darkness. We descend to gaze anew on nature in some fairer and gentler form. The light of valour, of purity, and of truth brightens around us; and we find ourselves led into some quiet retreat, where the springs

of warmest and tenderest affection pour forth their gladdening streams.

Conclusion.

I may conclude my observations by quoting the Abbé Cæsarotti's words regarding the character of Ossian as a poet—"Whether he be the son of Fingal or not, he is undoubtedly the son of Apollo." And Tennyson's words regarding the broken pearl-necklace of the queen may probably illustrate the form in which his poems are now presented to us. Pearls, and royal pearls, they still are.

> "This rhyme
> Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the queen
> That burst in dancing, and the pearls were spilt—
> Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept;
> But never more the same two sister pearls
> Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
> On her white neck: so is it with this rhyme—
> It lives dispersedly in many hands,
> And every minstrel sings it differently."

Among several friends who kindly interested themselves in the success of my work, I have pleasure in mentioning Principal Shairp of St Andrews, as one who often gave me most important aid; Mr Skene, who kindly solved every antiquarian doubt which I submitted to him; the late Archibald M'Neill, Esq., W.S., Principal Clerk to the Court of Session; Dr Laing, of the Signet Library, whose vast extent of accurate knowledge is equalled only by his readiness to impart its benefits to others; A. Nicolson, Esq., advocate, whose knowledge of Gaelic and acute learning helped me through various difficulties; and the Rev. J. Macleod, of the parish of Dunse, who possesses many high and rare qualifications for making the Bard of Morven truly known to the English reader.

I ought to have profited more by such able assistance. But very imperfect as in all truth I know my work to be, I trust that it may be the means of directing a greater degree of public attention to these wonderful and precious fragments of ancient British* poetry; and if so, I shall consider myself well rewarded.

* I use the term British advisedly, as referring to the ancient inhabitants of all Britain.

Manse of Kilmallie,
*October* 1870.