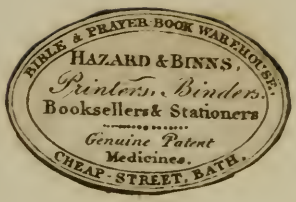
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MATTHEW BOULTON

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THE

POEMS OF OSSIAN,

TRANSLATED

BY

JAMES MACPHERSON, Esq.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

THE

ENGRAVINGS BY

JAMES FITTLER, A.R.A.

FROM PICTURES BY

HENRY SINGLETON.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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The following are the Poems, from which the subjects of the Engravings in this Edition are taken.

VOL. II.

VOL. III.

The Portrait of MACPHERSON to face the Title Page of Vol. I.

PREFACE.

WITHOUT encreasing his genius, the Author may have improved his language, in the eleven years, that the following Poems have been in the hands of the Public. Errors in diction might have been committed at twenty-four, which the experience of a riper age may remove; and some exuberances in imagery may be restrained, with advantage, by a degree of judgment acquired in the progress of time. Impressed with this opinion, he ran over the whole with attention and accuracy; and, he hopes, he has brought the work to a state of correct-

ness, which will preclude all future improvements.

The eagerness, with which these Poems have been received abroad, are a recompence for the coldness with which a few have affected to treat them at home. All the polite nations of Europe have transferred them into their respective languages; and they speak of him, who brought them to light, in terms that might flatter the vanity of one fond of fame. In a convenient indifference for a literary reputation, the Author hears praise without being elevated, and ribaldry without being depressed. He has frequently seen the first bestowed too precipitately; and the latter is so faithless to its purpose, that it is often the only index to merit in the present age.

Though the taste, which defines genius by the points of the compass, is a subject fit for mirth in itself, it is often a serious matter in the sale of a work. When rivers define the limits of abilities, as well

as the boundaries of countries, a writer may measure his success, by the latitude under which he was born. It was to avoid a part of this inconvenience, that the Author is said, by some, who speak without any authority, to have ascribed his own productions to another name. If this was the case, he was but young in the art of deception. When he placed the Poet in antiquity, the Translator should have been born on this side of the Tweed.

These observations regard only the frivolous in matters of literature; these, however, form a majority in every age and nation. In this country, men of genuine taste abound; but their still voice is drowned in the clamours of a multitude, who judge by fashion of poetry, as of dress. The truth is, to judge aright requires almost as much genius as to write well; and good critics are as rare as great poets. Though two hundred thousand Romans stood up, when Virgil

came to the Theatre, Varius only could correct the Æneid. He that obtains fame must receive it through mere fashion; and gratify his vanity with the applause of men, of whose judgment he cannot approve.

The following Poems, it must be confessed, are more calculated to please persons of exquisite feelings of heart, than those who receive all their impressions by the ear. The novelty of cadence, in what is called a prose version, though not destitute of harmony, will not to common readers supply the absence of the frequent returns of rhime. This was the opinion of the Writer himself, though he yielded to the judgment of others, in a mode, which presented freedom and dignity of expression, instead of fetters, which cramp the thought, whilst the harmony of language is preserved. His intention was to publish in verse. The making of poetry, like any other handicraft, may be learned by industry; and he had

served his apprenticeship, though in secret, to the muses.

It is, however, doubtful, whether the harmony which these Poems might derive from rhime, even in much better hands than those of the Translator, could atone for the simplicity and energy, which they would lose. The determination of this point shall be left to the readers of this preface. The following is the beginning of a Poem, translated from the Norse to the Gaëlic language; and, from the latter, transferred into English. The verse took little more time to the writer than the prose; and even he himself is doubtful (if he has succeeded in either), which of them is the most literal version.

FRAGMENT

OF

A NORTHERN TALE.

WHERE Harold, with golden hair, spread o'er Lochlin * his high commands; where, with justice, he ruled the tribes, who sunk, subdued, beneath his sword; abrupt rises Gormal † in snow! The tempests roll dark on his sides, but calm, above, his vast forehead appears. White-issuing from the skirt of his storms, the troubled torrents pour down his sides. Joining, as they roar along, they bear the Torno, in foam, to the main.

Grey on the bank and far from men, half-covered, by ancient pines, from the

* The Gaëlic name of Scandinavia, or Scandinia.

† The mountains of Sevo.

wind, a lonely pile exalts its head, long-shaken by the storms of the north. To this fled Sigurd, fierce in fight, from Harold the leader of armies, when fate had brightened his spear, with renown: When he conquered in that rude field, where Lulan's warriors fell in blood, or rose in terror on the waves of the main. Darkly sat the grey-haired chief; yet sorrow dwelt not in his soul. But when the warrior thought on the past, his proud heart heaved against his side: Forth flew his sword from its place, he wounded Harold in all the winds.

One daughter, and only one, but bright in form and mild of soul, the last beam of the setting line, remained to Sigurd of all his race. His son, in Lulan's battle slain, beheld not his father's flight from his foes. Nor finished seemed the ancient line! The splendid beauty of bright-eyed Fithon, covered still the fallen king with renown. Her arm was white like Gor-

mal's snow; her bosom whiter than the foam of the main, when roll the waves beneath the wrath of the winds. Like two stars were her radiant eyes, like two stars that rise on the deep, when dark tumult embroils the night. Pleasant are their beams aloft, as stately they ascend the skies.

Nor Odin forgot, in aught, the maid. Her form scarce equalled her lofty mind. Awe moved around her stately steps. Heroes loved—but shrunk away in their fears. Yet midst the pride of all her charms, her heart was soft, and her soul was kind. She saw the mournful with tearful eyes. Transient darkness arose in her breast. Her joy was in the chace. Each morning, when doubtful light wandered dimly on Lulan's waves, she rouzed the resounding woods, to Gormal's head of snow. Nor moved the maid alone, &c.

THE SAME VERSIFIED.

Where fair-hair'd Harold, o'er Scandinia reign'd,
And held, with justice, what his valour gain'd,
Sevo, in snow, his rugged forehead rears,
And, o'er the warfare of his storms, appears
Abrupt and vast.—White-wandering down his side,
A thousand torrents, gleaming as they glide,
Unite below: and pouring thro' the plain
Hurry the troubled Torno to the main.

Grey, on the bank, remote from human kind,
By aged pines, half-shelter'd from the wind,
A homely mansion rose, of antique form,
For ages batter'd by the polar storm.
To this, fierce Sigurd fled, from Norway's lord,
When fortune settled on the warrior's sword,
In that rude field, where Suecia's chiefs were slain,
Or forced to wander o'er the Bothnic main.
Dark was his life, yet undisturb'd with woes,
But when the memory of defeat arose,
His proud heart struck his side; he graspt the spear,
And wounded Harold in the vacant air.

One daughter only, but of form divine,
The last fair beam of the departing line,
Remain'd of Sigurd's race. His warlike son
Fell in the shock, which overturn'd the throne.
Nor desolate the house! Fionia's charms

Sustain'd the glory, which they lost in arms.
White was her arm, as Sevo's lofty snow,
Her bosom fairer, than the waves below,
When heaving to the winds. Her radiant eyes
Like two bright stars, exulting as they rise,
O'er the dark tumult of a stormy night,
And gladd'ning heaven, with their majestic light.

In nought is Odin to the maid unkind.
Her form scarce equals her exalted mind;
Awe leads her sacred steps where'er they move,
And mankind worship, where they dare not love.
But, mix'd with softness, was the virgin's pride,
Her heart had feelings, which her eyes deny'd.
Her bright tears started at another's woes,
While transient darkness on her soul arose.

The chace she lov'd; when morn with doubtful beam
Came dimly wandering o'er the Bothnic stream,
On Sevo's sounding sides, she bent the bow,
And rouz'd his forests to his head of snow.
Nor mov'd the maid alone, &c.

One of the chief improvements, on this edition, is the care taken, in arranging the Poems in the order of time; so as to form a kind of regular history of the age to which they relate. The Writer has

now resigned them for ever to their fate. That they have been well received by the Public, appears from an extensive sale; that they shall continue to be well received, he may venture to prophecy without the gift of that inspiration, to which poets lay claim. Through the medium of version upon version, they retain, in foreign languages, their native character of simplicity and energy. Genuine poetry, like gold, loses little, when properly transfused; but when a composition cannot bear the test of a literal version, it is a counterfeit which ought not to pass current. The operation must, however, be performed with skilful hands. A Translator, who cannot equal his original, is incapable of expressing its beauties.

LONDON,
August 15, 1773.

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DISSERTATION

CONCERNING

THE ÆRA OF OSSIAN.

INQUIRIES into the antiquities of nations afford more pleasure than any real advantage to mankind. The ingenious may form systems of history on probabilities and a few facts; but, at a great distance of time, their accounts must be vague and uncertain. The infancy of states and kingdoms is as destitute of great events, as of the means of transmitting them to posterity. The arts of polished life, by which alone facts can be preserved with certainty, are the production of a well-formed community. It is then historians

begin to write, and public transactions to be worthy remembrance. The actions of former times are left in obscurity, or magnified by uncertain traditions. Hence it is that we find so much of the marvellous in the origin of every nation; posterity being always ready to believe any thing, however fabulous, that reflects honour on their ancestors.

The Greeks and Romans were remarkable for this weakness. They swallowed the most absurd fables concerning the high antiquities of their respective nations. Good historians, however, rose very early amongst them, and transmitted, with lustre, their great actions to posterity. It is to them that they owe that unrivalled fame they now enjoy, while the great actions of other nations are involved in fables, or lost in obscurity. The Celtic nations afford a striking instance of this kind. They, though once the masters of Europe from the mouth of the river Oby *, in Russia, to Cape Finisterre, the western point of Gallicia, in Spain, are very little mentioned in history. They trusted their fame to tradition and the songs of their bards, which,

* Plin. l. 6.

by the vicissitude of human affairs, are long since lost. Their ancient language is the only monument that remains of them; and the traces of it being found in places so widely distant from each other, serves only to shew the extent of their ancient power, but throws very little light on their history.

Of all the Celtic nations, that which possessed old Gaul is the most renowned; not perhaps on account of worth superior to the rest, but for their wars with a people who had historians to transmit the fame of their enemies, as well as their own, to posterity. Britain was first peopled by them, according to the testimony of the best authors *; its situation, in respect to Gaul, makes the opinion probable; but what puts it beyond all dispute, is, that the same customs and language prevailed among the inhabitants of both in the days of Julius Cæsar †.

The colony from Gaul possessed themselves, at first, of that part of Britain which was next to their own country; and spreading northward, by degrees, as they increased in numbers, peo-

* Cæs. l. 5. Tac. Agric. c. 2.

† Cæsar. Pomp. Mel. Tacitus.

pled the whole island. Some adventurers, passing over from those parts of Britain that are within sight of Ireland, were the founders of the Irish nation; which is a more probable story than the idle fables of Milesian and Gallician colonies. Diodorus Siculus * mentions it as a thing well known in his time, that the inhabitants of Ireland were originally Britons; and his testimony is unquestionable, when we consider that, for many ages, the language and customs of both nations were the same.

Tacitus was of opinion, that the ancient Caledonians were of German extract; but even the ancient Germans themselves were Gauls. The present Germans, properly so called, were not the same with the ancient Celtæ. The manners and customs of the two nations were similar; but their language different. The Germans † are the genuine descendants of the ancient Scandinavians, who crossed, in an early period, the Baltic. The Celtæ ‡, anciently, sent many colonies into Germany, all of whom retained their own laws, language, and customs, till they were

* Diod. Sic. l. 5. † Strabo, l. 7.
‡ Cæs. l. 6. Liv. l. 5. Tac. de mor. Germ.

dissipated in the Roman empire; and it is of them, if any colonies came from Germany into Scotland, that the ancient Caledonians were descended.

But whether the Caledonians were a colony of the Celtic Germans, or the same with the Gauls that first possessed themselves of Britain, is a matter of no moment at this distance of time. Whatever their origin was, we find them very numerous in the time of Julius Agricola, which is a presumption that they were long before settled in the country. The form of their government was a mixture of aristocracy and monarchy, as it was in all the countries where the Druids bore the chief sway. This order of men seems to have been formed on the same principles with the Dactyli Idæ and Curetes of the ancients. Their pretended intercourse with heaven, their magic and divination, were the same. The knowledge of the Druids in natural causes, and the properties of certain things, the fruit of the experiments of ages, gained them a mighty reputation among the people. The esteem of the populace soon increased into a veneration for the order; which these cunning and ambitious priests took care to improve, to such a degree,

that they, in a manner, ingrossed the management of civil, as well as religious, matters. It is generally allowed that they did not abuse this extraordinary power; the preserving their character of sanctity was so essential to their influence, that they never broke out into violence or oppression. The chiefs were allowed to execute the laws, but the legislative power was entirely in the hands of the Druids *. It was by their authority that the tribes were united, in times of the greatest danger, under one head. This temporary king, or Vergobretus †, was chosen by them, and generally laid down his office at the end of the war. These priests enjoyed long this extraordinary privilege among the Celtic nations who lay beyond the pale of the Roman empire. It was in the beginning of the second century that their power among the Caledonians began to decline. The traditions concerning Trathal and Cormac, ancestors to Fingal, are full of the particulars of the fall of the Druids: a singular fate, it must be owned, of priests, who had once established their superstition.

The continual wars of the Caledonians against

* Cæs. l. 6. † Fer-gubreth, *the man to judge.*

the Romans, hindered the better sort from initiating themselves, as the custom formerly was, into the order of the Druids. The precepts of their religion were confined to a few, and were not much attended to by a people inured to war. The Vergobretus, or chief magistrate, was chosen without the concurrence of the hierarchy, or continued in his office against their will. Continual power strengthened his interest among the tribes, and enabled him to send down, as hereditary to his posterity, the office he had only received himself by election.

On occasion of a new war against the *King of the World*, as tradition emphatically calls the Roman emperor, the Druids, to vindicate the honour of the order, began to resume their ancient privilege of chusing the Vergobretus. Garmal, the son of Tarno, being deputed by them, came to the grandfather of the celebrated Fingal, who was then Vergobretus, and commanded him, in the name of the whole order, to lay down his office. Upon his refusal, a civil war commenced, which soon ended in almost the total extinction of the religious order of the Druids. A few that remained, retired to the dark recesses of their groves, and the caves they had formerly

used for their meditations. It is then we find them in *the circle of stones*, and unheeded by the world. A total disregard for the order, and utter abhorrence of the Druidical rites, ensued. Under this cloud of public hate, all that had any knowledge of the religion of the Druids became extinct, and the nation fell into the last degree of ignorance of their rites and ceremonies.

It is no matter of wonder then, that Fingal and his son Ossian disliked the Druids, who were the declared enemies to their succession in the supreme magistracy. It is a singular case, it must be allowed, that there are no traces of religion in the poems ascribed to Ossian; as the poetical compositions of other nations are so closely connected with their mythology. But gods are not necessary, when the poet has genius. It is hard to account for it to those who are not made acquainted with the manner of the old Scottish bards. That race of men carried their notions of martial honour to an extravagant pitch. Any aid given their heroes in battle, was thought to derogate from their fame; and the bards immediately transferred the glory of the action to him who had given that aid.

Had the poet brought down gods, as often as Homer hath done, to assist his heroes, his work had not consisted of eulogiums on men, but of hymns to superior beings. Those who write in the Gaelic language seldom mention religion in their profane poetry; and when they professedly write of religion, they never mix with their compositions, the actions of their heroes. This custom alone, even though the religion of the Druids had not been previously extinguished, may, in some measure, excuse the author's silence concerning the religion of ancient times.

To allege that a nation is void of all religion, would betray ignorance of the history of mankind. The traditions of their fathers, and their own observations on the works of nature, together with that superstition which is inherent in the human frame, have, in all ages, raised in the minds of men some idea of a superior being. Hence it is, that, in the darkest times, and amongst the most barbarous nations, the very populace themselves had some faint notion, at least, of a divinity. The Indians, who worship no God, believe that he exists. It would be doing injustice to the author of these poems, to think, that he had not opened his conceptions to

that primitive and greatest of all truths. But let his religion be what it will, it is certain he has not alluded to Christianity, or any of its rites, in his poems; which ought to fix his opinions, at least, to an æra prior to that religion. Conjectures, on this subject, must supply the place of proof. The persecution begun by Dioclesian, in the year 303, is the most probable time in which the first dawning of Christianity in the north of Britain can be fixed. The humane and mild character of Constantius Chlorus, who commanded then in Britain, induced the persecuted Christians to take refuge under him. Some of them, through a zeal to propagate their tenets, or through fear, went beyond the pale of the Roman empire, and settled among the Caledonians; who were ready to hearken to their doctrines, if the religion of the Druids was exploded long before.

These missionaries, either through choice, or to give more weight to the doctrine they advanced, took possession of the cells and groves of the Druids; and it was from this retired life they had the name of *Culdees* *, which, in the

* Culdich.

language of the country, signified *sequestered persons*. It was with one of the *Culdees* that Ossian, in his extreme old age, is said to have disputed concerning the Christian religion. This dispute, they say, is extant; and is couched in verse, according to the custom of the times. The extreme ignorance, on the part of Ossian, of the Christian tenets, shews, that that religion had only been lately introduced; as it is not easy to conceive how one of the first rank could be totally unacquainted with a religion that had been known for any time in the country. The dispute bears the genuine marks of antiquity. The obsolete phrases and expressions peculiar to the times, prove it to be no forgery. If Ossian then lived at the introduction of Christianity, as by all appearance he did, his epoch will be the latter end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century. Tradition here steps in with a kind of proof.

The exploits of Fingal against Caracul *, the son of the *King of the World*, are among the first brave actions of his youth. A compiete poem,

* Carac'huil, *terrible eye.* Carac'healla, *terrible look.* Caracchallamh, *a sort of upper garment.*

which relates to this subject, is printed in this collection.

In the year 210, the emperor Severus, after returning from his expedition against the Caledonians, at York, fell into the tedious illness of which he afterwards died. The Caledonians and Maiatæ, resuming courage from his indisposition, took arms, in order to recover the possessions they had lost. The enraged emperor commanded his army to march into their country, and to destroy it with fire and sword. His orders were but ill executed; for his son, Caracalla, was at the head of the army, and his thoughts were entirely taken up with the hopes of his father's death, and with schemes to supplant his brother Geta. He scarcely had entered the enemy's country, when news was brought him that Severus was dead. A sudden peace is patched up with the Caledonians; and, as it appears from Dion Cassius, the country they had lost to Severus was restored to them.

The Caracul of Fingal is no other than Caracalla, who, as the son of Severus, the emperor of Rome, whose dominions were extended almost over the known world, was not without reason called *the Son of the King of the World.* The

space of time between 211, the year Severus died, and the beginning of the fourth century, is not so great, but Ossian, the son of Fingal, might have seen the Christians whom the persecution under Dioclesian had driven beyond the pale of the Roman empire.

In one of the many lamentations on the death of Oscar, a battle which he fought against Caros, king of ships, on the banks of the winding Carun *, is mentioned among his great actions. It is more than probable, that the Caros mentioned here, is the same with the noted usurper Carausius, who assumed the purple in the year 287; and, seizing on Britain, defeated the emperor Maximinian Herculius, in several naval engagements, which gives propriety to his being called *the King of Ships*. The *winding Carun* is that small river retaining still the name of Carron, and runs in the neighbourhood of Agricola's wall, which Carausius repaired to obstruct the incursions of the Caledonians. Several other passages in traditions allude to the wars of the Romans; but the two just mentioned clearly fix the epocha of Fingal to the third century; and

* Car-avon, *winding river.*

this account agrees exactly with the Irish histories, which place the death of Fingal, the son of Comhal, in the year 283, and that of Oscar and their own celebrated Cairbre, in the year 296.

Some people may imagine, that the allusions to the Roman history might have been derived by tradition, from learned men, more than from ancient poems. This must then have happened at least three ages ago, as these allusions are mentioned often in the compositions of those times.

Every one knows what a cloud of ignorance and barbarism overspread the north of Europe three hundred years ago. The minds of men, addicted to superstition, contracted a narrowness that destroyed genius. Accordingly, we find the compositions of those times trivial and puerile to the last degree. But let it be allowed, that, amidst all the untoward circumstances of the age, a genius might arise, it is not easy to determine what could induce him to allude to the Roman times. We find no fact to favour any designs which could be entertained by any man who lived in the fifteenth century.

The strongest objection to the antiquity of the poems, now given to the public under the name

of Ossian, is the improbability of their being handed down by tradition through so many centuries. Ages of barbarism, some will say, could not produce poems abounding with the disinterested and generous sentiments so conspicuous in the compositions of Ossian; and could these ages produce them, it is impossible but they must be lost, or altogether corrupted in a long succession of barbarous generations.

These objections naturally suggest themselves to men unacquainted with the ancient state of the northern parts of Britain. The bards, who were an inferior order of the Druids, did not share their bad fortune. They were spared by the victorious king; as it was through their means only he could hope for immortality to his fame. They attended him in the camp, and contributed to establish his power by their songs. His great actions were magnified, and the populace, who had no ability to examine into his character narrowly, were dazzled with his fame in the rhimes of the bards. In the mean time, men assumed sentiments that are rarely to be met with in an age of barbarism. The bards, who were originally the disciples of the Druids, had their minds opened, and their ideas enlarged, by

being initiated in the learning of that celebrated order. They could form a perfect hero in their own minds, and ascribe that character to their prince. The inferior chiefs made this ideal character the model of their conduct; and, by degrees, brought their minds to that generous spirit which breathes in all the poetry of the times. The prince, flattered by his bards, and rivalled by his own heroes, who imitated his character, as described in the eulogies of his poets, endeavoured to excel his people in merit, as he was above them in station. This emulation continuing, formed at last the general character of the nation, happily compounded of what is noble in barbarity, and virtuous and generous in a polished people.

When virtue in peace, and bravery in war, are the characteristics of a nation, their actions become interesting, and their fame worthy of immortality. A generous spirit is warmed with noble actions, and becomes ambitious of perpetuating them. This is the true source of that divine inspiration, to which the poets of all ages pretended. When they found their themes inadequate to the warmth of their imaginations, they varnished them over with fables, supplied by

their own fancy, or furnished by absurd traditions. These fables, however ridiculous, had their abettors; posterity either implicitly believed them, or, through a vanity natural to mankind, pretended that they did. They loved to place the founders of their families in the days of fable, when poetry, without the fear of contradiction, could give what characters she pleased of her heroes. It is to this vanity that we owe the preservation of what remain of the more ancient poems. Their poetical merit made their heroes famous in a country where heroism was much esteemed and admired. The posterity of those heroes, or those who pretended to be descended from them, heard with pleasure the eulogiums of their ancestors; bards were employed to repeat the poems, and to record the connection of their patrons with chiefs so renowned. Every chief, in process of time, had a bard in his family, and the office became at last hereditary. By the succession of these bards, the poems concerning the ancestors of the family were handed down from generation to generation; they were repeated to the whole clan on solemn occasions, and always alluded to in the new compositions of the bards. This custom

came down to near our own times; and after the bards were discontinued, a great number in a clan retained by memory, or committed to writing, their compositions, and founded the antiquity of their families on the authority of their poems.

The use of letters was not known in the north of Europe till long after the institution of the bards: the records of the families of their patrons, their own, and more ancient poems, were handed down by tradition. Their poetical compositions were admirably contrived for that purpose. They were adapted to music; and the most perfect harmony was observed. Each verse was so connected with those which preceded or followed it, that if one line had been remembered in a stanza, it was almost impossible to forget the rest. The cadences followed in so natural a gradation, and the words were so adapted to the common turn of the voice, after it is raised to a certain key, that it was almost impossible, from a similarity of sound, to substitute one word for another. This excellence is peculiar to the Celtic tongue, and is perhaps to be met with in no other language. Nor does this choice of words clog the sense, or weaken the expression. The

numerous flections of consonants, and variation in declension, make the language very copious.

The descendants of the Celtæ, who inhabited Britain and its isles, were not singular in this method of preserving the most precious monuments of their nation. The ancient laws of the Greeks were couched in verse, and handed down by tradition. The Spartans, through a long habit, became so fond of this custom, that they would never allow their laws to be committed to writing. The actions of great men, and the eulogiums of kings and heroes, were preserved in the same manner. All the historical monuments of the old Germans were comprehended in their ancient songs * ! which were either hymns to their gods, or elegies in praise of their heroes; and were intended to perpetuate the great events in their nation, which were carefully interwoven with them. This species of composition was not committed to writing, but delivered by oral tradition †. The care they took to have the poems taught to their children, the uninterrupted custom of repeating them upon certain occasions,

* Tac. de mor. Germ.

† *Abbé de la Bleterie Remarques sur la Germaine.*

and the happy measure of the verse, served to preserve them for a long time uncorrupted. This oral chronicle of the Germans was not forgot in the eighth century, and it probably would have remained to this day, had not learning, which thinks every thing that is not committed to writing fabulous, been introduced. It was from poetical traditions that Garcillasso composed his account of the Yncas of Peru. The Peruvians had lost all other monuments of their history; and it was from ancient poems, which his mother, a princess of the blood of the Yncas, taught him in his youth, that he collected the materials of his history. If other nations, then, that had been often over-run by enemies, and had sent abroad and received colonies, could for many ages preserve, by oral tradition, their laws and histories uncorrupted, it is much more probable that the ancient Scots, a people so free of intermixture with foreigners, and so strongly attached to the memory of their ancestors, had the works of their bards handed down with great purity.

What is advanced, in this short Dissertation, it must be confessed, is mere conjecture. Beyond the reach of records, is settled a gloom,

which no ingenuity can penetrate. The manners described, in these poems, suit the ancient Celtic times, and no other period that is known in history. We must, therefore, place the heroes far back in antiquity; and it matters little, who were their cotemporaries in other parts of the world. If we have placed Fingal in his proper period, we do honour to the manners of barbarous times. He exercised every manly virtue in Caledonia, while Heliogabalus disgraced human nature at Rome.

A

DISSERTATION

CONCERNING

THE POEMS OF OSSIAN.

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THE POEMS OF OSSIAN.

The history of those nations, who originally possessed the north of Europe, is less known than their manners. Destitute of the use of letters, they themselves had not the means of transmitting their great actions to remote posterity. Foreign writers saw them only at a distance, and described them as they found them. The vanity of the Romans induced them to consider the nations beyond the pale of their empire as barbarians; and consequently their history unworthy of being investigated. Their manners and sin-

gular character were matters of curiosity, as they committed them to record. Some men, otherwise of great merit among ourselves, give into confined ideas on this subject. Having early imbibed their idea of exalted manners from the Greek and Roman writers, they scarcely ever afterwards have the fortitude to allow any dignity of character to any nation destitute of the use of letters.

Without derogating from the fame of Greece and Rome, we may consider antiquity beyond the pale of their empire worthy of some attention. The nobler passions of the mind never shoot forth more free and unrestrained than in the times we call barbarous. That irregular manner of life, and those manly pursuits from which barbarity takes its name, are highly favourable to a strength of mind unknown in polished times. In advanced society the characters of men are more uniform and disguised. The human passions lie in some degree concealed behind forms, and artificial manners; and the powers of the soul, without an opportunity of exerting them, lose their vigour. The times of regular government, and polished manners, are therefore to be wished for by the feeble and weak

in mind. An unsettled state, and those convulsions which attend it, is the proper field for an exalted character, and the exertion of great parts. Merit there rises always superior: no fortuitous event can raise the timid and mean into power. To those who look upon antiquity in this light, it is an agreeable prospect; and they alone can have real pleasure in tracing nations to their source.

The establishment of the Celtic states, in the north of Europe, is beyond the reach of written annals. The traditions and songs to which they trusted their history, were lost, or altogether corrupted in their revolutions and migrations, which were so frequent and universal, that no kingdom in Europe is now possessed by its original inhabitants. Societies were formed, and kingdoms erected, from a mixture of nations, who, in process of time, lost all knowledge of their own origin. If tradition could be depended upon, it is only among a people, from all time, free from intermixture with foreigners. We are to look for these among the mountains and inaccessible parts of a country: places, on account of their barrenness, uninviting to an enemy, or whose natural strength enabled the natives to

repel invasions. Such are the inhabitants of the mountains of Scotland. We, accordingly, find, that they differ materially from those who possess the low and more fertile part of the kingdom. Their language is pure and original, and their manners are those of an ancient and unmixed race of men. Conscious of their own antiquity, they long despised others, as a new and mixed people. As they lived in a country only fit for pasture, they were free from that toil and business which engross the attention of a commercial people. Their amusement consisted in hearing or repeating their songs and traditions; and these entirely turned on the antiquity of their nation, and the exploits of their forefathers. It is no wonder, therefore, that there are more remains of antiquity among them, than among any other people in Europe. Traditions, however, concerning remote periods, are only to be regarded in so far as they coincide with cotemporary writers of undoubted credit and veracity.

No writers began their accounts from a more early period, than the historians of the Scots nation. Without records, or even tradition itself, they give a long list of ancient kings, and a detail of their transactions, with a scrupulous ex-

actness. One might naturally suppose, that, when they had no authentic annals, they should, at least, have recourse to the traditions of their country, and have reduced them into a regular system of history. Of both they seem to have been equally destitute. Born in the low country, and strangers to the ancient language of their nation, they contented themselves with copying from one another, and retailing the same fictions, in a new colour and dress.

John Fordun was the first who collected those fragments of the Scots history, which had escaped the brutal policy of Edward I., and reduced them into order. His accounts, in so far as they concerned recent transactions, deserved credit: beyond a certain period, they were fabulous and unsatisfactory. Some time before Fordun wrote, the king of England, in a letter to the pope, had run up the antiquity of his nation to a very remote æra. Fordun, possessed of all the national prejudice of the age, was unwilling that his country should yield, in point of antiquity, to a people, then its rivals and enemies. Destitute of annals in Scotland, he had recourse to Ireland, which, according to the vulgar errors of the times, was reckoned the first habitation of

the Scots. He found, there, that the Irish bards had carried their pretensions to antiquity as high, if not beyond any nation in Europe. It was from them he took those improbable fictions, which form the first part of his history.

The writers that succeeded Fordun implicitly followed his system, though they sometimes varied from him in their relations of particular transactions, and the order of succession of their kings. As they had no new lights, and were, equally with him, unacquainted with the traditions of their country, their histories contain little information concerning the origin of the Scots. Even Buchanan himself, except the elegance and vigour of his style, has very little to recommend him. Blinded with political prejudices, he seemed more anxious to turn the fictions of his predecessors to his own purposes, than to detect their misrepresentations, or investigate truth amidst the darkness which they had thrown round it. It therefore appears, that little can be collected from their own historians, concerning the first migration of the Scots into Britain.

That this island was peopled from Gaul, admits of no doubt. Whether colonies came after-

wards from the north of Europe, is a matter of mere speculation. When South Britain yielded to the power of the Romans, the unconquered nations to the north of the province were distinguished by the name of *Caledonians*. From their very name, it appears, that they were of those *Gauls*, who possessed themselves originally of Britain. It is compounded of two *Celtic* words, *Caël* signifying *Celts*, or *Gauls*, and *Dun* or *Don*, *a hill;* so that *Caël-don*, or Caledonians, is as much as to say, the *Celts of the hill country*. The Highlanders, to this day, call themselves *Caël*, their language *Caëlic*, or *Gaelic*, and their country *Caëldoch*, which the Romans softened into *Caledonia*. This, of itself, is sufficient to demonstrate, they are the genuine descendents of the ancient Caledonians, and not a pretended colony of *Scots*, who settled first in the north, in the third or fourth century.

From the double meaning of the word *Caël*, which signifies *strangers*, as well as *Gauls*, or *Celts*, some have imagined, that the ancestors of the Caledonians were of a different race from the rest of the Britons, and that they received their name upon that account. This opinion, say they, is supported by Tacitus, who, from several cir-

cumstances, concludes, that the Caledonians were of German extraction. A discussion of a point so intricate, at this distance of time, could neither be satisfactory nor important.

Towards the latter end of the third, and beginning of the fourth century, we meet with the *Scots* in the north. Porphyrius * makes the first mention of them about that time. As the *Scots* were not heard of before that period, most writers supposed them to have been a colony newly come to Britain, and that the *Picts* were the only genuine descendents of the ancient Caledonians. This mistake is easily removed. The Caledonians, in process of time, became naturally divided into two distinct nations, as possessing parts of the country entirely different in their nature and soil. The western coast of Scotland is hilly and barren; towards the east the country is plain, and fit for tillage. The inhabitants of the mountains, a roving and uncontrouled race of men, lived by feeding of cattle, and what they killed in hunting. Their employment did not fix them to one place. They removed from one heath to another, as suited best with their

* St. Hierom. ad Ctesiphon.

convenience or inclination. They were not, therefore, improperly called, by their neighbours, SCUITE, or *the wandering nation;* which is evidently the origin of the Roman name of *Scoti.*

On the other hand, the Caledonians, who possessed the east coast of Scotland, as the division of the country was plain and fertile, applied themselves to agriculture, and raising of corn. It was from this, that the Gaelic name of the *Picts* proceeded; for they are called, in that language, *Cruithnich,* i. e. *the wheat or corn eaters.* As the Picts lived in a country so different in its nature from that possessed by the Scots, so their national character suffered a material change. Unobstructed by mountains, or lakes, their communication with one another was free and frequent. Society, therefore, became sooner established among them, than among the Scots, and, consequently, they were much sooner governed by civil magistrates and laws. This, at last, produced so great a difference in the manners of the two nations, that they began to forget their common origin, and almost continual quarrels and animosities subsisted between them. These animosities, after some ages, ended in the

subversion of the Pictish kingdom, but not in the total extirpation of the nation, according to most of the Scots writers, who seemed to think it more for the honour of their countrymen to annihilate, than reduce, a rival people under their obedience. It is certain, however, that the very name of the Picts was lost, and those that remained were so completely incorporated with their conquerors, that they soon lost all memory of their own origin.

The end of the Pictish government is placed so near that period, to which authentic annals reach, that it is matter of wonder, that we have no monuments of their language or history remaining. This favours the system I have laid down. Had they originally been of a different race from the Scots, their language of course would be different. The contrary is the case. The names of places in the Pictish dominions, and the very names of their kings, which are handed down to us, are of Gaelic original; which is a convincing proof that the two nations were, of old, one and the same, and only divided into two governments, by the effect which their situation had upon the genius of the people.

The name of *Picts* is said to have been given by the Romans to the Caledonians, who possessed the east coast of Scotland, from their painting their bodies. The story is silly, and the argument absurd. But let us revere antiquity in her very follies. This circumstance made some imagine, that the Picts were of British extract, and a different race of men from the Scots. That more of the Britons, who fled northward from the tyranny of the Romans, settled in the low country of Scotland, than among the Scots of the mountains, may be easily imagined, from the very nature of the country. It was they who introduced painting among the Picts. From this circumstance, affirm some antiquaries, proceeded the name of the latter, to distinguish them from the Scots, who never had that art among them, and from the Britons, who discontinued it after the Roman conquest.

The Caledonians, most certainly, acquired a considerable knowledge in navigation, by their living on a coast intersected with many arms of the sea, and in islands, divided, one from another, by wide and dangerous firths. It is, therefore, highly probable, that they, very early, found their way to the north of Ireland, which is

within sight of their own country. That Ireland was first peopled from Britain, is, at length, a matter that admits of no doubt. The vicinity of the two islands; the exact correspondence of the ancient inhabitants of both, in point of manners and language, are sufficient proofs, even if we had not the testimony of * authors of undoubted veracity to confirm it. The abettors of the most romantic systems of Irish antiquities allow it; but they place the colony from Britain in an improbable and remote æra. I shall easily admit, that the colony of the *Firbolg*, confessedly the *Belgæ* of Britain, settled in the south of Ireland, before the *Caël*, or Caledonians, discovered the north: but it is not at all likely, that the migration of the Firbolg to Ireland happened many centuries before the Christian æra.

The poem of Temora throws considerable light on this subject. The accounts given in it agree so well with what the ancients have delivered, concerning the first population and inhabitants of Ireland, that every unbiassed person will confess them more probable, than the legends handed down, by tradition, in that country. It ap-

* Dio. Sic. l. 5.

pears, that, in the days of Trathal, grandfather to Fingal, Ireland was possessed by two nations; the *Firbolg*, or *Belgæ* of Britain, who inhabited the south, and the *Caël*, who passed over from Caledonia and the Hebrides to Ulster. The two nations, as is usual among an unpolished and lately settled people, were divided into small dynasties, subject to petty kings, or chiefs, independant of one another. In this situation, it is probable, they continued long, without any material revolution in the state of the island, until Crothar, lord of Atha, a country in Connaught, the most potent chief of the *Firbolg*, carried away Conlama, the daughter of Cathmin, a chief of the *Caël*, who possessed Ulster.

Conlama had been betrothed some time before to Turloch, a chief of their own nation. Turloch resented the affront offered him by Crothar, made an irruption into Connaught, and killed Cormul, the brother of Crothar, who came to oppose his progress. Crothar himself then took arms, and either killed or expelled Turloch. The war, upon this, became general between the two nations: and the Caël were reduced to the last extremity. In this situation, they applied for aid to Trathal, king of Morven, who

sent his brother Conar, already famous for his great exploits, to their relief. Conar, upon his arrival in Ulster, was chosen king, by the unanimous consent of the Caledonian tribes, who possessed that country. The war was renewed with vigour and success; but the *Firbolg* appear to have been rather repelled than subdued. In succeeding reigns, we learn from episodes in the same poem, that the chiefs of Atha made several efforts to become monarchs of Ireland, and to expel the race of Conar.

To Conar succeeded his son Cormac, who appears to have reigned long. In his latter days he seems to have been driven to the last extremity, by an insurrection of the *Firbolg*, who supported the pretensions of the chiefs of Atha to the Irish throne. Fingal, who then was very young, came to the aid of Cormac, totally defeated Colc-ulla, chief of Atha, and re-established Cormac in the sole possession of all Ireland. It was then he fell in love with, and took to wife, Roscrana, the daughter of Cormac, who was the mother of Ossian.

Cormac was succeeded in the Irish throne by his son Cairbre; Cairbre by Artho, his son, who was the father of that Cormac, in whose

minority the invasion of Swaran happened, which is the subject of the poem of *Fingal*. The family of Atha, who had not relinquished their pretensions to the Irish throne, rebelled in the minority of Cormac, defeated his adherents, and murdered him in the palace of Temora. Cairbar, lord of Atha, upon this, mounted the throne. His usurpation soon ended with his life; for Fingal made an expedition into Ireland, and restored, after various vicissitudes of fortune, the family of Conar to the possession of the kingdom. This war is the subject of Temora; the events, though certainly heightened and embellished by poetry, seem, notwithstanding, to have their foundation in true history.

Temora contains not only the history of the first migration of the Caledonians into Ireland, it also preserves some important facts, concerning the first settlement of the *Firbolg*, or *Belgæ of Britain*, in that kingdom, under their leader Larthon, who was ancestor to Cairbar and Cathmor, who successively mounted the Irish throne, after the death of Cormac, the son of Artho. I forbear to transcribe the passage, on account of its length. It is the song of Fonar, the bard; towards the latter end of the seventh book of

Temora. As the generations from Larthon to Cathmor, to whom the episode is addressed, are not marked, as are those of the family of Conar, the first king of Ireland, we can form no judgment of the time of the settlement of the Firbolg. It is, however, probable, it was some time before the Cäel, or Caledonians, settled in Ulster. One important fact may be gathered from this history, that the Irish had no king before the latter end of the first century. Fingal lived, it is supposed, in the third century; so Conar, the first monarch of the Irish, who was his grand-uncle, cannot be placed farther back than the close of the first. To establish this fact, is to lay at once aside the pretended antiquities of the Scots and Irish, and to get quit of the long list of kings which the latter give us for a millenium before.

Of the affairs of Scotland, it is certain, nothing can be depended upon, prior to the reign of Fergus, the son of Erc, who lived in the fifth century. The true history of Ireland begins somewhat later than that period. Sir James Ware *, who was indefatigable in his researches

* War. de antiq. Hybern. præ. p. 1.

after the antiquities of his country, rejects, as mere fiction and idle romance, all that is related of the ancient Irish, before the time of St Patrick, and the reign of Leogaire. It is from this consideration, that he begins his history at the introduction of Christianity; remarking, that all that is delivered down, concerning the times of Paganism, were tales of late invention, strangely mixed with anachronisms and inconsistencies. Such being the opinion of Ware, who had collected, with uncommon industry and zeal, all the real and pretendedly ancient manuscripts, concerning the history of his country, we may, on his authority, reject the improbable and self-condemned tales of Keating and O'Flaherty. Credulous and puerile to the last degree, they have disgraced the antiquities they meant to establish. It is to be wished, that some able Irishman, who understands the language and records of his country, may redeem, ere it is too late, the genuine antiquities of Ireland, from the hands of these idle fabulists.

By comparing the history in these poems with the legends of the Scots and Irish writers, and, by afterwards examining both by the test of the Roman authors, it is easy to discover which is

the most probable. Probability is all that can be established on the authority of tradition, ever dubious and uncertain. But when it favours the hypothesis laid down by cotemporary writers of undoubted veracity, and, as it were, finishes the figure of which they only drew the out-lines, it ought, in the judgment of sober reason, to be preferred to accounts framed in dark and distant periods, with little judgment, and upon no authority.

Concerning the period of more than a century, which intervenes between Fingal and the reign of Fergus, the son of Erc or Arcath, tradition is dark and contradictory. Some trace up the family of Fergus to a son of Fingal of that name, who makes a considerable figure in Ossian's poems. The three elder sons of Fingal, Ossian, Fillan, and Ryno, dying without issue, the succession, of course, devolved upon Fergus, the fourth son, and his posterity. This Fergus, say some traditions, was the father of Congal, whose son was Arcath, the father of Fergus, properly called the first king of Scots; as it was in his time the Caël, who possessed the western coast of Scotland, began to be distinguished, by foreigners, by the name of Scots.

From thence-forward the Scots and Picts, as distinct nations, became objects of attention to the historians of other countries. The internal state of the two Caledonian kingdoms has always continued, and ever must remain, in obscurity and fable.

It is in this epoch we must fix the beginning of the decay of that species of heroism, which subsisted in the days of Fingal. There are three stages in human society. The first is the result of consanguinity, and the natural affection of the members of a family to one another. The second begins when property is established, and men enter into associations for mutual defence against the invasions and injustice of neighbours. Mankind submit, in the third, to certain laws and subordinations of government, to which they trust the safety of their persons and property. As the first is formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primæval dignity of sentiment. The middle state is the region of complete barbarism and ignorance. About the beginning of the fifth century, the Scots and Picts were advanced into the second stage, and,

consequently, into those circumscribed sentiments, which always distinguish barbarity. The events which soon after happened did not at all contribute to enlarge their ideas, or mend their national character.

About the year 426, the Romans, on account of domestic commotions, entirely forsook Britain, finding it impossible to defend so distant a frontier. The Picts and Scots, seizing this favourable opportunity, made incursions into the deserted province. The Britons, enervated by the slavery of several centuries, and those vices which are inseparable from an advanced state of civility, were not able to withstand the impetuous, though irregular, attacks of a barbarous enemy. In the utmost distress, they applied to their old masters, the Romans, and (after the unfortunate state of the Empire could not spare aid) to the Saxons, a nation equally barbarous and brave with the enemies of whom they were so much afraid. Though the bravery of the Saxons repelled the Caledonian nations for a time, yet the latter found means to extend themselves, considerably, towards the south. It is, in this period, we must place the origin of the arts of civil life among the Scots. The seat of

government was removed from the mountains to the plain and more fertile provinces of the south, to be near the common enemy, in case of sudden incursions. Instead of roving through unfrequented wilds, in search of subsistence, by means of hunting, men applied to agriculture, and raising of corn. This manner of life was the first means of changing the national character. The next thing which contributed to it, was their mixture with strangers.

In the countries which the Scots had conquered from the Britons, it is probable the most of the old inhabitants remained. These incorporating with the conquerors, taught them agriculture, and other arts, which they themselves had received from the Romans. The Scots, however, in number as well as power, being the most predominant, retained still their language, and as many of the customs of their ancestors as suited with the nature of the country they possessed. Even the union of the two Caledonian kingdoms did not much affect the national character. Being originally descended from the same stock, the manners of the Picts and Scots were as similar as the different natures of the countries they possessed permitted.

What brought about a total change in the genius of the Scots nation, was their wars and other transactions with the Saxons. Several counties in the south of Scotland were alternately possessed by the two nations. They were ceded, in the ninth age, to the Scots; and, it is probable, that most of the Saxon inhabitants remained in possession of their lands. During the several conquests and revolutions in England, many fled for refuge into Scotland, to avoid the oppression of foreigners, or the tyranny of domestic usurpers; in so much, that the Saxon race formed perhaps near one half of the Scottish kingdom. The Saxon manners and language daily gained ground, on the tongue and customs of the ancient Caledonians, till, at last, the latter were entirely regulated to inhabitants of the mountains, who were still unmixed with strangers.

It was after the accession of territory which the Scots received, upon the retreat of the Romans from Britain, that the inhabitants of the Highlands were divided into clans. The king, when he kept his court in the mountains, was considered, by the whole nation, as the chief of their blood. Their small number, as well as the

presence of their prince, prevented those divisions which afterwards sprung forth into so many separate tribes. When the seat of government was removed to the south, those who remained in the Highlands were, of course, neglected. They naturally formed themselves into small societies, independent of one another. Each society had its own *regulus*, who either was, or in the succession of a few generations, was regarded as chief of their blood. The nature of the country favoured an institution of this sort. A few valleys, divided from one another by extensive heaths and impassable mountains, form the face of the Highlands. In these valleys the chiefs fixed their residence. Round them, and almost within sight of their dwellings, were the habitations of their relations and dependents.

The seats of the Highland chiefs were neither disagreeable nor inconvenient. Surrounded with mountains and hanging woods, they were covered from the inclemency of the weather. Near them generally ran a pretty large river, which, discharging itself not far off, into an arm of the sea, or extensive lake, swarmed with variety of fish. The woods were stocked with wild-fowl; and the heaths and mountains behind them were

the natural seat of the red-deer and roe. If we make allowance for the backward state of agriculture, the valleys were not unfertile; affording, if not all the conveniences, at least the necessaries of life. Here the chief lived, the supreme judge and lawgiver of his own people; but his sway was neither severe nor unjust. As the populace regarded him as the chief of their blood, so he, in return, considered them as members of his family. His commands, therefore, though absolute and decisive, partook more of the authority of a father, than of the rigour of a judge. Though the whole territory of the tribe was considered as the property of the chief, yet his vassals made him no other consideration for their lands than services, neither burdensome nor frequent. As he seldom went from home, he was at no expence. His table was supplied by his own herds, and what his numerous attendants killed in hunting.

In this rural kind of magnificence, the Highland chiefs lived, for many ages. At a distance from the seat of government, and secured by the inaccessibleness of their country, they were free and independent. As they had little communication with strangers, the customs of their an-

cestors remained among them, and their language retained its original purity. Naturally fond of military fame, and remarkably attached to the memory of their ancestors, they delighted in traditions and songs, concerning the exploits of their nation, and especially of their own particular families. A succession of bards was retained in every clan, to hand down the memorable actions of their forefathers. As Fingal and his chiefs were the most renowned names in tradition, the bards took care to place them in the genealogy of every great family. They became famous among the people, and an object of fiction and poetry to the bards.

The bards erected their immediate patrons into heroes, and celebrated them in their songs. As the circle of their knowledge was narrow, their ideas were confined in proportion. A few happy expressions, and the manners they represent, may please those who understand the language; their obscurity and inaccuracy would disgust in a translation. It was chiefly for this reason, that I have rejected wholly the works of the bards in my publications. Ossian acted in a more extensive sphere, and his ideas ought to be more noble and universal; neither gives he,

I presume, so many of those peculiarities, which are only understood in a certain period or country. The other bards have their beauties, but not in this species of composition. Their rhimes, only calculated to kindle a martial spirit among the vulgar, afford very little pleasure to genuine taste. This observation only regards their poems of the heroic kind; in every inferior species of poetry they are more successful. They express the tender melancholy of desponding love, with simplicity and nature. So well adapted are the sounds of the words to the sentiments, that, even without any knowledge of the language, they pierce and dissolve the heart. Successful love is expressed with peculiar tenderness and elegance. In all their compositions, except the heroic, which was solely calculated to animate the vulgar, they give us the genuine language of the heart, without any of those affected ornaments of phraseology, which, though intended to beautify sentiments, divest them of their natural force. The ideas, it is confessed, are too local to be admired in another language; to those who are acquainted with the manners they represent, and the scenes they describe, they must afford pleasure and satisfaction.

It was the locality of their description and sentiment, that, probably, has kept them hitherto in the obscurity of an almost lost language. The ideas of an unpolished period are so contrary to the present advanced state of society, that more than a common mediocrity of taste is required to relish them as they deserve. Those who alone are capable of transferring ancient poetry into a modern language, might be better employed in giving originals of their own, were it not for that wretched envy and meanness which affects to despise cotemporary genius. My first publication was merely accidental. Had I then met with less approbation, my after pursuits would have been more profitable; at least, I might have continued to be stupid, without being branded with dulness.

These poems may furnish light to antiquaries, as well as some pleasure to the lovers of poetry. The first population of Ireland, its first kings, and several circumstances which regard its connection of old with the south and north of Britain, are presented in several episodes. The subject and catastrophe of the poem are founded upon facts, which regarded the first peopling of that country, and the contests between the two

British nations, who originally inhabited that island. In a preceding part of this Dissertation, I have shewn how superior the probability of this system is to the undigested fictions of the Irish bards, and the more recent and regular legends of both Irish and Scottish historians. I mean not to give offence to the abettors of the high antiquities of the two nations, though I have all along expressed my doubts, concerning the veracity and abilities of those who deliver down their ancient history. For my own part, I prefer the national fame, arising from a few certain facts, to the legendary and uncertain annals of ages of remote and obscure antiquity. No kingdom now established in Europe can pretend to equal antiquity with that of the Scots, inconsiderable as it may appear in other respects, even according to my system, so that it is altogether needless to fix its origin a fictitious millenium before.

Since the first publication of these poems, many insinuations have been made, and doubts arisen, concerning their authenticity. Whether these suspicions are suggested by prejudice, or are only the effects of malice, I neither know nor care. Those who have doubted my veracity

have paid a compliment to my genius; and, were even the allegation true, my self-denial might have atoned for my fault. Without vanity I say it, I think I could write tolerable poetry; and I assure my antagonists, that I should not translate what I could not imitate.

As prejudice is the effect of ignorance, I am not surprised at its being general. An age that produces few marks of genius ought to be sparing of admiration. The truth is, the bulk of mankind have ever been led by reputation more than taste, in articles of literature. If all the Romans, who admired Virgil, understood his beauties, he would have scarce deserved to have come down to us, through so many centuries. Unless genius were in fashion, Homer himself might have written in vain. He that wishes to come with weight, on the superficial, must skim the surface in their own shallow way. Were my aim to gain the many, I would write a madrigal sooner than an heroic poem. Laberius himself would be always sure of more followers than Sophocles.

Some who doubt the authenticity of this work, with peculiar acuteness appropriate them to the Irish nation. Though it is not easy to conceive

how these poems can belong to Ireland and to me at once, I shall examine the subject, without further animadversion on the blunder.

Of all the nations descended from the ancient Celtæ, the Scots and Irish are the most similar in language, customs, and manners. This argues a more intimate connection between them, than a remote descent from the great Celtic stock. It is evident, in short, that at some one period or other, they formed one society, were subject to the same government, and were, in all respects, one and the same people. How they became divided, which the colony, or which the mother nation, I have in another work amply discussed. The first circumstance that induced me to disregard the vulgarly-received opinion of the Hibernian extraction of the Scottish nation, was my observations on their ancient language. That dialect of the Celtic tongue, spoken in the north of Scotland, is much more pure, more agreeable to its mother language, and more abounding with primitives, than that now spoken, or even that which has been written for some centuries back, amongst the most unmixed part of the Irish nation. A Scotchman, tolerably conversant in his own language, understands an Irish

composition, from that derivative analogy which it has to the Galic of North Britain. An Irishman, on the other hand, without the aid of study, can never understand a composition in the Gaelic tongue. This affords a proof that the Scotch Galic is the most original, and, consequently, the language of a more ancient and unmixed people. The Irish, however backward they may be to allow any thing to the prejudice of their antiquity, seem inadvertently to acknowledge it, by the very appellation they give to the dialect they speak. They call their own language Caëlic Eirinach, *i. e.* Caledonian Irish, when, on the contrary, they call the dialect of North Britain, a Caëlic, or the Caledonian tongue, emphatically. A circumstance of this nature tends more to decide which is the most ancient nation, than the united testimonies of a whole legion of ignorant bards and senachies, who, perhaps, never dreamed of bringing the Scots from Spain to Ireland, till some one of them, more learned than the rest, discovered, that the Romans called the first Iberia, and the latter Hibernia. On such a slight foundation were probably built the romantic fictions concerning the Milesians of Ireland.

From internal proofs it sufficiently appears,

that the poems published under the name of Ossian, are not of Irish composition. The favourite chimæra, that Ireland is the mother-country of the Scots, is totally subverted and ruined. The fictions concerning the antiquities of that country, which were forming for ages, and growing as they came down, on the hands of successive senachies and fileas, are found, at last, to be the spurious brood of modern and ignorant ages. To those who know how tenacious the Irish are, of their pretended Iberian descent, this alone is proof sufficient, that poems, so subversive of their system, could never be produced by an Hibernian bard. But when we look to the language, it is so different from the Irish dialect, that it would be as ridiculous to think that Milton's Paradise Lost could be wrote by a Scottish peasant, as to suppose that the poems ascribed to Ossian were writ in Ireland.

The pretensions of Ireland to Ossian proceed from another quarter. There are handed down, in that country, traditional poems, concerning the Fiona, or the heroes of Fion Mac Comnal. This Fion, say the Irish annalists, was general of the militia of Ireland, in the reign of Cormac, in the third century. Where Keating and O'Fla-

herty learned that Ireland had an embodied militia so early, is not easy for me to determine. Their information certainly did not come from the Irish poems concerning Fion. I have just now in my hands all that remain of those compositions; but, unluckily for the antiquities of Ireland, they appear to be the work of a very modern period. Every stanza, nay almost every line, affords striking proofs that they cannot be three centuries old. Their allusions to the manners and customs of the fifteenth century are so many, that it is matter of wonder to me how any one could dream of their antiquity. They are entirely writ in that romantic taste which prevailed two ages ago. Giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches, and magicians, form the whole circle of the poet's invention. The celebrated Fion could scarcely move from one hillock to another, without encountering a giant, or being entangled in the circles of a magician. Witches on broomsticks were continually hovering round him like crows; and he had freed enchanted virgins in every valley in Ireland. In short, Fion, great as he was, passed a disagreeable life. Not only had he to engage all the mischiefs in his own country, foreign armies

invaded him, assisted by magicians and witches, and headed by kings as tall as the main-mast of a first rate. It must be owned, however, that Fion was not inferior to these in height.

A chos air Cromleach, druim-ard,
Chos eile air Crom-meal dubh,
Thoga Fion le lamh mhoir
An d'uisge o Lubhair na fruth.

With one foot on Cromleach his brow,
The other on Crommal the dark,
Fion took up with his large hand
The water from Lubar of the streams.

Cromleach and Crommal were two mountains in the neighbourhood of one another, in Ulster, and the river Lubar ran through the intermediate valley. The property of such a monster as this Fion, I should never have disputed with any nation. But the bard himself, in the poem from which the above quotation is taken, cedes him to Scotland.

Fion o Albin, siol nan laoich !
Fion from Albion, race of heroes !

Were it allowable to contradict the authority of a bard at this distance of time, I should have given as my opinion, that this enormous Fion

was of the race of the Hibernian giants, of Ruanus, or some other celebrated name, rather than a native of Caledonia, whose inhabitants, now, at least, are not remarkable for their stature. As for the poetry, I leave it to the reader.

If Fion was so remarkable for his stature, his heroes had also other extraordinary properties. In weight all the sons of strangers yielded to the celebrated Toniosal; and for hardness of skull, and, perhaps, for thickness too, the valiant Oscar stood unrivalled and alone. Ossian himself had many singular and less delicate qualifications than playing on the harp; and the brave Cuthullin was of so diminutive a size, as to be taken for a child of two years of age, by the gigantic Swaran. To illustrate this subject, I shall here lay before the reader the history of some of the Irish poems, concerning Fion Mac Comnal. A translation of these pieces, if well executed, might afford satisfaction, in an uncommon way, to the public. But this ought to be the work of a native of Ireland. To draw forth from obscurity the poems of my own country, has wasted all the time I had alloted for the muses; besides, I am too diffident of my own abilities, to undertake such a work. A gentleman in Dublin ac-

cused me to the public of committing blunders and absurdities in translating the language of my own country, and that before any translation of mine appeared *. How the gentleman came to see my blunders before I committed them, is not easy to determine; if he did not conclude that, as a Scotsman, and, of course, descended of the Milesian race, I might have committed some of those oversights which, perhaps very justly, are said to be peculiar to them.

* In Faulkner's Dublin Journal, of the first December, 1761, appeared the following advertisement: two weeks before my first publication appeared in London.

Speedily will be published, by a gentleman of this kingdom, who hath been, for some time past, employed in translating and writing historical Notes to

FINGAL, A POEM.

Originally wrote in the Irish or Erse language. In the preface to which, the translator, who is a perfect master of the Irish tongue, will give an account of the manners and customs of the ancient Irish or Scotch; and, therefore, most humbly intreats the public, to wait for his edition, which will appear in a short time, as he will set forth all the blunders and absurdities in the edition now printing in London, and shew the ignorance of the English translator, in his knowledge of Irish grammar, not understanding any part of that accidence.

From the whole tenor of the Irish poems, concerning the Fiona, it appears that Fion Mac Comnal flourished in the reign of Cormac, which is placed, by the universal consent of the senachies, in the third century. They even fix the death of Fingal in the year 286, yet his son Ossian is made contemporary with St Patrick, who preached the gospel in Ireland about the middle of the fifth age. Ossian, though at that time he must have been two hundred and fifty years of age, had a daughter young enough to become wife to the saint. On account of this family connection, Patrick of the Psalms, for so the apostle of Ireland is emphatically called in the poems, took great delight in the company of Ossian, and in hearing the great actions of his family. The saint sometimes threw off the austerity of his profession, drunk freely, and had his soul properly warmed with wine, to receive, with becoming enthusiasm, the poems of his father-in-law. One of the poems begins with this piece of useful information.

Lo don rabh Padric na mhúr,
Gun Sailm air uidh, ach a gól,
Ghluais é thigh Ossian mhic Fhion,
O san leis bu bhinn a ghloir.

The title of this poem is Teantach mor na Fiona. It appears to have been founded on the same story of the battle of Lora. The circumstances and catastrophe in both are much the same; but the Irish Ossian discovers the age in which he lived, by an unlucky anachronism. After describing the total route of Erragon, he very gravely concludes with this remarkable anecdote, that none of the foe escaped, but a few who were permitted to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This circumstance fixes the date of the composition of the piece some centuries after the famous croisade; for, it is evident, that the poet thought the time of the croisade so ancient, that he confounds it with the age of Fingal. Erragon, in the course of this poem, is often called,

Riogh Lochlin an do shloigh,
King of Denmark of two nations,

which alludes to the union of the kingdoms of Norway and Denmark; a circumstance which happened under Margaret de Waldemar, in the close of the fourteenth age. Modern, however, as this pretended Ossian was, it is certain he lived before the Irish had dreamed of appropria-

ting Fion, or Fingal, to themselves. He concludes the poem, with this reflection:

Na fagha se comhthróm nan n' arm,
Erragon Mac Annir nan lánn glas
'San n' Albin ni n' abairtair Triath
Agus ghlaoite an n' Fhiona as.

" Had Erragon, son of Annir of gleaming swords, avoided the equal contest of arms, (single combat) no chief should have afterwards been numbered in Albion, and the heroes of Fion should no more be named."

The next poem that falls under our observation, is Cath-cabhra, or, The Death of Oscar. This piece is founded on the same story which we have in the first book of Temora. So little thought the author of Cath-cabhra of making Oscar his countryman, that, in the course of two hundred lines, of which the poems consist, he puts the following expression in the mouth of the hero:

Albin an sa d' roina m' arach.——
Albion, where I was born and bred.

The poem contains almost all the incidents in the first book of Temora. In one circumstance

the bard differs materially from Ossian. Oscar, after he was mortally wounded by Cairbar, was carried by his people to a neighbouring hill, which commanded a prospect of the sea. A fleet appeared at a distance, and the hero exclaims with joy,

Loingeas mo shean-athair at' án
'S iad a tiächd le cabhair chugain,
O Albin na n' ioma stnagh.

" It is the fleet of my grandfather, coming with aid to our field, from Albion of many waves !"

The testimony of this bard is sufficient to confute the idle fictions of Keating and O'Flaherty; for, though he is far from being antient, it is probable he flourished a full century before these historians. He appears, however, to have been a much better christian than chronologer; for Fion, though he is placed two centuries before St Patrick, very devoutly recommends the soul of his grandson to his Redeemer.

Duan a Gharibh Mac-Starn is another Irish poem of high repute. The grandeur of its images, and its propriety of sentiment, might

have induced me to give a translation of it, had not I some expectations, which are now over, of seeing it in the collection of the Irish Ossian's poems, promised twelve years since to the public. The author descends sometimes from the region of the sublime to low and indecent description; the last of which the Irish translator no doubt will choose to leave in the obscurity of the original. In this piece Cuthullin is used with very little ceremony, for he is oft called the dog of Tara, in the county of Meath. This severe title of the redoubtable Cuthullin, the most renowned of Irish champions, proceeded from the poet's ignorance of etymology. Cu—voice, or commander, signifies also a dog. The poet chose the last, as the most noble appellation for his hero.

The subject of the poem is the same with that of the epic poem of Fingal. Caribh Mac-Starn is the same with Ossian's Swaran, the son of Starno. His single combats with, and his victory over all the heroes of Ireland, excepting the celebrated dog of Tara, i. e. Cuthullin, afford matter for two hundred lines of tolerable poetry. Caribh's progress in search of Cuthullin, and his intrigue with the gigantic Emir-bragal, that

hero's wife, enables the poet to extend his piece to four hundred lines. This author, it is true, makes Cuthullin a native of Ireland ; the gigantic Emir-bragal he calls the guiding star of the women of Ireland. The property of this enormous lady I shall not dispute with him or any other. But as he speaks with great tenderness of the daughters of the convent, and throws out some hints against the English nation, it is probable he lived in too modern a period to be intimately acquainted with the genealogy of Cuthullin.

Another Irish Ossian, for there were many, as appears from their difference in language and sentiment, speaks very dogmatically of Fion Mac Comnal as an Irishman. Little can be said for the judgment of this poet, and less for his delicacy of sentiment. The history of one of his episodes may at once stand as a specimen of his want of both. Ireland, in the days of Fion, happened to be threatened with an invasion by three great potentates, the kings of Lochlin, Sweden, and France. It is needless to insist upon the impropriety of a French invasion of Ireland ; it is sufficient for me to be faithful to the language of my author. Fion, upon re-

ceiving intelligence of the intended invasion, sent Ca-olt, Ossian, and Oscar, to watch the bay in which it was apprehended the enemy was to land. Oscar was the worst choice of a scout that could be made, for, brave as he was, he had the bad property of falling very often asleep on his post, nor was it possible to awake him, without cutting off one of his fingers, or dashing a large stone against his head. When the enemy appeared, Oscar, very unfortunately, was asleep. Ossian and Ca-olt consulted about the method of wakening him, and they, at last, fixed on the stone, as the less dangerous expedient.

Gun thog Caoilte a chlach, nach gán,
Agus a n' aighai' chiean gun bhuáil ;
Tri mil an tulloch gun chri', &c.

" Ca-olt took up a heavy stone, and struck it against the hero's head. The hill shook for three miles, as the stone rebounded and rolled away."

Oscar rose in wrath, and his father gravely desired him to spend his rage on his enemies, which he did to so good purpose, that he singly routed a whole wing of their army. The con-

federate kings advanced, notwithstanding, till they came to a narrow pass, possessed by the celebrated Ton-iosal. This name is very significant of the singular property of the hero who bore it. Ton-iosal, though brave, was so heavy and unwieldy, that when he sat down, it took the whole force of an hundred men to set him upright on his feet again. Luckily for the preservation of Ireland, the hero happened to be standing when the enemy appeared, and he gave so good an account of them, that Fion, upon his arrival, found little to do, but to divide the spoil among his soldiers.

All these extraordinary heroes, Fion, Ossian, Oscar, and Ca-olt, says the poet, were

> Siol Erin na gorm lánn.
> The sons of Erin of blue steel.

Neither shall I much dispute the matter with him: He has my consent also to appropriate to Ireland the celebrated Ton-iosal. I shall only say, that they are different persons from those of the same name in the Scotch poems; and that, though the stupendous valour of the first is so remarkable, they have not been equally lucky with the latter, in their poet. It is somewhat

extraordinary that Fion, who lived some ages before St Patrick, swears like a very good Christian.

Air an Dia do chum gach case.
By God, who shaped every case.

It is worthy of being remarked, that, in the line quoted, Ossian, who lived in St Patrick's days, seems to have understood something of the English, a language not then subsisting. A person more sanguine for the honour of his country than I am, might argue, from this circumstance, that this pretendedly Irish Ossian was a native of Scotland; for my countrymen are universally allowed to have an exclusive right to the second-sight.

From the instances given, the reader may form a complete idea of the Irish compositions concerning the Fiona. The greatest part of them make the heroes of Fion,

Siol Albin a n'nioma caoile.
The race of Albion of many firths.

The rest make them natives of Ireland. But the truth is, that their authority is of little consequence on either side. From the instances I have given, they appear to have been the work of

a very modern period. The pious ejaculations they contain, their allusions to the manners of the times, fix them to the fifteenth century. Had even the authors of these pieces avoided all allusions to their own times, it is impossible that the poems could pass for ancient, in the eyes of any person tolerably conversant with the Irish tongue. The idiom is so corrupted, and so many words borrowed from the English, that the language must have made considerable progress in Ireland before the poems were written.

It remains now to shew how the Irish bards begun to appropriate the Scottish Ossian and his heroes to their own country. After the English conquest, many of the natives of Ireland, averse to a foreign yoke, either actually were in a state of hostility with the conquerors, or at least paid little regard to their government. The Scots, in those ages, were often in open war, and never in cordial friendship, with the English. The similarity of manners and language, the traditions concerning their common origin, and above all, their having to do with the same enemy, created a free and friendly intercourse between the Scottish and Irish nations. As the custom of retaining bards and senachies was

common to both, so each no doubt had formed a system of history, it matters not how much soever fabulous, concerning their respective origin. It was the natural policy of the times to reconcile the traditions of both nations together, and, if possible, to reduce them from the same original stock.

The Saxon manners and language had, at that time, made great progress in the south of Scotland. The ancient language, and the traditional history of the nation, became confined entirely to the inhabitants of the Highlands, then fallen, from several concurring circumstances, into the last degree of ignorance and barbarism. The Irish who, for some ages before the conquest, had possessed a competent share of that kind of learning which then prevailed in Europe, found it no difficult matter to impose their own fictions on the ignorant Highland senachies. By flattering the vanity of the Highlanders with their long list of Heremonian kings and heroes, they, without contradiction, assumed to themselves the character of being the mother nation of the Scots of Britain. At this time, certainly, was established that Hibernian system of the original of the Scots, which after-

wards, for want of any other, was universally received. The Scots of the low country, who, by losing the language of their ancestors, lost, together with it, their national traditions, received, implicitly, the history of their country, from Irish refugees, or from Highland senachies, persuaded over into the Hibernian system.

These circumstances are far from being ideal. We have remaining many particular traditions, which bear testimony to a fact, of itself abundantly probable. What makes the matter incontestible, is, that the ancient traditional accounts of the genuine original of the Scots, have been handed down without interruption. Though a few ignorant senachies might be persuaded out of their own opinion, by the smoothness of an Irish tale, it was impossible to eradicate, from among the bulk of the people, their own national traditions. These traditions afterwards so much prevailed, that the Highlanders continue totally unacquainted with the pretended Hibernian extract of the Scots nation. Ignorant chronicle writers, strangers to the ancient language of their country, preserved only from falling to the ground so improbable a story.

This subject, perhaps, is pursued further than

it deserves; but a discussion of the pretensions of Ireland, was become in some measure necessary. If the Irish poems concerning the Fiona should appear ridiculous, it is but justice to observe, that they are scarcely more so than the poems of other nations at that period. On other subjects the bards of Ireland have displayed a genius for poetry. It was alone in matters of antiquity, that they were monstrous in their fables. Their love sonnets, and their elegies on the death of persons worthy or renowned, abound with simplicity, and a wild harmony of numbers. They become more than an atonement for their errors in every other species of poetry. But the beauty of these species depends so much on a certain *curiosa felicitas* of expression in the original, that they must appear much to disadvantage in another language.

A CRITICAL

DISSERTATION

ON THE

POEMS OF OSSIAN.

BY HUGH BLAIR, D. D.

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AMONG the monuments remaining of the ancient state of nations, few are more valuable than their poems or songs. History, when it treats of remote and dark ages, is seldom very instructive. The beginnings of society, in every country, are involved in fabulous confusion; and though they were not, they would furnish few events worth recording. But, in every period of society, human manners are a curious spectacle; and the most natural pictures of ancient manners are exhibited in the ancient

poems of nations. These present to us what is much more valuable than the history of such transactions as a rude age can afford,—the history of human imagination and passion. They make us acquainted with the notions and feelings of our fellow-creatures in the most artless ages; discovering what objects they admired, and what pleasures they pursued, before those refinements of society had taken place, which enlarge indeed, and diversify the transactions, but disguise the manners of mankind.

Besides this merit, which ancient poems have with philosophical observers of human nature, they have another with persons of taste. They promise some of the highest beauties of poetical writing. Irregular and unpolished we may expect the productions of uncultivated ages to be; but abounding, at the same time, with that enthusiasm, that vehemence and fire, which are the soul of poetry. For, many circumstances of those times which we call barbarous, are favourable to the poetical spirit. That state in which human nature shoots wild and free, though unfit for other improvements, certainly encourages the high exertions of fancy and passion.

In the infancy of societies, men live scattered

and dispersed in the midst of solitary rural scenes, where the beauties of nature are their chief entertainment. They meet with many objects, to them new and strange; their wonder and surprise are frequently excited; and by the sudden changes of fortune occurring in their unsettled state of life, their passions are raised to the utmost; their passions have nothing to restrain them, their imagination has nothing to check it. They display themselves to one another without disguise: and converse and act in the uncovered simplicity of nature. As their feelings are strong, so their language of itself assumes a poetical turn. Prone to exaggerate, they describe every thing in the strongest colours; which of course renders their speech picturesque and figurative. Figurative language owes its rise chiefly to two causes; to the want of proper names for objects, and to the influence of imagination and passion over the form of expression. Both these causes concur in the infancy of society. Figures are commonly considered as artificial modes of speech, devised by orators and poets, after the world had advanced to a refined state. The contrary of this is the truth. Men never have used so many figures

of style, as in those rude ages, when, besides the power of a warm imagination to suggest lively images, the want of proper and precise terms for the ideas they would express, obliged them to have recourse to circumlocution, metaphor, comparison, and all those substituted forms of expression, which give a poetical air to language. An American chief, at this day, harangues at the head of his tribe, in a more bold metaphorical style, than a modern European would adventure to use in an Epic poem.

In the progress of society, the genius and manners of men undergo a change more favourable to accuracy than to sprightliness and sublimity. As the world advances, the understanding gains ground upon the imagination; the understanding is more exercised; the imagination, less. Fewer objects occur that are new or surprising. Men apply themselves to trace the causes of things; they correct and refine one another; they subdue or disguise their passions; they form their exterior manners upon one uniform standard of politeness and civility. Human nature is pruned according to method and rule. Language advances from sterility to copiousness, and at the same time from fervour and enthu-

siasm, to correctness and precision. Style becomes more chaste; but less animated. The progress of the world in this respect resembles the progress of age in man. The powers of imagination are most vigorous and predominant in youth; those of the understanding ripen more slowly, and often attain not to their maturity. till the imagination begin to flag. Hence poetry, which is the child of imagination, is frequently most glowing and animated in the first ages of society. As the ideas of our youth are remembered with a peculiar pleasure on account of their liveliness and vivacity; so the most ancient poems have often proved the greatest favourites of nations.

Poetry has been said to be more ancient than prose: and, however paradoxical such an assertion may seem, yet, in a qualified sense, it is true. Men certainly never conversed with one another in regular numbers; but even their ordinary language would, in ancient times, for the reasons before assigned, approach to a poetical style; and the first compositions transmitted to posterity, beyond doubt, were, in a literal sense, poems; that is, compositions in which imagination had the chief hand, formed into some kind

of numbers, and pronounced with a musical modulation or tone. Music or song has been found coæval with society among the most barbarous nations. The only subjects which could prompt men, in their first rude state, to utter their thoughts in compositions of any length, were such as naturally assumed the tone of poetry; praises of their gods, or of their ancestors; commemorations of their own warlike exploits; or lamentations over their misfortunes. And before writing was invented, no other compositions except songs or poems, could take such hold of the imagination and memory, as to be preserved by oral tradition, and handed down from one race to another.

Hence we may expect to find poems among the antiquities of all nations. It is probable too, that an extensive search would discover a certain degree of resemblance among all the most ancient poetical productions, from whatever country they have proceeded. In a similar state of manners, similar objects and passions operating upon the imaginations of men, will stamp their productions with the same general character. Some diversity will, no doubt, be occasioned by climate and genius. But mankind never

bear such resembling features, as they do in the beginnings of society. Its subsequent revolutions give rise to the principal distinctions among nations; and divert, into channels widely separated, that current of human genius and manners, which descends originally from one spring. What we have been long accustomed to call the oriental vein of poetry, because some of the earliest poetical productions have come to us from the east, is probably no more oriental than occidental; it is characteristical of an age rather than a country; and belongs, in some measure, to all nations at a certain period. Of this the works of Ossian seem to furnish a remarkable proof.

Our present subject leads us to investigate the ancient poetical remains, not so much of the east, or of the Greeks and Romans, as of the northern nations; in order to discover whether the Gothic poetry has any resemblance to the Celtic or Galic, which we are about to consider. Though the Goths, under which name we usually comprehend all the Scandinavian tribes, were a people altogether fierce and martial, and noted, to a proverb, for their ignorance of the liberal arts, yet they too, from the earliest times, had their poets and their songs. Their poets were

distinguished by the title of Scalders, and their songs were termed Vyses *. Saxo Grammaticus, a Danish historian of considerable note, who flourished in the thirteenth century, informs

* Olaus Wormius, in the appendix to his Treatise de Literatura Runica, has given a particular account of the Gothic poetry, commonly called Runic, from Runes, which signifies the Gothic letters. He informs us that there were no fewer than 136 different kinds of measure or verse used in their Vyses; and though we are accustomed to call rhyme a Gothic invention, he says expressly, that among all these measures, rhyme, or correspondence of final syllables, was never employed. He analyses the structure of one of these kinds of verse, that in which the poem of Lodbrog, afterwards quoted, is written: which exhibits a very singular species of harmony, if it can be allowed that name, depending neither upon rhyme nor upon metrical feet, or quantity of syllables, but chiefly upon the number of the syllables, and the disposition of the letters. In every stanza was an equal number of lines: in every line six syllables. In each distich, it was requisite that three words should begin with the same letter; two of the corresponding words placed in the first line of the distich, the third, in the second line. In each line were also required two syllables, but never the final ones, formed either of the same consonants, or same vowels. As an example of this measure, Olaus gives us these two Latin lines constructed exactly according to the above rules of Runic verse:

us that very many of these songs, containing the ancient traditionary stories of the country, were found engraven upon rocks in the old Runic character; several of which he has translated into Latin, and inserted into his History. But his versions are plainly so paraphrastical, and

Christus caput nostrum
Coronet te bonis.

The initial letters of Christus, Caput, and Coronet, make the three corresponding letters of the distich. In the first line, the first syllables of Christus and of nostrum: in the second line, the *on* in coronet and in bonis make the requisite correspondence of syllables. Frequent inversions and transpositions were permitted in this poetry; which would naturally follow from such laborious attention to the collocation of words.

The curious on this subject may consult likewise Dr Hicks's Thesaurus Linguarum Septentrionalium; particularly the 23d chapter of his Grammatica Anglo-Saxonica & Mæso-Gothica; where they will find a full account of the structure of the Anglo Saxon verse, which nearly resembled the Gothic. They will find also some specimens both of Gothic and Saxon poetry. An extract which Dr Hicks has given from the work of one of the Danish Scalders, entitled, Hervarer Saga, containing an evocation from the dead, may be found in the 6th volume of Miscellany Poems, published by Mr Dryden.

forced into such an imitation of the style and the measures of the Roman poets, that one can form no judgment from them of the native spirit of the original. A more curious monument of the true Gothic poetry is preserved by Olaus Wormius in his book de Literatura Runica. It is an Epicedium, or funeral song, composed by Regner Lodbrog; and translated by Olaus, word for word from the original. This Lodbrog was a king of Denmark, who lived in the eighth century, famous for his wars and victories; and at the same time an eminent Scalder or poet. It was his misfortune to fall at last into the hands of one of his enemies, by whom he was thrown into prison, and condemned to be destroyed by serpents. In this situation he solaced himself with rehearsing all the exploits of his life. The poem is divided into twenty-nine stanzas, of ten lines each; and every stanza begins with these words, Pugnavimus Ensibus, We have fought with our swords. Olaus' version is in many places so obscure as to be hardly intelligible. I have subjoined the whole below, exactly as he has published it; and shall translate as much as

may give the English reader an idea of the spirit and strain of this kind of poetry *.

" We have fought with our swords. I was " young, when, towards the east, in the bay of

1 *

Pugnavimus Ensibus
Haud post longum tempus
Cum in Gotlandia accessimus
Ad serpentis immensi necem
Tunc impetravimus Thoram
Ex hoc vocarunt me virum
Quod serpentem transfodi
Hirsutam braccam ob illam cedem
Cuspide ictum intuli in colubrum
Ferro lucidorum stupendiorum.

2.

Multum juvenis fui quando acquisivimus
Orientem versus in Oreonico freto
Vulnerum amnes avidæ feræ
Et flavipedi avi
Accepimus ibidem sonuerunt
Ad sublimes galeas
Dura ferra magnam escam
Omnis erat oceanus vulnus
Vadavit corvus in sanguine Cæsorum.

" Oreon, we made torrents of blood flow, to " gorge the ravenous beast of prey, and the yel- " low-footed bird. There resounded the hard " steel upon the lofty helmets of men. The

3.

Alte tulimus tunc lanceas
Quando viginti annos numeravimus
Et celebrem laudem comparavimus passim
Vicimus octo barones
In oriente ante Dimini portum
Aquilæ impetravimus tunc sufficientem
Hospitii sumptum in illa strage
Sudor decidit in vulnerum
Oceano perdidit exercitus ætatem.

4.

Pugnæ facta copia
Cum Helsingianos postulavimus
Ad aulam Odini
Naves direximus in æstium Vistulæ
Mucro potuit tum mordere
Omnis erat vulnus unda
Terra rubefacta Calido
Frendebat gladius in loricas
Gladius findebat Clypeos.

5.

Memini neminem tunc fugisse
Priusquam in navibus

" whole ocean was one wound. The crow waded " in the blood of the slain. When we had num- " bered twenty years, we lifted our spears on " high, and every where spread our renown.

Heraudus in bello caderet
Non findit navibus
Alius baro præstantior
Mare ad portum
In navibus longis post illum
Sic attulit princeps passim
Alacre in bellum cor.

6.

Exercitus abjecit clypeos
Cum hasta volavit
Ardua ad virorum pectora
Momordit Scarforum cautes
Gladius in pugna
Sanguineus erat Clypeus
Antequam Rafno rex caderet
Fluxit ex virorum capitibus
Calidus in loricas sudor.

7.

Habere potuerunt tum corvi
Ante Indirorum insulas
Sufficientem prædam dilaniandam
Acquisivimus feris carnivoris
Plenum prandium unico actu

" Eight barons we overcame in the east, before " the port of Diminum ; and plentifully we " feasted the eagle in that slaughter. The warm " stream of wounds ran into the ocean. The

Difficile erat unius facere mentionem
Oriente sole
Spicula vidi pungere
Propulerunt arcus ex se ferra.

8.

Altum mugierunt enses
Antequam in Laneo campo
Eislinus rex cecidit
Processimus auro ditati
Ad terram prostratorum dimicandum
Gladius secuit Clypeorum
Picturas in galearum conventu
Cervicum mustum ex vulneribus
Diffusum per cerebrum fissum.

9.

Tenimus Clypeos in sanguine
Cum hastam unximus
Ante Boring holmum
Telorum nubes disrumpunt clypeum
Extrusit arcus ex se metallum
Volnir cecidit in conflictu
Non erat illo rex major
Cæsi dispersi late per littora
Feræ amplectebantur escam.

" army fell before us. When we steered our " ships into the mouth of the Vistula, we sent " the Helsingians to the Hall of Odin. Then " did the sword bite. The waters were all one

10.

Pugna manifeste crescebat
Antequam Freyr rex caderet
In Flandrorum terra
Cæpit cæruleus ad incidendum
Sanguine illitus in auream
Loricam in pugna
Durus armorum mucro olim
Virgo deploravit matutinam lanienam
Multa præda dabatur teris.

11.

Centies centenos vidi jacere
In navibus
Ubi Æuglanes vocatur
Navigavimus ad pugnam
Per sex dies antequam exercitus caderet
Transegimus mucronum missam
Id exortu solis
Coactus est pro nostris gladiis
Valdiotur in bello occumbere.

12.

Ruit pluvia sanguinis de gladiis
Præceps in Bardafyrde

" wound. The earth was dyed red with the " warm stream. The sword rung upon the " coats of mail, and clove the bucklers in twain. " None fled on that day, till among his ships

Pallidum corpus pro accipitribus
Murmuravit arcus ubi mucro
Acriter mordebat Loricas
In conflictu
Odini Pileus Galea
Cucurrit arcus ad vulnus
Venenate acutus conspersus sudore sanguineo.

13.

Tenuimus magica scuta
Alte in pugnæ Indo
Ante Hiadningum sinum
Videre licuit tum viros
Qui gladiis lacerarunt Clypeos
In gladiatorio murmure
Galeæ attritæ virorum
Erat sicut splendidam virginem
In lecto juxta se collocare.

14.

Dura venit tempestas Clypeis
Cadaver cecidit in terram
In Nortumbria
Erat circa matutinum tempus
Hominibus necessum erat fugere

" Heraudus fell. Than him no braver baron
" cleaves the sea with ships; a cheerful heart
" did he ever bring to the combat. Then the
" host threw away their shields, when the up-

Ex prælio ubi acute
Cassidis campos mordebant gladii
Erat hoc veluti Juvenem viduam
In primaria sede osculari.

15.

Herthiofe evasit fortunatus
In Australibus Orcadibus ipse
Victoriæ in nostris hominibus
Cogebatur in armorum nimbo
Rogvaldus occumbere
Iste venit summus super accipitres
Luctus in gladiorum ludo
Strenue jactabat concussor
Galeæ sanguinis teli.

16.

Quilibet jacebat transversim supra alium
Gaudebat pugna lætus
Accipiter ob gladiorum ludum
Non fecit aquilam aut aprum
Qui Irlandiam gubernavit
Conventus fiebat ferri & Clypei
Marstanus rex jejunis
Fiebat in vedræ sinu
Præda data corvis.

" lifted spear flew at the breasts of heroes. The " sword bit the Scarfian rocks ; bloody was the " shield in battle, until Rafno the king was slain. " From the heads of warriors the warm sweat

17.

Bellatorem multum vidi cadere
Mante ante machæram
Virum in mucronum dissidio
Filio meo incidit mature
Gladius juxta cor
Egilius fecit Agnerum spoliatum
Imperterritum virum vita
Sonuit lancea prope Hamdi
Griseam loricam splendebant vexilla.

18.

Verborum tenaces vidi dissecare
Haut minutim pro lupis
Endili maris ensibus
Erat per Hebdomadæ spacium
Quasi mulieres vinum apportarent
Rubefactæ erant naves
Valde in strepitu armorum
Scissa erat lorica
In Scioldungorum prælio.

19.

Pulchricomum vidi crepusculascere
Virginis amatorem circa matutinum

" streamed down their armour. The crows a-
" round the Indirian islands had an ample prey.
" It were difficult to single out one among so
" many deaths. At the rising of the sun I be-

Et confabulationis amicum viduarum
Erat sicut calidum balneum
Vinei vasis nympha portaret
Nos in llæ freto
Antiquam Orn rex caderet
Sanguineum Clypeum vidi ruptum
Hoc invertit virorum vitam.

20.

Egimus gladiorum ad cædem
Ludum in Lindis insula
Cum regibus tribus
Pauci potuerunt inde lætari
Cecidit multus in rictum ferarum
Accipiter dilaniavit carnem cum lupo
Ut satur inde discederet
Hybernorum sanguis in oceanum
Copiose decidit per mactationis tempus.

21.

Alte gladius mordebat Clypeos
Tunc cum aurei coloris
Hasta fricabat loricas
Videre licuit in Onlugs insula
Per secula multum post

" held the spears piercing the bodies of foes, and " the bows throwing forth their steel-pointed ar- " rows. Loud roared the swords in the plains " of Lano. The virgin long bewailed the slaugh-

Ibi fuit ad gladiorum ludos
Reges processerunt
Rubicundum erat circa insulam
Ar volans Draco vulnerum.

22.

Quid est viro forti morte certius
Etsi ipse in armorum nimbo
Adversus collocatus sit
Sæpe deplorat ætatem
Qui nunquam premitur
Malum ferunt timidum incitare
Aquilam ad gladiorum ludum
Meticulosus venit nuspiam
Cordi suo usui.

23.

Hoc numero æquum ut pro
In contactu gladiorum
Juvenis unus contra alterum
Non retrocedat vir a viro.
Hoc fuit viri fortis nobilitas diu
Semper debat amoris amicus virginum
Audax esse in fremitu armorum.

" ter of that morning." In this strain the poet continues to describe several other military exploits. The images are not much varied : The noise of arms, the streaming of blood, and the

24.

Hoc videtur mihi re vera
Quod fata sequimur
Rarus transgreditur fata Parcarum
Non destinavi Ellæ
De vitæ exitu meæ
Cum ego sanguinem semimortuus tegerem
Et naves in aquas protrusi
Passim impetravimus tum feris
Escam in Scotiæ sinubus.

25.

Hoc ridere me facit semper
Quod Balderi patris scamna
Parata scio in aula
Bibemus cerevisiam brevi
Ex concavis crateribus craniorum
Non gemit vir fortis contra mortem
Magnifici in Odini domibus
Non venio desperabundis
Verbis ad Odini aulam.

26.

Hic vellent nunc omnes
Filii Aslaugæ gladiis

feasting the birds of prey, often recurring. He mentions the death of two of his sons in battle; and the lamentation he describes as made for one of them is very singular. A Grecian or Ro-

Amarum bellum excitare
Si exacte scirent
Calamitates nostras
Quem non pauci angues
Venenati me discerpunt
Matrem accepi meis
Filiis ita ut corda valeant.

27.

Valde inclinatur ad hæreditatem
Crudele stat nocumentum a vipera
Anguis inhabitat aulam cordis
Speramus alterius ad Othini
Virgam in Ellæ sanguine
Filiism eis livescet
Sua iri rubescet
Non acres juvenes
Sessionem tranquillam faciant.

28.

Habeo quinquagies
Prælia sub signis facta
Ex belli invitatione & semel
Minime putavi hominum
Quod me futuris esset

man poet would have introduced the virgins or nymphs of the wood, bewailing the untimely fall of a young hero. But, says our Gothic poet, "When Rogvaldus was slain, for him mourned "all the hawks of heaven," as lamenting a benefactor who had so liberally supplied them with prey; "for boldly," as he adds, "in the strife "of swords, did the breaker of helmets throw "the spear of blood."

The poem concludes with sentiments of the highest bravery and contempt of death. "What "is more certain to the brave man than death, "though amidst the storm of swords, he stands

Juvenis didici mucronem rubefacere
Alius rex præstantior
Nos Asæ invitabunt
Non est lugenda mors.

29.

Fert animus finire
Invitant me Dysæ
Quas ex Othini aula
Othinus mihi misit
Lætus cerevisiam cum Asis
In summa sede bibam
Vitæ elapsæ sunt horæ
Ridens moriar.

" always ready to oppose it? He only regrets " this life who hath never known distress. The " timorous man allures the devouring eagle to " the field of battle. The coward, wherever he " comes, is useless to himself. This I esteem ho- " nourable, that the youth should advance to " the combat fairly matched one against another; " nor man retreat from man. Long was this the " warrior's highest glory. He who aspires to " the love of virgins, ought always to be fore- " most in the roar of arms. It appears to me " of truth, that we are led by the Fates. Sel- " dom can any overcome the appointment of " destiny. Little did I foresee that Ella * was " to have my life in his hands, in that day when " fainting I concealed my blood, and pushed " forth my ships into the waves; after we had " spread a repast for the beasts of prey through- " out the Scottish bays. But this makes me al- " ways rejoice that in the halls of our father Bal- " der (or Odin) I know there are seats prepared, " where, in a short time, we shall be drinking ale " out of the hollow skulls of our enemies. In " the house of the mighty Odin, no brave man

* This was the name of his enemy who had condemned him to death.

" laments death. I come not with the voice of
" despair to Odin's hall. How eagerly would
" all the sons of Aslauga now rush to war, did
" they know the distress of their father, whom a
" multitude of venomous serpents tear! I have
" given to my children a mother who hath filled
" their hearts with valour. I am fast approach-
" ing to my end. A cruel death awaits me from
" the viper's bite. A snake dwells in the midst
" of my heart. I hope that the sword of some
" of my sons shall yet be stained with the blood
" of Ella. The valiant youths will wax red
" with anger, and will not sit in peace. Fifty
" and one times have I reared the standard in
" battle. In my youth I learned to dye the
" sword in blood: my hope was then, that no
" king among men would be more renowned
" than me. The goddesses of death will now soon
" call me; I must not mourn my death. Now
" I end my song. The goddesses invite me away;
" they whom Odin has sent to me from his hall.
" I will sit upon a lofty seat, and drink ale joy-
" fully with the goddesses of death. The hours
" of my life are run out. I will smile when I
" die."

This is such poetry as we might expect from a

barbarous nation. It breathes a most ferocious spirit. It is wild, harsh, and irregular; but at the same time animated and strong; the style, in the original, full of inversions, and, as we learn from some of Olaus's notes, highly metaphorical and figured.

But when we open the works of Ossian, a very different scene presents itself. There we find the fire and the enthusiasm of the most early times, combined with an amazing degree of regularity and art. We find tenderness, and even delicacy of sentiment, greatly predominant over fierceness and barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the softest feelings, and at the same time elevated with the highest ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and true heroism. When we turn from the poetry of Lodbrog to that of Ossian, it is like passing from a savage desart into a fertile and cultivated country. How is this to be accounted for? Or by what means to be reconciled with the remote antiquity attributed to these poems? This is a curious point; and requires to be illustrated.

That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original is past all doubt. Their conformity with the Celtic nations, in language, manners, and reli-

gion, proves it to a full demonstration. The Celtæ, a great and mighty people, altogether distinct from the Goths and Teutones, once extended their dominion over all the west of Europe; but seem to have had their most full and complete establishment in Gaul. Wherever the Celtæ or Gauls are mentioned by ancient writers, we seldom fail to hear of their Druids and their Bards; the institution of which two orders, was the capital distinction of their manners and policy. The Druids were their philosophers and priests; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions: And both these orders of men seem to have subsisted among them, as chief members of the state, from time immemorial *. We must not therefore imagine the Celtæ to have been altogether a gross and rude nation. They possessed from very remote ages a formed system

* Τρία φῦλα τῶν τιμωμενών διαφερόντως ἐςι. Βαρδοι τε καὶ ὐατεις, καί Δρυϊδας. Βαρδοι μεν ὑμνητωὶ καὶ ποιηταὶ. Strabo, lib. iv.

Εἰσι πωρ ᾶυτοῖς καὶ ποιηταὶ μελῶν, ὕς Βαρδους ὀνομαζουσιν. ὕτοι δε μετ' ὀργάνων, ταῖς λυραις ὁμοιών, ὐς δε βλασφημουσι. Diodor. Sicul. l. 5.

Τα δε ἀκουσματα ᾶυτῶν εισιν οἱ καλὀμενοι βαρδοι. ποιητωί δ' ὐτοι τυγχανὀυσι μετ' ωδης ἐπαινὀς λεγοντες. Posidonius ap. Athenæum, l. 6.

of discipline and manners, which appears to have had a deep and lasting influence. Ammianus Marcellinus gives them this express testimony, that there flourished among them the study of the most laudable arts; introduced by the Bards, whose office it was to sing in heroic verse, the gallant actions of illustrious men; and by the Druids, who lived together in colleges or societies, after the Pythagorean manner, and philosophizing upon the highest subjects, asserted the immortality of the human soul *. Though Julius Cæsar, in his account of Gaul, does not expressly mention the Bards, yet it is plain that under the title of Druids, he comprehends that whole college or order; of which the Bards, who it is probable were the disciples of the

* Per hæc loca (speaking of Gaul) hominibus paulatim excultis *viguere studia laudabilium doctrinarum;* inchoata per Bardos & Euhages & Druidas. Et Bardi quidem fortia virorum illustrium facta heroicis composita versibus cum dulcibus lyræ modulis cantitârunt. Euhages vero scrutantes seriùm & sublimia naturæ pandere conabantur. Inter hos, Druidæ ingeniis celsiores, ut auctoritas Pythagoræ decrevit, sodalitiis adstricti consortiis, quæstionibus altarum occultarumque rerum erecti sunt; & despectantes humana pronuntiârunt animas immortales. Amm. Marcellinus, lib. 15. cap. 9.

Druids, undoubtedly made a part. It deserves remark, that, according to his account, the Druidical institution first took rise in Britain, and passed from thence into Gaul; so that they who aspired to be thorough masters of that learning were wont to resort to Britain. He adds too, that such as were to be initiated among the Druids, were obliged to commit to their memory a great number of verses, insomuch that some employed twenty years in this course of education; and that they did not think it lawful to record these poems in writing, but sacredly handed them down by tradition from race to race *.

So strong was the attachment of the Celtic nations to their poetry and their bards, that amidst all the changes of their government and manners, even long after the order of the Druids was extinct, and the national religion altered, the bards continued to flourish; not as a set of strolling songsters, like the Greek Ἀοιδοὶ or Rhapsodists, in Homer's time, but as an order of men highly respected in the state, and supported by a public establishment. We find them, according to the testimonies of Strabo and Diodorus, be-

* Vid. Cæsar de bello Gall. lib. 6.

fore the age of Augustus Cæsar; and we find them remaining under the same name, and exercising the same functions as of old, in Ireland, and in the north of Scotland, almost down to our own times. It is well known that in both these countries, every Regulus or chief had his own bard, who was considered as an officer of rank in his court; and had lands assigned him, which descended to his family. Of the honour in which the bards were held, many instances occur in Ossian's poems. On all important occasions, they were the ambassadors between contending chiefs; and their persons were held sacred. "Cairbar feared to stretch his sword to "the bards, though his soul was dark." "Loose "the bards," said his brother Cathmor, "they "are the sons of other times. Their voice shall "be heard in other ages, when the kings of Te-"mora have failed."

From all this, the Celtic tribes clearly appear to have been addicted in so high a degree to poetry, and to have made it so much their study from the earliest times, as may remove our wonder at meeting with a vein of higher poetical refinement among them, than was at first sight to have been expected among nations whom we are

accustomed to call barbarous. Barbarity, I must observe, is a very equivocal term; it admits of many different forms and degrees; and though in all of them it excludes polished manners, it is, however, not inconsistent with generous sentiments and tender affections *. What degrees of friendship, love, and heroism, may possibly be found to prevail in a rude state of so-

* Surely among the wild Laplanders, if any where, barbarity is in its most perfect state. Yet their love songs, which Scheffer has given us in his Lapponia, are a proof that natural tenderness of sentiment may be found in a country into which the least glimmering of science has never penetrated. To most English readers these songs are well known by the elegant translations of them in the Spectator, No. 366 and 400. I shall subjoin Scheffer's Latin version of one of them, which has the appearance of being strictly literal:

Sol, clarissimum emitte lumen in paludem Orra. Si enisus in summa picearum cacumina scirem me visurum Orra paludem, in ea eniterer, ut viderem inter quos amica, mea esset flores; omnes suscinderem frutices ibi enatos, omnes ramos præsecarem, hos virentes ramos. Cursum nubium essem secutus, quæ iter suum instituunt versus paludem Orra, si ad te volare possem alis, cornicum alis. Sed mihi desunt alæ, alæ querquedulæ, pedesque, anserum pedes plantæve bonæ quæ deferre me valeant ad te. Satis expectâsti diu; per tot dies, tot dies tuos

ciety, no one can say. Astonishing instances of them, we know, from history, have sometimes appeared: and a few characters distinguished by those high qualities, might lay a foundation for a set of manners being introduced into the songs of the bards, more refined, it is probable, and exalted, according to the usual poetical license, than the real manners of the country. In particular, with respect to heroism; the great employment of the Celtic bards, was to delineate the characters, and sing the praises of heroes. So Lucan:

Vos quoque qui fortes animos, belloque peremtos,
Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
Plurima securi fudistis carmina bardi. PHARS. l. 1.

Now, when we consider a college or order of

optimos, oculis tuis jucundissimis, corde tuo amicissimo. Quod si longissimè velles effugere, cito tamen te consequerer. Quid firmius validiusve esse potest quam contorti nervi, catenæve ferreæ, quæ durissimè ligant? Sic amor contorquet caput nostrum, mutat cogitationes & sententias. Feurorum voluntas, voluntas venti; juvenum cogitationes, longæ cogitationes. Quos si audirem omnes, a via, a via justa declinarem. Unum est consilium quod capiam; ita scio viam rectiorem me reperturum. Schefferi Lapponia, cap. 25.

men, who, cultivating poetry throughout a long series of ages, had their imaginations continually employed on the ideas of heroism; who had all the poems and panegyrics, which were composed by their predecessors, handed down to them with care; who rivalled and endeavoured to outstrip those who had gone before them, each in the celebration of his particular hero; is it not natural to think that at length the character of a hero would appear in their songs with the highest lustre, and be adorned with qualities truly noble? Some of the qualities, indeed, which distinguish a Fingal, moderation, humanity, and clemency, would not probably be the first ideas of heroism occurring to a barbarous people: but no sooner had such ideas begun to dawn on the minds of poets, than, as the human mind easily opens to the native representations of human perfection, they would be seized and embraced; they would enter into their panegyrics; they would afford materials for succeeding bards to work upon and improve; they would contribute not a little to exalt the public manners. For such songs as these, familiar to the Celtic warriors from their childhood, and throughout their whole life, both

in war and in peace, their principal entertainment, must have had a very considerable influence in propagating among them real manners nearly approaching to the poetical; and in forming even such a hero as Fingal. Especially when we consider that among their limited objects of ambition, among the few advantages which in a savage state man could obtain over man, the chief was fame, and that immortality which they expected to receive from their virtues and exploits, in the songs of bards *.

Having made these remarks on the Celtic poetry and bards in general, I shall next consider the particular advantages which Ossian possessed. He appears clearly to have lived in a period which enjoyed all the benefit I just now mentioned of traditionary poetry. The exploits of Trathal, Trenmor, and the other ancestors of Fingal, are spoken of as familiarly known. Ancient bards are frequently alluded to. In one

* When Edward I. conquered Wales, he put to death all the Welch bards. This cruel policy plainly shews how great an influence he imagined the songs of these bards to have over the minds of the people; and of what nature he judged that influence to be. The Welch bards were of the same Celtic race with the Scottish and Irish.

remarkable passage, Ossian describes himself as living in a sort of classical age, enlightened by the memorials of former times, which were conveyed in the songs of bards; and points at a period of darkness and ignorance which lay beyond the reach of tradition. "His words," says he, "came "only by halves to our ears; they were dark as "the tales of other times, before the light of the "song arose." Ossian himself appears to have been endowed by nature with an exquisite sensibility of heart; prone to that tender melancholy which is so often an attendant on great genius; and susceptible equally of strong and of soft emotions. He was not only a professed bard, educated with care, as we may easily believe, to all the poetical art then known, and connected, as he shews us himself, in intimate friendship with the other contemporary bards, but a warrior also; and the son of the most renowned hero and prince of his age. This formed a conjunction of circumstances, uncommonly favourable towards exalting the imagination of a poet. He relates expeditions in which he had been engaged; he sings of battles in which he had fought and overcome; he had beheld the most illustrious scenes which that age could exhibit;

both of heroism in war, and magnificence in peace. For however rude the magnificence of those times may seem to us, we must remember that all ideas of magnificence are comparative; and that the age of Fingal was an æra of distinguished splendour in that part of the world. Fingal reigned over a considerable territory; he was enriched with the spoils of the Roman province; he was ennobled by his victories and great actions; and was in all respects a personage of much higher dignity than any of the chieftains, or heads of clans, who lived in the same country, after a more extensive monarchy was established.

The manners of Ossian's age, so far as we can gather them from his writings, were abundantly favourable to a poetical genius. The two dispiriting vices, to which Longinus imputes the decline of poetry, covetousness and effeminacy, were as yet unknown. The cares of men were few. They lived a roving indolent life; hunting and war, their principal employments; and their chief amusements, the music of bards and "the feast of shells." The great object pursued by heroic spirits, was, "to receive their fame," that is, to become worthy of being celebrated in the

songs of bards; and "to have their name on the "four grey stones." To die, unlamented by a bard, was deemed so great a misfortune, as even to disturb their ghosts in another state. "They "wander in thick mists beside the reedy lake: "but never shall they rise, without the song, to "the dwelling of winds." After death they expected to follow employments of the same nature with those which had amused them on earth; to fly with their friends on clouds, to pursue airy deer, and to listen to their praise in the mouths of bards. In such times as these, in a country where poetry had been so long cultivated, and so highly honoured, is it any wonder that among the race and succession of bards, one Homer should arise; a man who, endowed with a natural happy genius, favoured by peculiar advantages of birth and condition, and meeting, in the course of his life, with a variety of incidents proper to fire his imagination, and to touch his heart, should attain a degree of eminence in poetry, worthy to draw the admiration of more refined ages?

The compositions of Ossian are so strongly marked with characters of antiquity, that although there were no external proof to support

that antiquity, hardly any reader of judgment and taste, could hesitate in referring them to a very remote æra. There are four great stages through which men successively pass in the progress of society. The first and earliest is the life of hunters; pasturage succeeds to this, as the ideas of property begin to take root; next agriculture; and lastly, commerce. Throughout Ossian's poems, we plainly find ourselves in the first of these periods of society; during which, hunting was the chief employment of men, and the principal method of their procuring subsistence. Pasturage was not indeed wholly unknown; for we hear of dividing the herd in the case of a divorce; but the allusions to herds and to cattle are not many; and of agriculture, we find no traces. No cities appear to have been built in the territories of Fingal. No arts are mentioned except that of navigation and of working in iron *. Every thing presents to us the most

* Their skill in navigation need not at all surprise us. Living in the western islands, along the coast, or in a country which is every where intersected with arms of the sea, one of the first objects of their attention, from the earliest time, must have been how to traverse the waters. Hence that knowledge of the stars, so necessary for

simple and unimproved manners. At their feasts, the heroes prepared their own repast; they sat round the light of the burning oak; the wind lifted their locks, and whistled through their open halls. Whatever was beyond the necessaries of life was known to them only as the spoil of the Roman province; "the gold of the stranger; "the lights of the stranger; the steeds of the "stranger, the children of the rein."

This representation of Ossian's times, must strike us the more, as genuine and authentic,

guiding them by night, of which we find several traces in Ossian's works; particularly in the beautiful description of Cathmor's shield, in the 7th book of Temora. Among all the northern maritime nations, navigation was very early studied. Piratical incursions were the chief means they employed for acquiring booty; and were among the first exploits which distinguished them in the world. Even the savage Americans were, at their first discovery, found to possess the most surprising skill and dexterity in navigating their immense lakes and rivers.

The description of Cuthullin's chariot, in the first book of Fingal, has been objected to by some, as representing greater magnificence than is consistent with the supposed poverty of that age. But this chariot is plainly only a horse litter; and the gems mentioned in the description, are no other than the shiniug stones or pebbles, known to be frequently found along the western coast of Scotland.

when it is compared with a poem of later date, which Mr Macpherson has preserved in one of his notes. It is that wherein five bards are represented as passing the evening in the house of a chief, and each of them separately giving his description of the night. The night scenery is beautiful; and the author has plainly imitated the manner and style of Ossian: But he has allowed some images to appear which betray a later period of society. For we meet with windows clapping, the herds of goats and cows seeking shelter, the shepherd wandering, corn on the plain, and the wakeful hind rebuilding the shocks of corn which had been overturned by the tempest. Whereas in Ossian's works, from beginning to end, all is consistent; no modern allusion drops from him; but every where the same face of rude nature appears; a country wholly uncultivated, thinly inhabited, and recently peopled. The grass of the rock, the flower of the heath, the thistle with its beard, are the chief ornaments of his landscapes. "The desert," says Fingal, "is enough for me, with all its woods and deer."

The circle of ideas and transactions is no wider than suits such an age: nor any greater diversity introduced into characters, than the

events of that period would naturally display. Valour and bodily strength are the admired qualities. Contentions arise, as is usual among savage nations, from the slightest causes. To be affronted at a tournament, or to be omitted in the invitation to a feast, kindles a war. Women are often carried away by force; and the whole tribe, as in the Homeric times, rise to avenge the wrong. The heroes show refinement of sentiment indeed on several occasions, but none of manners. They speak of their past actions with freedom, boast of their exploits, and sing their own praise. In their battles, it is evident that drums, trumpets, or bagpipes, were not known or used. They had no expedient for giving the military alarms but striking a shield, or raising a loud cry: And hence the loud and terrible voice of Fingal is often mentioned, as a necessary qualification of a great general; like the βοὴν ἀγαθος Μενελαος of Homer. Of military discipline or skill, they appear to have been entirely destitute. Their armies seem not to have been numerous; their battles were disorderly; and terminated, for the most part, by a personal combat, or wrestling of the two chiefs; after

which, " the bard sung the song of peace, and " the battle ceased along the field."

The manner of composition bears all the marks of the greatest antiquity. No artful transitions ; nor full and extended connection of parts ; such as we find among the poets of later times, when order and regularity of composition were more studied and known ; but a style always rapid and vehement ; in narration concise even to abruptness, and leaving several circumstances to be supplied by the reader's imagination. The language has all that figurative cast, which, as I before shewed, partly a glowing and undisciplined imagination, partly the sterility of language and the want of proper terms, have always introduced into the early speech of nations; and in several respects, it carries a remarkable resemblance to the style of the Old Testament. It deserves particular notice, as one of the most genuine and decisive characters of antiquity, that very few general terms, or abstract ideas, are to be met with in the whole collection of Ossian's works. The ideas of men, at first, were all particular. They had not words to express general conceptions. These were the consequence of more profound reflection, and longer acquain-

tance with the arts of thought and of speech. Ossian, accordingly, almost never expresses himself in the abstract. His ideas extended little farther than to the objects he saw around him. A public, a community, the universe, were conceptions beyond his sphere. Even a mountain, a sea, or a lake, which he has occasion to mention, though only in a simile, are for the most part particularized; it is the hill of Cromla, the storm of the sea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego. A mode of expression, which, whilst it is characteristical of ancient ages, is at the same time highly favourable to descriptive poetry. For the same reasons, personification is a poetical figure not very common with Ossian. Inanimate objects, such as winds, trees, and flowers, he sometimes personifies with great beauty. But the personifications which are so familiar to later poets, of Fame, Time, Terror, Virtue, and the rest of that class, were unknown to our Celtic bard. These were modes of conception too abstract for his age.

All these are marks so undoubted, and some of them too so nice and delicate, of the most early times, as put the high antiquity of these poems out of question. Especially when we con-

sider, that if there had been any imposture in this case, it must have been contrived and executed in the Highlands of Scotland, two or three centuries ago; as up to this period, both by manuscripts, and by the testimony of a multitude of living witnesses, concerning the uncontrovertible tradition of these poems, they can clearly be traced. Now this is a period when that country enjoyed no advantages for a composition of this kind, which it may not be supposed to have enjoyed in as great, if not in a greater degree, a thousand years before. To suppose that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been in a state of gross ignorance and barbarity, there should have arisen in that country a poet, of such exquisite genius, and of such deep knowledge of mankind, and of history, as to divest himself of the ideas and manners of his own age, and to give us a just and natural picture of a state of society ancienter by a thousand years; one who could support this counterfeited antiquity through such a large collection of poems, without the least inconsistency; and who, possessed of all this genius and art, had at the same time the self-denial of concealing himself, and of ascribing his own works to an

antiquated bard, without the imposture being detected; is a supposition that transcends all bounds of credibility.

There are, besides, two other circumstances to be attended to, still of greater weight, if possible, against this hypothesis. One is, the total absence of religious ideas from this work; for which the translator has, in his preface, given a very probable account, on the footing of its being the work of Ossian. The druidical superstition was, in the days of Ossian, on the point of its final extinction; and for particular reasons, odious to the family of Fingal; whilst the Christian faith was not yet established. But had it been the work of one, to whom the ideas of Christianity were familiar from his infancy; and who had superadded to them also the bigoted superstition of a dark age and country; it is impossible but in some passage or other, the traces of them would have appeared. The other circumstance is, the entire silence which reigns with respect to all the great clans or families, which are now established in the Highlands. The origin of these several clans is known to be very ancient: And it is as well known, that there is no passion by which a native Highlander is more distinguished,

than by attachment to his clan, and jealousy for its honour. That a Highland bard, in forging a work relating to the antiquities of his country, should have inserted no circumstance which pointed out the rise of his own clan, which ascertained its antiquity, or increased its glory, is, of all suppositions that can be formed, the most improbable; and the silence on this head, amounts to a demonstration that the author lived before any of the present great clans were formed or known.

Assuming it then, as we well may, for certain, that the poems now under consideration are genuine venerable monuments of very remote antiquity; I proceed to make some remarks upon their general spirit and strain. The two characteristics of Ossian's poetry are, tenderness and sublimity. It breathes nothing of the gay and chearful kind; an ear of solemnity and seriousness is diffused over the whole. Ossian is perhaps the only poet who never relaxes, or lets himself down into the light and amusing strain; which I readily admit to be no small disadvantage to him, with the bulk of readers. He moves perpetually in the high region of the grand and the pathetic. One key note is struck at the be-

ginning, and supported to the end; nor is any ornament introduced, but what is perfectly concordant with the general tone or melody. The events recorded are all serious and grave; the scenery throughout, wild and romantic. The extended heath by the sea shore; the mountain shaded with mist; the torrent rushing through a solitary valley; the scattered oaks, and the tombs of warriors over-grown with moss; all produce a solemn attention in the mind, and prepare it for great and extraordinary events. We find not in Ossian, an imagination that sports itself, and dresses out gay trifles to please the fancy. His poetry, more perhaps than that of any other writer, deserves to be styled, *The Poetry of the Heart.* It is a heart penetrated with noble sentiments, and with sublime and tender passions; a heart that glows, and kindles the fancy; a heart that is full, and pours itself forth. Ossian did not write, like modern poets, to please readers and critics. He sung from the love of poetry and song. His delight was to think of the heroes among whom he had flourished; to recal the affecting incidents of his life; to dwell upon his past wars, and loves, and friendships; till, as he expresses it himself, "there comes a voice to

" Ossian and awakes his soul. It is the voice of " years that are gone; they roll before me with " all their deeds;" and under this true poetic inspiration, giving vent to his genius, no wonder we should so often hear and acknowledge in his strains, the powerful and ever-pleasing voice of nature.

——Arte, natura potentior omni—
Est Deus in nobis, agitante calescimus illo.

It is necessary here to observe, that the beauties of Ossian's writings cannot be felt by those who have given them only a single or a hasty perusal. His manner is so different from that of the poets, to whom we are most accustomed; his style is so concise, and so much crowded with imagery; the mind is kept at such a stretch in accompanying the author; that an ordinary reader is at first apt to be dazzled and fatigued, rather than pleased. His poems require to be taken up at intervals, and to be frequently reviewed; and then it is impossible but his beauties must open to every reader who is capable of sensibility. Those who have the highest degree of it, will relish them the most.

As Homer is, of all the great poets, the one

whose manner, and whose times come the nearest to Ossian's, we are naturally led to run a parallel in some instances between the Greek and the Celtic bard. For, though Homer lived more than a thousand years before Ossian, it is not from the age of the world, but from the state of society, that we are to judge of resembling times. The Greek has, in several points, a manifest superiority. He introduces a greater variety of incidents; he possesses a larger compass of ideas; has more diversity in his characters; and a much deeper knowledge of human nature. It was not to be expected, that in any of these particulars, Ossian could equal Homer. For Homer lived in a country where society was much farther advanced; he had beheld many more objects; cities built and flourishing; laws instituted; order, discipline, and arts begun. His field of observation was much larger and more splendid; his knowledge, of course, more extensive; his mind also, it shall be granted, more penetrating. But if Ossian's ideas and objects be less diversified than those of Homer, they are all, however, of the kind fittest for poetry: The bravery and generosity of heroes, the tenderness of lovers, the attachments of friends, parents, and children.

In a rude age and country, though the events that happen be few, the undissipated mind broods over them more; they strike the imagination, and fire the passions in a higher degree; and of consequence become happier materials to a poetical genius, than the same events when scattered through the wide circle of more varied action, and cultivated life.

Homer is a more cheerful and sprightly poet than Ossian. You discern in him all the Greek vivacity; whereas Ossian uniformly maintains the gravity and solemnity of a Celtic hero. This too is in a great measure to be accounted for from the different situations in which they lived, partly personal, and partly national. Ossian had survived all his friends, and was disposed to melancholy by the incidents of his life. But besides this, cheerfulness is one of the many blessings which we owe to formed society. The solitary wild state is always a serious one. Bating the sudden and violent bursts of mirth, which sometimes break forth at their dances and feasts; the savage American tribes have been noted by all travellers for their gravity and taciturnity. Somewhat of this taciturnity may be also remarked in Ossian. On all occasions he is frugal of

his words; and never gives you more of an image or a description, than is just sufficient to place it before you in one clear point of view. It is a blaze of lightning, which flashes and vanishes. Homer is more extended in his descriptions; and fills them up with a greater variety of circumstances. Both the poets are dramatic; that is, they introduce their personages frequently speaking before us. But Ossian is concise and rapid in his speeches, as he is in every other thing. Homer, with the Greek vivacity, had also some portion of the Greek loquacity. His speeches indeed are highly characteristical; and to them we are much indebted for that admirable display he has given of human nature. Yet if he be tedious any where, it is in these; some of them trifling; and some of them plainly unseasonable. Both poets are eminently sublime; but a difference may be remarked in the species of their sublimity. Homer's sublimity is accompanied with more impetuosity and fire; Ossian's with more of a solemn and awful grandeur. Homer hurries you along; Ossian elevates, and fixes you in astonishment. Homer is most sublime in actions and battles; Ossian, in description and sentiment. In the pathetic, Homer, when he

chuses to exert it, has great power; but Ossian exerts that power much oftener, and has the character of tenderness far more deeply imprinted on his works. No poet knew better how to seize and melt the heart. With regard to dignity of sentiment, the pre-eminence must clearly be given to Ossian. This is indeed a surprising circumstance, that in point of humanity, magnanimity, virtuous feelings of every kind, our rude Celtic bard should be distinguished to such a degree, that not only the heroes of Homer, but even those of the polite and refined Virgil, are left far behind by those of Ossian.

After these general observations on the genius and spirit of our author, I now proceed to a nearer view, and more accurate examination of his works: and as Fingal is the first great poem in this collection, it is proper to begin with it. To refuse the title of an epic poem to Fingal, because it is not, in every little particular, exactly conformable to the practice of Homer and Virgil, were the mere squeamishness and pedantry of criticism. Examined even according to Aristotle's rules, it will be found to have all the essential requisites of a true and regular epic; and to have several of them in so high a degree, as at

first view to raise our astonishment on finding Ossian's composition so agreeable to rules of which he was entirely ignorant. But our astonishment will cease, when we consider from what source Aristotle drew those rules. Homer knew no more of the laws of criticism than Ossian; but guided by nature, he composed in verse a regular story, founded on heroic actions, which all posterity admired. Aristotle, with great sagacity and penetration, traced the causes of this general admiration. He observed what it was in Homer's composition, and in the conduct of his story, which gave it such power to please; from this observation he deduced the rules which poets ought to follow, who would write and please like Homer; and to a composition formed according to such rules, he gave the name of an epic poem. Hence his whole system arose. Aristotle studied nature in Homer. Homer and Ossian both wrote from nature. No wonder that among all the three there should be such agreement and conformity.

The fundamental rules delivered by Aristotle concerning an epic poem, are these: That the action which is the ground-work of the poem, should be one, complete, and great; that it

should be feigned, not merely historical; that it should be enlivened with characters and manners, and heightened by the marvellous.

But before entering on any of these, it may perhaps be asked, what is the moral of Fingal? For, according to M. Bossu, an epic poem is no other than an allegory, contrived to illustrate some moral truth. The poet, says this critic, must begin with fixing on some maxim, or instruction, which he intends to inculcate on mankind. He next forms a fable, like one of Æsop's, wholly with a view to the moral; and having thus settled and arranged his plan, he then looks into traditionary history for names and incidents, to give his fable some air of probability. Never did a more frigid, pedantic notion, enter into the mind of a critic. We may safely pronounce, that he who should compose an epic poem after this manner, who should first lay down a moral and contrive a plan, before he had thought of his personages and actors, might deliver indeed very sound instruction, but would find few readers. There cannot be the least doubt that the first object which strikes an epic poet, which fires his genius, and gives him any idea of his work, is the action or subject he is to celebrate. Hardly is

there any tale, any subject a poet can chuse for such a work, but will afford some general moral instruction. An epic poem is by its nature one of the most moral of all poetical compositions. But its moral tendency is by no means to be limited to some common-place maxim, which may be gathered from the story. It arises from the admiration of heroic actions, which such a composition is peculiarly calculated to produce; from the virtuous emotions which the characters and incidents raise, whilst we read it; from the happy impression which all the parts separately, as well as the whole taken together, leave upon the mind. However, if a general moral be still insisted on, Fingal obviously furnishes one, not inferior to that of any other poet, viz. That Wisdom and Bravery always triumph over brutal force: or another nobler still; That the most complete victory over an enemy is obtained by that moderation and generosity which convert him into a friend.

The unity of the Epic action, which, of all Aristotle's rules, is the chief and most material, is so strictly preserved in Fingal, that it must be perceived by every reader. It is a more complete unity than what arises from relating the ac-

tions of one man, which the Greek critic justly censures as imperfect; it is the unity of one enterprise, the deliverance of Ireland from the invasion of Swaran: An enterprise which has surely the full heroic dignity. All the incidents recorded bear a constant reference to one end; no double plot is carried on; but the parts unite into a regular whole: and as the action is one and great, so it is an entire and complete action. For we find, as the critic farther requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; a Nodus, or intrigue in the poem; difficulties occurring through Cuthullin's rashness and bad success: those difficulties gradually surmounted; and at last the work conducted to that happy conclusion which is held essential to epic poetry. Unity is indeed observed with greater exactness in Fingal, than in almost any other epic composition. For not only is unity of subject maintained, but that of time and place also. The autumn is clearly pointed out as the season of the action; and from beginning to end the scene is never shifted from the heath of Lena, along the sea shore. The duration of the action in Fingal, is much shorter than in the Iliad or Æneid, but sure there may be shorter as well as longer heroic

poems; and if the authority of Aristotle be also required for this, he says expressly that the epic composition is indefinite as to the time of its duration. Accordingly, the action of the Iliad lasts only forty-seven days, whilst that of the Æneid is continued for more than a year.

Throughout the whole of Fingal, there reigns that grandeur of sentiment, style, and imagery, which ought ever to distinguish this high species of poetry. The story is conducted with no small art. The poet goes not back to a tedious recital of the beginning of the war with Swaran; but hastening to the main action, he falls in exactly, by a most happy coincidence of thought, with the rule of Horace.

> Semper ad eventum festinat, & in medias res,
> Non secus ac notas, auditorem rapit—
> Nec gemino bellum Trojanum auditur ab ovo.
>
> DE ARTE POET.

He invokes no muse, for he acknowledged none; but his occasional addresses to Malvina have a finer effect than the invocation of any muse. He sets out with no formal proposition of his subject; but the subject naturally and easily unfolds itself; the poem opening in an animated manner with the situation of Cuthullin,

and the arrival of a scout who informs him of Swaran's landing. Mention is presently made of Fingal, and of the expected assistance from the ships of the lonely isle, in order to give further light to the subject. For the poet often shows his address in gradually preparing us for the events he is to introduce; and in particular the preparation for the appearance of Fingal, the previous expectations that are raised, and the extreme magnificence fully answering these expectations, with which the hero is at length presented to us, are all worked up with such skilful conduct as would do honour to any poet of the most refined times. Homer's art in magnifying the character of Achilles has been universally admired. Ossian certainly shews no less art in aggrandizing Fingal. Nothing could be more happily imagined for this purpose than the whole management of the last battle, wherein Gaul, the son of Morni, had besought Fingal to retire, and to leave to him and his other chiefs the honour of the day. The generosity of the king in agreeing to this proposal; the majesty with which he retreats to the hill, from whence he was to behold the engagement, attended by his bards, and waving the lightning of his sword;

his perceiving the chiefs overpowered by numbers, but from unwillingness to deprive them of the glory of the victory by coming in person to their assistance, first sending Ullin, the bard, to animate their courage; and, at last, when the danger becomes more pressing, his rising in his might, and interposing, like a divinity, to decide the doubtful fate of the day; are all circumstances contrived with so much art as plainly discover the Celtic bards to have been not unpractised in heroic poetry.

The story which is the foundation of the Iliad is in itself as simple as that of Fingal. A quarrel arises between Achilles and Agamemnon concerning a female slave; on which Achilles, apprehending himself to be injured, withdraws his assistance from the rest of the Greeks. The Greeks fall into great distress, and beseech him to be reconciled to them. He refuses to fight for them in person, but sends his friend Patroclus; and upon his being slain, goes forth to revenge his death, and kills Hector. The subject of Fingal is this: Swaran comes to invade Ireland: Cuthullin, the guardian of the young king, had applied for assistance to Fingal, who reigned in the opposite coast of Scotland. But before Fingal's

arrival, he is hurried by rash counsel to encounter Swaran. He is defeated; he retreats; and desponds. Fingal arrives in this conjuncture. The battle is for some time dubious; but in the end he conquers Swaran; and the remembrance of Swaran's being the brother of Agandecca, who had once saved his life, makes him dismiss him honourably. Homer, it is true, has filled up his story with a much greater variety of particulars than Ossian; and in this has shewn a compass of invention superior to that of the other poet. But it must not be forgotten, that though Homer be more circumstantial, his incidents, however, are less diversified in kind than those of Ossian. War and bloodshed reign throughout the Iliad; and notwithstanding all the fertility of Homer's invention, there is so much uniformity in his subjects, that there are few readers who, before the close, are not tired of perpetual fighting. Whereas in Ossian, the mind is relieved by a more agreeable diversity. There is a finer mixture of war and heroism, with love and friendship, of martial, with tender scenes, than is to be met with, perhaps, in any other poet. The episodes too, have great propriety; as natural, and proper to that age and country: consisting of

the songs of bards, which are known to have been the great entertainment of the Celtic heroes in war, as well as in peace. These songs are not introduced at random; if you except the episode of Duchommar and Morna, in the first book, which, though beautiful, is more unartful than any of the rest; they have always some particular relation to the actor who is interested, or to the events which are going on; and, whilst they vary the scene, they preserve a sufficient connection with the main subject, by the fitness and propriety of their introduction.

As Fingal's love to Agandecca influences some circumstances of the poem, particularly the honourable dismission of Swaran at the end; it was necessary that we should be let into this part of the hero's story. But as it lay without the compass of the present action, it could be regularly introduced no where, except in an episode. Accordingly the poet, with as much propriety, as if Aristotle himself had directed the plan, has contrived an episode for this purpose in the song of Carril, at the beginning of the third book.

The conclusion of the poem is strictly according to rule; and is every way noble and pleasing. The reconciliation of the contending heroes, the

consolation of Cuthullin, and the general felicity that crowns the action, sooth the mind in a very agreeable manner, and form that passage from agitation and trouble, to perfect quiet and repose, which critics require as the proper termination of the epic work. "Thus they passed "the night in song, and brought back the morn- "ing with joy. Fingal arose on the heath; and "shook his glittering spear in his hand. He "moved first towards the plains of Lena; and "we followed like a ridge of fire. Spread the "sail, said the king of Morven, and catch the "winds that pour from Lena. We rose on the "wave with songs; and rushed with joy through "the foam of the ocean." So much for the unity and general conduct of the epic action in Fingal.

With regard to that property of the subject which Aristotle requires, that it should be feigned, not historical, he must not be understood so strictly, as if he meant to exclude all subjects which have any foundation in truth. For such exclusion would both be unreasonable in itself, and, what is more, would be contrary to the practice of Homer, who is known to have founded his Iliad on historical facts concerning the war

of Troy, which was famous throughout all Greece. Aristotle means no more than that it is the business of a poet not to be a mere annalist of facts, but to embellish truth with beautiful, probable, and useful fictions; to copy nature, as he himself explains it, like painters, who preserve a likeness, but exhibit their objects more grand and beautiful than they are in reality. That Ossian has followed this course, and building upon true history, has sufficiently adorned it with poetical fiction for aggrandizing his characters and facts, will not, I believe, be questioned by most readers. At the same time, the foundation which those facts and characters had in truth, and the share which the poet himself had in the transactions which he records, must be considered as no small advantage to his work. For truth makes an impression on the mind far beyond any fiction; and no man, let his imagination be ever so strong, relates any events so feelingly as those in which he has been interested; paints any scene so naturally as one which he has seen; or draws any characters in such strong colours as those which he has personally known. It is considered as an advantage of the epic subject to be taken from a period so distant, as by

being involved in the darkness of tradition, may give licence to fable. Though Ossian's subject may at first view appear unfavourable in this respect, as being taken from his own times, yet when we reflect that he lived to an extreme old age; that he relates what had been transacted in another country, at the distance of many years, and after all that race of men who had been the actors were gone off the stage; we shall find the objection in a great measure obviated. In so rude an age, when no written records were known, when tradition was loose, and accuracy of any kind little attended to, what was great and heroic in one generation, easily ripened into the marvellous in the next.

The natural representation of human characters in an epic poem is highly essential to its merit: and in respect of this there can be no doubt of Homer's excelling all the heroic poets who have ever wrote. But though Ossian be much inferior to Homer in this article, he will be found to be equal at least, if not superior, to Virgil; and has indeed given all the display of human nature, which the simple occurrences of his times could be expected to furnish. No dead uniformity of character prevails in Fingal; but, on the con-

trary, the principal characters are not only clearly distinguished, but sometimes artfully contrasted, so as to illustrate each other. Ossian's heroes are, like Homer's, all brave; but their bravery, like those of Homer's too, is of different kinds. For instance, the prudent, the sedate, the modest and circumspect Connal, is finely opposed to the presumptuous, rash, overbearing, but gallant and generous Calmar. Calmar hurries Cuthullin into action by his temerity; and when he sees the bad effect of his counsels, he will not survive the disgrace. Connal, like another Ulysses, attends Cuthullin to his retreat, counsels, and comforts him under his misfortune. The fierce, the proud, the high-spirited Swaran is admirably contrasted with the calm, the moderate, and generous Fingal. The character of Oscar is a favourite one throughout the whole poems. The amiable warmth of the young warrior; his eager impetuosity in the day of action; his passion for fame; his submission to his father; his tenderness for Malvina, are the strokes of a masterly pencil; the strokes are few; but it is the hand of nature, and attracts the heart. Ossian's own character, the old man, the hero, and the bard, all in one, presents to us through the

whole work a most respectable and venerable figure, which we always contemplate with pleasure. Cuthullin is a hero of the highest class; daring, magnanimous, and exquisitely sensible to honour. We become attached to his interest, and are deeply touched with his distress; and after the admiration raised for him in the first part of the poem, it is a strong proof of Ossian's masterly genius that he durst adventure to produce to us another hero, compared with whom, even the great Cuthullin should be only an inferior personage; and who should rise as far above him, as Cuthullin rises above the rest.

Here indeed, in the character and description of Fingal, Ossian triumphs almost unrivalled: for we may boldly defy all antiquity to shew us any hero equal to Fingal. Homer's Hector possesses several great and amiable qualities; but Hector is a secondary personage in the Iliad, not the hero of the work. We see him only occasionally; we know much less of him than we do of Fingal; who not only in this Epic poem, but in Temora, and throughout the rest of Ossian's works, is presented in all that variety of lights, which give the full display of a character. And though Hector faithfully discharges his duty to his coun-

try, his friends, and his family, he is tinctured, however, with a degree of the same savage ferocity, which prevails among all the Homeric heroes. For we find him insulting over the fallen Patroclus, with the most cruel taunts, and telling him, when he lies in the agony of death, that Achilles cannot help him now; and that in a short time his body, stripped naked, and deprived of funeral honours, shall be devoured by the vultures *. Whereas in the character of Fingal, concur almost all the qualities that can ennoble human nature; that can either make us admire the hero, or love the man. He is not only unconquerable in war, but he makes his people happy by his wisdom in the days of peace. He is truly the father of his people. He is known by the epithet of "Fingal of the mildest look;" and distinguished, on every occasion, by humanity and generosity. He is merciful to his foes †; full of

* Iliad, xvi. 830. II. xvii. 127.

† When he commands his sons, after Swaran is taken prisoner, to "pursue the rest of Lochlin, over the heath "of Lena; that no vessel may hereafter bound on the "dark rolling waves of Inistore;" he means not assuredly, as some have misrepresented him, to order a general slaughter of the foes, and to prevent their saving them-

affection to his children; full of concern about his friends; and never mentions Agandecca, his first love, without the utmost tenderness. He is the universal protector of the distressed; "None ever went sad from Fingal." "O Os-"car! bend the strong in arms; but spare the "feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides "against the foes of thy people; but like the "gale that moves the grass to those who ask "thine aid. So Trenmor lived; such Trathal "was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was "the support of the injured; the weak rested "behind the lightning of my steel." These were the maxims of true heroism, to which he formed his grandson. His fame is represented as every where spread; the greatest heroes acknowledge his superiority; his enemies tremble at his name; and the highest encomium that can be bestowed on one whom the poet would most exalt, is to say, that his soul was like the soul of Fingal.

To do justice to the poet's merit, in supporting such a character as this, I must observe,

selves by flight; but, like a wise general, he commands his chiefs to render the victory complete, by a total rout of the enemy; that they might adventure no more for the future, to fit out any fleet against him or his allies.

what is not commonly attended to, that there is no part of poetical execution more difficult, than to draw a perfect character in such a manner, as to render it distinct and affecting to the mind. Some strokes of human imperfection and frailty, are what usually give us the most clear view, and the most sensible impression of a character; because they present to us a man, such as we have seen; they recal known features of human nature. When poets attempt to go beyond this range, and describes a faultless hero, they, for the most part, set before us a sort of vague undistinguishable character, such as the imagination cannot lay hold of, or realize to itself, as the object of affection. We know how much Virgil has failed in this particular. His perfect hero, Æneas, is an unanimated, insipid personage, whom we may pretend to admire, but whom no one can heartily love. But what Virgil has failed in, Ossian, to our astonishment, has successfully executed. His Fingal, though exhibited without any of the common human failings, is nevertheless a real man; a character which touches and interests every reader. To this it has much contributed, that the poet has represented him as an old man; and by this has

gained the advantage of throwing around him a great many circumstances, peculiar to that age, which paint him to the fancy in a more distinct light. He is surrounded with his family : he instructs his children in the principles of virtue : he is narrative of his past exploits ; he is venerable with the grey locks of age ; he is frequently disposed to moralize, like an old man, on human vanity and the prospect of death. There is more art, at least more felicity, in this, than may at first be imagined. For youth and old age, are the two states of human life, capable of being placed in the most picturesque lights. Middle age is more general and vague ; and has fewer circumstances peculiar to the idea of it. And when any object is in a situation that admits it to be rendered particular, and to be cloathed with a variety of circumstances, it always stands out more clear and full in poetical description.

Besides human personages, divine or supernatural agents are often introduced into epic poetry ; forming what is called the machinery of it ; which most critics hold to be an essential part. The marvellous, it must be admitted, has always a great charm for the bulk of readers. It gratifies the imagination, and affords room for

striking and sublime description. No wonder, therefore, that all poets have a strong propensity towards it. But I must observe, that nothing is more difficult, than to adjust properly the marvellous with the probable. If a poet sacrifice probability, and fill his work with extravagant supernatural scenes, he spreads over it an appearance of romance and childish fiction; he transports his reader from this world, into a fantastic, visionary region; and loses that weight and dignity which should reign in epic poetry. No work, from which probability is altogether banished, can make a lasting and deep impression. Human actions and manners, are always the most interesting objects which can be presented to a human mind. All machinery, therefore, is faulty which withdraws these too much from view; or obscures them under a cloud of incredible fictions. Besides being temperately employed, machinery ought always to have some foundation in popular belief. A poet is by no means at liberty to invent what system of the marvellous he pleases: he must avail himself either of the religious faith, or the superstitious credulity of the country wherein he lives; so as

to give an air of probability to events which are most contrary to the common course of nature.

In these respects, Ossian appears to me to have been remarkably happy. He has indeed followed the same course with Homer. For it is perfectly absurd to imagine, as some critics have done, that Homer's mythology was invented by him, in consequence of profound reflections on the benefit it would yield to poetry. Homer was no such refining genius. He found the traditionary stories on which he built his Iliad, mingled with popular legends concerning the intervention of the gods; and he adopted these, because they amused the fancy. Ossian, in like manner, found the tales of his country full of ghosts and spirits: It is likely he believed them himself; and he introduced them, because they gave his poems that solemn and marvellous cast, which suited his genius. This was the only machinery he could employ with propriety; because it was the only intervention of supernatural beings, which agreed with the common belief of the country. It was happy; because it did not interfere in the least with the proper display of human characters and actions; because it had less of the incredible than most other

kinds of poetical machinery; and because it served to diversify the scene, and to heighten the subject by an awful grandeur, which is the great design of machinery.

As Ossian's mythology is peculiar to himself, and makes a considerable figure in his other poems, as well as in Fingal, it may be proper to make some observations on it, independent of its subserviency to epic composition. It turns, for the most part, on the appearances of departed spirits. These, consonantly to the notions of every rude age, are represented not as purely immaterial, but as thin airy forms, which can be visible or invisible at pleasure; their voice is feeble; their arm is weak; but they are endowed with knowledge more than human. In a separate state, they retain the same dispositions which animated them in life. They ride on the wind; they bend their airy bows; and pursue deer formed of clouds. The ghosts of departed bards continue to sing. The ghosts of departed heroes frequent the fields of their former fame. "They rest together in their caves, and talk of "mortal men. Their songs are of other worlds. "They come sometimes to the ear of rest, and "raise their feeble voice." All this presents

to us much the same set of ideas, concerning spirits, as we find in the eleventh book of the Odyssey, where Ulysses visits the regions of the dead: and in the twenty-third book of the Iliad, the ghost of Patroclus, after appearing to Achilles, vanishes precisely like one of Ossian's, emitting a shrill, feeble cry, and melting away like smoke.

But though Homer's and Ossian's ideas concerning ghosts were of the same nature, we cannot but observe, that Ossian's ghosts are drawn with much stronger and livelier colours than those of Homer. Ossian describes ghosts with all the particularity of one who had seen and conversed with them, and whose imagination was full of the impression they had left upon it. He calls up those awful and tremendous ideas which the

——Simulacra modis pallentia miris,

are fitted to raise in the human mind; and which, in Shakespeare's style, "harrow up the "soul." Crugal's ghost, in particular, in the beginning of the second book of Fingal, may vie with any appearance of this kind, described by any epic or tragic poet whatever. Most poets

would have contented themselves with telling us, that he resembled, in every particular, the living Crugal; that his form and dress were the same, only his face more pale and sad; and that he bore the mark of the wound by which he fell. But Ossian sets before our eyes a spirit from the invisible world, distinguished by all those features, which a strong astonished imagination would give to a ghost. "A dark red stream of "fire comes down from the hill. Crugal sat up- "on the beam; he that lately fell by the hand "of Swaran, striving in the battle of heroes. "His face is like the beam of the setting moon. "His robes are of the clouds of the hill. His "eyes are like two decaying flames. Dark is "the wound of his breast.—The stars dim-twink- "led through his form; and his voice was like "the sound of a distant stream." The circumstance of the stars being beheld, "dim-twinkling "through his form," is wonderfully picturesque; and conveys the most lively impression of his thin and shadowy substance. The attitude in which he is afterwards placed, and the speech put into his mouth, are full of that solemn and awful sublimity, which suits the subject. "Dim, "and in tears, he stood, and stretched his pale

" hand over the hero. Faintly he raised his " feeble voice, like the gale of the reedy Lego.— " My ghost, O Connal ! is on my native hills; " but my corse is on the sands of Ullin. Thou " shalt never talk with Crugal, or find his lone " steps in the heath. I am light as the blast of " Cromla; and I move like the shadow of mist. " Connal, son of Colgar! I see the dark cloud " of death. It hovers over the plains of Lena. " The sons of green Erin shall fall. Remove " from the field of ghosts.—Like the darkened " moon he retired in the midst of the whistling " blast."

Several other appearances of spirits might be pointed out, as among the most sublime passages of Ossian's poetry. The circumstances of them are considerably diversified; and the scenery always suited to the occasion. " Oscar " slowly ascends the hill. The meteors of night " set on the heath before him. A distant tor- " rent faintly roars. Unfrequent blasts rush " through the aged oaks. The half-enlightened " moon sinks dim and red behind her hill. Fee- " ble voices are heard on the heath. Oscar " drew his sword." Nothing can prepare the fancy more happily for the awful scene that is to

follow. "Trenmor came from his hill, at the "voice of his mighty son. A cloud like the "steed of the stranger, supported his airy limbs. "His robe is of the mist of Lano, that brings "death to the people. His sword is a green me- "teor, half-extinguished. His face is without "form, and dark. He sighed thrice over the "hero: And thrice, the winds of the night roar- "ed around. Many were his words to Oscar.— "He slowly vanished, like a mist that melts on "the sunny hill." To appearances of this kind, we can find no parallel among the Greek or Roman poets. They bring to mind that noble description in the book of Job: "In thoughts "from the visions of the night, when deep sleep "falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trem- "bling, which made all my bones to shake. "Then a spirit passed before my face. The hair "of my flesh stood up. It stood still; but I "could not discern the form thereof. An image "was before mine eyes. There was silence; and I "heard a voice—Shall mortal man be more just "than God *!"

As Ossian's supernatural beings are described

* Job. iv. 13.—17.

with a surprising force of imagination, so they are introduced with propriety. We have only three ghosts in Fingal: That of Crugal, which comes to warn the host of impending destruction, and to advise them to save themselves by retreat; that of Evirallin, the spouse of Ossian, which calls him to rise and rescue their son from danger; and that of Agandecca, which, just before the last engagement with Swaran, moves Fingal to pity, by mourning for the approaching destruction of her kinsmen and people. In the other poems, ghosts sometimes appear when invoked to foretell futurity; frequently, according to the notions of these times, they come as forerunners of misfortune or death, to those whom they visit; sometimes they inform their friends at a distance, of their own death; and sometimes they are introduced to heighten the scenery on some great and solemn occasion. "A hundred "oaks burn to the wind; and faint light gleams "over the heath. The ghosts of Ardven pass "through the beam; and shew their dim and "distant forms. Comala is half unseen on her "meteor; and Hidallan is sullen and dim."—— "The awful faces of other times, looked from "the clouds of Crona."—Fercuth! I saw the

" ghost of night. Silent he stood on that bank, " his robe of mist flew on the wind. I could be- " hold his tears. An aged man he seemed, and " full of thought."

The ghosts of strangers mingle not with those of the natives. " She is seen ; but not like the " daughters of the hill. Her robes are from " the strangers land ; and she is still alone." When the ghost of one whom we had formerly known is introduced, the propriety of the living character is still preserved. This is remarkable in the appearance of Calmar's ghost, in the poem entitled The Death of Cuthullin. He seems to forebode Cuthullin's death, and to beckon him to his cave. Cuthullin reproaches him for supposing that he could be intimidated by such prognostics. " Why dost thou bend thy dark eyes " on me, ghost of the car-borne Calmar ? " Wouldst thou frighten me, O Matha's son ! " from the battles of Cormac ? Thy hand was " not feeble in war ; neither was thy voice for " peace. How art thou changed, chief of La- " ra ! if now thou dost advise to fly ! Retire " thou to thy cave : Thou are not Calmar's " ghost : He delighted in battle ; and his arm " was like the thunder of heaven." Calmar

makes no return to this seeming reproach: But, "He retired in his blast with joy; for he had "heard the voice of his praise." This is precisely the ghost of Achilles in Homer; who, notwithstanding all the dissatisfaction he expresses with his state in the region of the dead, as soon as he had heard his son Neoptolemus praised for his gallant behaviour, strode away with silent joy to rejoin the rest of the shades *.

It is a great advantage of Ossian's mythology, that it is not local and temporary, like that of most other ancient poets; which of course is apt to seem ridiculous, after the superstitions have passed away on which it was founded. Ossian's mythology is, to speak so, the mythology of human nature; for it is founded on what has been the popular belief, in all ages and countries, and under all forms of religion, concerning the appearances of departed spirits. Homer's machinery is always lively and amusing; but far from being always supported with proper dignity. The indecent squabbles among his gods, surely do no honour to epic poetry. Whereas Ossian's machinery has dignity upon all occasions. It is

* Odyss. Lib. 11.

indeed a dignity of the dark and awful kind; but this is proper; because coincident with the strain and spirit of the poetry. A light and gay mythology, like Homer's, would have been perfectly unsuitable to the subject on which Ossian's genius was employed. But though his machinery be always solemn, it is not, however, always dreary or dismal; it is enlivened, as much as the subject would permit, by those pleasant and beautiful appearances, which he sometimes introduces, of the spirits of the hill. These are gentle spirits; descending on sun-beams; fair-moving on the plain; their forms white and bright; their voices sweet; and their visits to men propitious. The greatest praise that can be given, to the beauty of a living woman, is to say, "She is fair as the ghost of the "hill; when it moves in a sun-beam at noon, "over the silence of Morven." "The hunter "shall hear my voice from his booth. He shall "fear, but love my voice. For sweet shall my "voice be for my friends; for pleasant were "they to me."

Besides ghosts, or the spirits of departed men, we find in Ossian some instances of other kinds of machinery. Spirits of a superior nature to

ghosts are sometimes alluded to, which have power to embroil the deep; to call forth winds and storms, and pour them on the land of the stranger; to overturn forests, and to send death among the people. We have prodigies too; a shower of blood; and when some disaster is befalling at a distance, the sound of death heard on the strings of Ossian's harp: all perfectly consonant, not only to the peculiar ideas of northern nations, but to the general current of a superstitious imagination in all countries. The description of Fingal's airy hall, in the poem called Berrathon, and of the ascent of Malvina into it, deserves particular notice, as remarkably noble and magnificent. But above all, the engagement of Fingal with the spirit of Loda, in Carric-thura, cannot be mentioned without admiration. I forbear transcribing the passage, as it must have drawn the attention of every one who has read the works of Ossian. The undaunted courage of Fingal, opposed to all the terrors of the Scandinavian God; the appearance and the speech of that awful spirit; the wound which he receives, and the shriek which he sends forth, "as, rolled into himself, he rose "upon the wind;" are full of the most amazing

and terrible majesty. I know no passage more sublime in the writings of any uninspired author. The fiction is calculated to aggrandize the hero; which it does to a high degree; nor is it so unnatural or wild a fiction, as might at first be thought. According to the notions of those times, supernatural beings were material, and consequently, vulnerable. The spirit of Loda was not acknowledged as a deity by Fingal; he did not worship at the stone of his power; he plainly considered him as the God of his enemies alone; as a local deity, whose dominion extended no further than to the regions where he was worshipped; who had, therefore, no title to threaten him, and no claim to his submission. We know there are poetical precedents of great authority, for fictions fully as extravagant; and if Homer be forgiven for making Diomed attack and wound in battle, the gods whom that chief himself worshipped, Ossian surely is pardonable for making his hero superior to the god of a foreign territory *.

* The scene of this encounter of Fingal with the spirit of Loda is laid at Inistore, or the islands of Orkney; and in the description of Fingal's landing there, it is said, "A rock bends along the coast with all its echoing

Notwithstanding the poetical advantages which I have ascribed to Ossian's machinery, I acknowledge it would have been much more beautiful and perfect, had the author discovered some knowledge of a Supreme Being. Although his silence on this head has been accounted for by the learned and ingenious translator in a very probable manner, yet still it must be held

" wood. On the top is the circle of Loda, with the mos-
" sy stone of power." In confirmation of Ossian's topography, it is proper to acquaint the reader, that in these islands, as I have been well informed, there are many pillars, and circles of stones, still remaining, known by the name of the stones and circles of Loda, or Loden; to which some degree of superstitious regard is annexed to this day. These islands, until the year 1468, made a part of the Danish dominions. Their ancient language, of which there are yet some remains among the natives, is called the Norse; and is a dialect, not of the Celtic, but of the Scandinavian tongue. The manners and the superstitions of the inhabitants are quite distinct from those of the Highlands and western isles of Scotland. Their ancient songs, too, are of a different strain and character, turning upon magical incantations and evocations from the dead, which were the favourite subjects of the old Runic poetry. They have many traditions among them, of wars in former times with the inhabitants of the western islands.

a considerable disadvantage to the poetry. For the most august and lofty ideas that can embellish poetry are derived from the belief of a divine administration of the universe: And hence the invocation of a Supreme Being, or at least of some superior powers who are conceived as presiding over human affairs, the solemnities of religious worship, prayers preferred, and assistance implored on critical occasions, appear with great dignity in the works of almost all poets as chief ornaments of their compositions. The absence of all such religious ideas from Ossian's poetry, is a sensible blank in it; the more to be regretted, as we can easily imagine what an illustrious figure they would have made under the management of such a genius as his; and how finely they would have been adapted to many situations which occur in his works.

After so particular an examination of Fingal, it were needless to enter into as full a discussion of the conduct of Temora, the other epic poem. Many of the same observations, especially with regard to the great characteristics of heroic poetry, apply to both. The high merit, however, of Temora, requires that we should not pass it by without some remarks.

The scene of Temora, as of Fingal, is laid in Ireland; and the action is of a posterior date. The subject is, an expedition of the hero, to dethrone and punish a bloody usurper, and to restore the possession of the kingdom to the posterity of the lawful prince; an undertaking worthy of the justice and heroism of the great Fingal. The action is one, and complete. The poem opens with the descent of Fingal on the coast, and the consultation held among the chiefs of the enemy. The murder of the young prince Cormac, which was the cause of the war, being antecedent to the epic action, is introduced with great propriety as an episode in the first book. In the progress of the poem, three battles are described, which rise in their importance above one another; the success is various, and the issue for some time doubtful; till at last, Fingal brought into distress, by the wound of his great general, Gaul, and the death of his son Fillan, assumes the command himself, and having slain the king in single combat, restores the rightful heir to his throne.

Temora has perhaps less fire than the other epic poem; but in return it has more variety, more tenderness, and more magnificence. The

reigning idea, so often presented to us of "Fin-gal in the last of his fields," is venerable and affecting; nor could any more noble conclusion be thought of, than the aged hero, after so many successful atchievements, taking his leave of battles, and with all the solemnities of those times resigning his spear to his son. The events are less crouded in Temora than in Fingal; actions and characters are more particularly displayed; we are let into the transactions of both hosts; and informed of the adventures of the night as well as of the day. The still pathetic, and the romantic scenery of several of the night adventures, so remarkably suited to Ossian's genius, occasion a fine diversity in the poem; and are happily contrasted with the military operations of the day.

In most of our author's poems, the horrors of war are softened by intermixed scenes of love and friendship. In Fingal, these are introduced as episodes; in Temora, we have an incident of this nature wrought into the body of the piece; in the adventure of Cathmor and Sulmalla. This forms one of the most conspicuous beauties of that poem. The distress of Sulmalla, disguised and unknown among strangers, her tender and anxious concern for the safety of

Cathmor, her dream, and her melting remembrance of the land of her fathers; Cathmor's emotion when he first discovers her, his struggles to conceal and express his passion, lest it should unman him in the midst of war, "though his soul poured forth in secret, when "he beheld her fearful eye;" and the last interview between them, when overcome by her tenderness, he lets her know he had discovered her, and confesses his passion; are all wrought up with the most exquisite sensibility and delicacy.

Besides the characters which appeared in Fingal, several new ones are here introduced; and though, as they are all the characters of warriors, bravery is the predominant feature, they are nevertheless diversified in a sensible and striking manner. Foldath, for instance, the general of Cathmor, exhibits the perfect picture of a savage chieftain: bold, and daring, but presumptuous, cruel, and overbearing. He is distinguished, on his first appearance, as the friend of the tyrant Cairbar; "His stride is haughty; his red eye rolls in wrath." In his person and whole deportment, he is contrasted with the mild and wise Hidalla, another leader of the same army, on whose humanity and gentleness he looks with great contempt. He professedly delights in strife

and blood. He insults over the fallen. He is unrelenting in all his schemes of revenge, even to the length of denying the funeral song to the dead ; which, from the injury thereby done to their ghosts, was, in those days, considered as the greatest barbarity. Fierce to the last, he comforts himself in his dying moments, with thinking that his ghost shall often leave its blast to rejoice over the graves of those he had slain. Yet Ossian, ever prone to the pathetic, has contrived to throw into his account of the death even of this man, some tender circumstances ; by the moving description of his daughter Dardulena, the last of his race.

The character of Foldath tends much to exalt that of Cathmor, the chief commander, which is distinguished by the most humane virtues. He abhors all fraud and cruelty, is famous for his hospitality to strangers, open to every generous sentiment, and to every soft and compassionate feeling. He is so amiable as to divide the reader's attachment between him and the hero of the poem ; though our author has artfully managed it so, as to make Cathmor himself indirectly acknowledge Fingal's superiority, and to appear somewhat apprehensive of the event, after the death of Fillan, which he knew would call forth

Fingal in all his might. It is very remarkable, that although Ossian has introduced in his poems three complete heroes, Cuthullin, Cathmor, and Fingal, he has, however, sensibly distinguished each of their characters. Cuthullin is particularly honourable; Cathmor particularly amiable; Fingal wise, and great, retaining an ascendant peculiar to himself in whatever light he is viewed.

But the favourite figure in Temora, and the one most highly finished, is Fillan. His character is of that sort, for which Ossian shews a particular fondness; an eager, fervent, young warrior, fired with all the impatient enthusiasm for military glory, peculiar to that time of life. He had sketched this in the description of his own son Oscar; but as he has extended it more fully in Fillan, and as the character is so consonant to the epic strain, though, so far as I remember, not placed in such a conspicuous light by any other epic poet, it may be worth while to attend a little to Ossian's management of it in this instance.

Fillan was the youngest of all the sons of Fingal; younger, it is plain, than his nephew Oscar, by whose fame and great deeds in war, we may naturally suppose his ambition to have been

highly stimulated. Withal, as he is younger, he is described as more rash and fiery. His first appearance is soon after Oscar's death, when he was employed to watch the motions of the foe by night. In a conversation with his brother Ossian, on that occasion, we learn that it was not long since he began to lift the spear. " Few are " the marks of my sword in battle ; but my soul " is fire." He is with some difficulty restrained by Ossian from going to attack the enemy ; and complains to him, that his father had never allowed him any opportunity of signalizing his valour. " The king hath not remarked my sword ; " I go forth with the crowd ; I return without " my fame." Soon after, when Fingal according to custom was to appoint one of his chiefs to command the army, and each was standing forth, and putting in his claim to this honour, Fillan is presented in the following most picturesque and natural attitude. " On his spear stood " the son of Clatho, in the wandering of his " locks. Thrice he raised his eyes to Fingal : " his voice thrice failed him as he spoke. Fil- " lan could not boast of battles, at once he strode " away. Bent over a distant stream he stood ; " the tear hung in his eye. He struck, at times,

" the thistle's head, with his inverted spear." No less natural and beautiful is the description of Fingal's paternal emotion on this occasion. " Nor is he unseen of Fingal. Side-long he be- " held his son. He beheld him with bursting " joy. He hid the big tear with his locks, and " turned amidst his crouded soul." The command, for that day, being given to Gaul, Fillan rushes amidst the thickest of the foe, saves Gaul's life, who is wounded by a random arrow, and distinguishes himself so in battle, that " the days " of old return on Fingal's mind, as he beholds " the renown of his son. As the sun rejoices " from the cloud, over the tree his beams have " raised, whilst it shakes its lonely head on the " heath, so joyful is the king over Fillan." Sedate however and wise, he mixes the praise which he bestows on him with some reprehension of his rashness. " My son, I saw thy deeds, and my " soul was glad. Thou art brave, son of Cla- " tho, but headlong in the strife. So did not " Fingal advance, though he never feared a foe. " Let thy people be a ridge behind thee; they " are thy strength in the field. Then shalt thou " be long renowned, and behold the tombs of " thy fathers."

On the next day, the greatest and the last of Fillan's life, the charge is committed to him of leading on the host to battle. Fingal's speech to his troops on this occasion is full of noble sentiment; and where he recommends his son to their care, extremely touching. "A young "beam is before you; few are his steps to war. "They are few, but he is valiant; defend my "dark-haired son. Bring him back with joy; "hereafter he may stand alone. His form is "like his fathers; his soul is a flame of their "fire." When the battle begins, the poet puts forth his strength to describe the exploits of the young hero; who, at last encountering and killing with his own hand Foldath the opposite general, attains the pinnacle of glory. In what follows, when the fate of Fillan is drawing near, Ossian, if any where, excels himself. Foldath being slain, and a general rout begun, there was no resource left to the enemy but in the great Cathmor himself, who in this extremity descends from the hill, where, according to the custom of those princes, he surveyed the battle. Observe how this critical event is wrought up by the poet. "Wide spreading over echoing Lubar, the flight "of Bolga is rolled along. Fillan hung forward

" on their steps; and strewed the heath with " dead. Fingal rejoiced over his son.—Blue- " shielded Cathmor rose. Son of Alphin, bring " the harp! Give Fillan's praise to the wind; " raise high his praise in my hall, while yet he " shines in war. Leave, blue-eyed Clatho! leave " thy hall; behold that early beam of thine! " The host is withered in its course. No farther " look—it is dark—light-trembling from the " harp, strike, virgins! strike the sound." The sudden interruption, and suspense of the narration on Cathmor's rising from his hill, the abrupt bursting into the praise of Fillan, and the passionate apostrophe to his mother Clatho, are admirable efforts of poetical art, in order to interest us in Fillan's danger; and the whole is heightened by the immediately following simile, one of the most magnificent and sublime that is to be met with in any poet, and which if it had been found in Homer, would have been the frequent subject of admiration to critics; " Fillan " is like a spirit of heaven, that descends from " the skirt of his blast. The troubled ocean " feels his steps, as he strides from wave to wave; " his path kindles behind him; islands shake " their heads on the heaving seas."

But the poet's art is not yet exhausted. The fall of this noble young warrior, or, in Ossian's style, the extinction of this beam of heaven, could not be rendered too interesting and affecting. Our attention is naturally drawn towards Fingal. He beholds from his hill the rising of Cathmor, and the danger of his son. But what shall he do? "Shall Fingal rise to his aid, and "take the sword of Luno? What then should "become of thy fame, son of white-bosomed "Clatho? Turn not thine eyes from Fingal, "daughter of Inistore! I shall not quench thy "early beam.—No cloud of mine shall rise, my "son, upon thy soul of fire." Struggling between concern for the fame, and fear for the safety of his son, he withdraws from the sight of the engagement; and dispatches Ossian in haste to the field, with this affectionate and delicate injunction: "Father of Oscar!" addressing him by a title which on this occasion has the highest propriety, "Father of Oscar! lift the spear; "defend the young in arms. But conceal thy "steps from Fillan's eyes: He must not know "that I doubt his steel." Ossian arrived too late. But unwilling to describe Fillan vanquished, the poet suppresses all the circumstances of

the combat with Cathmor; and only shews us the dying hero. We see him animated to the end with the same martial and ardent spirit; breathing his last in bitter regret for being so early cut off from the field of glory. "Ossian, "lay me in that hollow rock. Raise no stone "above me, lest one should ask about my fame. "I am fallen in the first of my fields; fallen "without renown. Let thy voice alone, send "joy to my flying soul. Why should the bard "know where dwells the early-fallen Fillan." He who, after tracing the circumstances of this story, shall deny that our bard is possessed of high sentiment and high art, must be strangely prejudiced indeed. Let him read the story of Pallas in Virgil, which is of a similar kind; and after all the praise he may justly bestow on the elegant and finished description of that amiable author, let him say which of the two poets unfold most of the human soul. I wave insisting on any more of the particulars in Temora; as my aim is rather to lead the reader into the genius and spirit of Ossian's poetry, than to dwell on all his beauties.

The judgment and art discovered in conducting works of such length as Fingal and Temora,

distinguish them from the other poems in this collection. The smaller pieces, however, contain particular beauties no less eminent. They are historical poems, generally of the elegiac kind; and plainly discover themselves to be the work of the same author. One consistent face of manners is every where presented to us; one spirit of poetry reigns; the masterly hand of Ossian appears throughout; the same rapid and animated style; the same strong colouring of imagination, and the same glowing sensibility of heart. Besides the unity which belongs to the compositions of one man, there is moreover a certain unity of subject, which very happily connects all these poems. They form the poetical history of the age of Fingal. The same race of heroes whom we had met with in the greater poems, Cuthullin, Oscar, Connal, and Gaul, return again upon the stage; and Fingal himself is always the principal figure, presented on every occasion, with equal magnificence, nay rising upon us to the last. The circumstances of Ossian's old age and blindness, his surviving all his friends, and his relating their great exploits to Malvina, the spouse or mistress of his beloved son Oscar, furnish the finest poetical situations

that fancy could devise for that tender pathetic which reigns in Ossian's poetry.

On each of these poems, there might be room for separate observations, with regard to the conduct and disposition of the incidents, as well as to the beauty of the descriptions and sentiments. Carthon is a regular and highly finished piece. The main story is very properly introduced by Clessammor's relation of the adventure of his youth; and this introduction is finely heightened by Fingal's song of mourning over Moina; in which Ossian, ever fond of doing honour to his father, has contrived to distinguish him, for being an eminent poet, as well as warrior. Fingal's song upon this occasion, when "his thou-" sand bards leaned forward from their seats, to "hear the voice of the king," is inferior to no passage in the whole book; and with great judgment put in his mouth, as the seriousness, no less than the sublimity of the strain, is peculiarly suited to the hero's character. In Darthula, are assembled almost all the tender images that can touch the heart of man; friendship, love, the affections of parents, sons, and brothers, the distress of the aged, and the unavailing bravery of the young. The beautiful address to

the moon, with which the poem opens, and the transition from thence to the subject, most happily prepare the mind for that train of affecting events that is to follow. The story is regular, dramatic, interesting to the last. He who can read it without emotion may congratulate himself, if he pleases, upon being completely armed against sympathetic sorrow. As Fingal had no occasion of appearing in the action of this poem, Ossian makes a very artful transition from his narration, to what was passing in the halls of Selma. The sound heard there on the strings of his harp, the concern which Fingal shews on hearing it, and the invocation of the ghosts of their fathers, to receive the heroes falling in a distant land, are introduced with great beauty of imagination to increase the solemnity, and to diversify the scenery of the poem.

Carric-thura is full of the most sublime dignity; and has this advantage of being more cheerful in the subject, and more happy in the catastrophe than most of the other poems: Though tempered at the same time with episodes in that strain of tender melancholy, which seems to have been the great delight of Ossian and the bards of his age. Lathmon is peculiarly distinguished,

by high generosity of sentiment. This is carried so far, particularly in the refusal of Gaul, on one side, to take the advantage of a sleeping foe; and of Lathmon, on the other, to overpower by numbers the two young warriors, as to recal into one's mind the manners of chivalry; some resemblance to which may perhaps be suggested by other incidents in this collection of poems. Chivalry, however, took rise in an age and country too remote from those of Ossian, to admit the suspicion that the one could have borrowed any thing from the other. So far as chivalry had any real existence, the same military enthusiasm, which gave birth to it in the feudal times, might, in the days of Ossian, that is, in the infancy of a rising state, through the operation of the same cause, very naturally produce effects of the same kind on the minds and manners of men. So far as chivalry was an ideal system existing only in romance, it will not be thought surprising, when we reflect on the account before given of the Celtic bards, that this imaginary refinement of heroic manners should be found among them, as much, at least, as among the Trobadores, or strolling Provençal Bards, in the 10th or 11th century; whose songs, it is said,

first gave rise to those romantic ideas of heroism, which for so long a time enchanted Europe *. Ossian's heroes have all the gallantry and generosity of those fabulous knights, without their extravagance; and his love scenes have native tenderness, without any mixture of those forced and unnatural conceits which abound in the old romances. The adventures related by our poet which resemble the most those of romance, concern women who follow their lovers to war disguised in the armour of men; and these are so managed as to produce, in the discovery, several of the most interesting situations; one beautiful instance of which may be seen in Carricthura, and another in Calthon and Colmal.

Oithona presents a situation of a different nature. In the absence of her lover Gaul, she had been carried off and ravished by Dunrommath. Gaul discovers the place where she is kept concealed, and comes to revenge her. The meeting of the two lovers, the sentiments and the behaviour of Oithona on that occasion, are described with such tender and exquisite propriety, as does the greatest honour both to the art and to the delicacy

* Vid. Huetius de origine fabularum Romanensium.

of our author: and would have been admired in any poet of the most refined age. The conduct of Croma must strike every reader as remarkably judicious and beautiful. We are to be prepared for the death of Malvina, which is related in the succeeding poem. She is therefore introduced in person; "she has heard a "voice in a dream; she feels the fluttering of "her soul;" and in a most moving lamentation addressed to her beloved Oscar, she sings her own death song. Nothing could be calculated with more art to sooth and comfort her, than the story which Ossian relates. In the young and brave Fovargormo, another Oscar is introduced; his praises are sung; and the happiness is set before her of those who die in their youth, "when their renown is around them; before the "feeble behold them in the hall, and smile at "their trembling hands."

But no where does Ossian's genius appear to greater advantage, than in Berrathon, which is reckoned the conclusion of his songs, "The last "sound of the voice of Cona."

Qualis olor noto positurus littore vitam,
Ingemit, et mæstis mulcens concentibus auras
Præsago quæritur venientia funera cantu.

The whole train of ideas is admirably suited to the subject. Every thing is full of that invisible world, into which the aged bard believes himself now ready to enter. The airy hall of Fingal presents itself to his view; "he sees the "cloud that shall receive his ghost; he beholds "the mist that shall form his robe when he ap- "pears on his hill;" and all the natural objects around him seem to carry the presages of death. "The thistle shakes its beard to the wind. The "flower hangs its heavy head; it seems to say, "I am covered with the drops of heaven; the "time of my departure is near, and the blast "that shall scatter my leaves." Malvina's death is hinted to him in the most delicate manner by the son of Alpin. His lamentation over her, her apotheosis, or ascent to the habitation of heroes, and the introduction to the story which follows from the mention which Ossian supposes the father of Malvina to make of him in the hall of Fingal, are all in the highest spirit of poetry. "And dost thou remember Ossian, O "Toscar son of Comloch? The battles of our "youth were many; our swords went together "to the field." Nothing could be more proper than to end his songs with recording an exploit

of the father of that Malvina, of whom his heart was now so full; and who, from first to last, had been such a favourite object throughout all his poems.

The scene of most of Ossian's poems is laid in Scotland, or in the coast of Ireland opposite to the territories of Fingal. When the scene is in Ireland, we perceive no change of manners from those of Ossian's native country. For as Ireland was undoubtedly peopled with Celtic tribes, the language, customs, and religion of both nations were the same. They had been separated from one another by migration, only a few generations, as it should seem, before our poet's age; and they still maintained a close and frequent intercourse. But when the poet relates the expeditions of any of his heroes to the Scandinavian coast, or to the islands of Orkney, which were then part of the Scandinavian territory, as he does in Carric-thura, Sulmalla of Lumon, and Cathloda, the case is quite altered. Those countries were inhabited by nations of the Teutonic descent, who in their manners and religious rites differed widely from the Celtæ; and it is curious and remarkable, to find this difference clearly pointed out in the poems of Ossian. His de-

scriptions bear the native marks of one who was present in the expeditions which he relates, and who describes what he had seen with his own eyes. No sooner are we carried to Lochlin, or the islands of Inistore, than we perceive that we are in a foreign region. New objects begin to appear. We meet every where with the stones and circles of Loda, that is, Odin, the Scandinavian deity. We meet with the divinations and inchantments, for which it is well known those northern nations were early famous. "There, "mixed with the murmur of waters, rose the "voice of aged men, who called the forms of "night to aid them in their war;" whilst the Caledonian chiefs who assisted them, are described as standing at a distance, heedless of their rites. That ferocity of manners which distinguished those nations, also becomes conspicuous. In the combats of their chiefs there is a peculiar savageness; even their women are bloody and fierce. The spirit, and the very ideas of Regner Lodbrog, that northern Scalder whom I formermerly quoted, occur to us again. "The hawks," Ossian makes one of the Scandinavian chiefs say, "rush from all their winds; they are wont to "trace my course. We rejoiced three days a-

" bove the dead, and called the hawks of hea-
" ven. They came from all their winds, to feast
" on the foes of Annir."

Dismissing now the separate consideration of any of our author's works, I proceed to make some observations on his manner of writing, under the general heads of Description, Imagery, and Sentiment.

A poet of original genius is always distinguished by his talent for description *. A second-rate writer discerns nothing new or peculiar in the object he means to describe. His conceptions of it are vague and loose; his expressions feeble; and of course the object is presented to us indistinctly and as through a cloud. But a true poet makes us imagine that we see it before our eyes: he catches the distinguishing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in such a light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a lively imagination, which first receives a strong impression of the object; and then, by a proper selection of capital picturesque circum-

* See the rules of poetical description excellently illustrated by Lord Kaims, in his Elements of Criticism, vol. iii. chap. 21. Of narration and description.

stances employed in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imaginations of others. That Ossian possesses this descriptive power in a high degree, we have a clear proof from the effect which his descriptions produce upon the imaginations of those who read him with any degree of attention and taste. Few poets are more interesting. We contract an intimate acquaintance with his principal heroes. The characters, the manners, the face of the country become familiar: we even think we could draw the figure of his ghosts: in a word, whilst reading him we are transported as into a new region, and dwell among his objects as if they were all real.

It were easy to point out several instances of exquisite painting in the works of our author. Such, for instance, as the scenery with which Temora opens, and the attitude in which Cairbar is there presented to us; the description of the young prince Cormac, in the same book; and the ruins of Balclutha in Carthon. "I have seen "the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate. "The fire had resounded in the halls; and the "voice of the people is heard no more. The "stream of Clutha was removed from its place

" by the fall of the walls. The thistle shook there " its lonely head: The moss whistled to the wind. " The fox looked out from the windows; the " rank grass of the wall waved round his head. " Desolate is the dwelling of Moina; silence is " in the house of her fathers." Nothing, also, can be more natural and lively, than the manner in which Carthon afterwards describes how the conflagration of his city affected him when a child: " Have I not seen the fallen Balclutha? " And shall I feast with Comhal's son? Com- " hal! who threw his fire in the midst of my fa- " ther's hall! I was young, and knew not the " cause why the virgins wept. The columns of " smoke pleased mine eye, when they rose above " my walls: I often looked back with gladness, " when my friends fled above the hill. But when " the years of my youth came on, I beheld the " moss of my fallen walls. My sigh arose with " the morning; and my tears descended with " night. Shall I not fight, I said to my soul, " against the children of my foes? And I will " fight, O bard! I feel the strength of my soul." In the same poem, the assembling of the chiefs round Fingal, who had been warned of some impending danger by the appearance of a prodigy,

is described with so many picturesque circumstances, that one imagines himself present in the assembly. "The king alone beheld the terrible "sight, and he foresaw the death of his people. "He came in silence to his hall, and took his "father's spear; the mail rattled on his breast. "The heroes rose around. They looked, in si- "lence, on each other, marking the eyes of Fin- "gal. They saw the battle in his face. A thou- "sand shields are placed at once on their arms; "and they drew a thousand swords. The hall "of Selma brightened around. The clang of "arms ascends. The grey dogs howl in their "place. No word is among the mighty chiefs. "Each marked the eyes of the king; and half "assumed his spear."

It has been objected to Ossian, that his descriptions of military actions are imperfect, and much less diversified by circumstances than those of Homer. This is in some measure true. The amazing fertility of Homer's invention is no where so much displayed as in the incidents of his battles, and in the little history pieces he gives of the persons slain. Nor indeed, with regard to the talent of description, can too much be said in praise of Homer. Every thing is alive in his

writings. The colours with which he paints are those of nature. But Ossian's genius was of a different kind from Homer's. It led him to hurry towards grand objects, rather than to amuse himself with particulars of less importance. He could dwell on the death of a favourite hero; but that of a private man seldom stopped his rapid course. Homer's genius was more comprehensive than Ossian's. It included a wider circle of objects; and could work up any incident into description. Ossian's was more limited; but the region within which it chiefly exerted itself was the highest of all, the region of the pathetic and sublime.

We must not imagine, however, that Ossian's battles consist only of general indistinct description. Such beautiful incidents are sometimes introduced, and the circumstances of the persons slain so much diversified, as show that he could have embellished his military scenes with an abundant variety of particulars, if his genius had led him to dwell upon them. "One man is "stretched in the dust of his native land; he "fell, where often he had spread the feast, and "often raised the voice of the harp." The maid of Inistore is introduced, in a moving apostrophe,

as weeping for another; and a third, "as rolled "in the dust he lifted his faint eyes to the king," is remembered and mourned by Fingal as the friend of Agandecca. The blood pouring from the wound of one who is slain by night, is heard "hissing on the half-extinguished oak," which had been kindled for giving light: Another, climbing a tree to escape from his foe, is pierced by his spear from behind; "shrieking, panting, "he fell; whilst moss and withered branches "pursue his fall, and strew the blue arms of "Gaul." Never was a finer picture drawn of the ardour of two youthful warriors than the following: "I saw Gaul in his armour, and my "soul was mixed with his: for the fire of the "battle was in his eyes: he looked to the foe "with joy. We spoke the words of friendship in "secret; and the lightning of our swords pour-"ed together. We drew them behind the wood, "and tried the strength of our arms on the emp-"ty air."

Ossian is always concise in his descriptions, which adds much to their beauty and force. For it is a great mistake to imagine, that a crowd of particulars, or a very full and extended style, is of advantage to description. On the contrary,

such a diffuse manner for the most part weakens it. Any one redundant circumstance is a nuisance. It encumbers and loads the fancy, and renders the main image indistinct. "Obstat," as Quintilian says with regard to style, "quic-"quid non adjuvat." To be concise in description, is one thing; and to be general, is another. No description that rests in generals can possibly be good; it can convey no lively idea; for it is of particulars only that we have a distinct conception. But, at the same time, no strong imagination dwells long upon one particular; or heaps together a mass of trivial ones. By the happy choice of some one, or of a few that are the most striking, it presents the image more complete, shows us more at one glance, than a feeble imagination is able to do, by turning its object round and round into a variety of lights. Tacitus is of all prose writers the most concise. He has even a degree of abruptness resembling our author: Yet no writer is more eminent for lively description. When Fingal, after having conquered the haughty Swaran, proposes to dismiss him with honour: "Raise to-morrow thy "white sails to the wind, thou brother of Agan-"decca!" He conveys, by thus addressing his

enemy, a stronger impression of the emotions then passing within his mind, than if whole paragraphs had been spent in describing the conflict between resentment against Swaran, and the tender remembrance of his ancient love. No amplification is needed to give us the most full idea of a hardy veteran, after the few following words: "His shield is marked with the strokes of battle; "his red eyes despise danger." When Oscar, left alone, was surrounded by foes, "he stood," it is said, "growing in his place, like the flood "of the narrow vale;" a happy representation of one, who, by daring intrepidity in the midst of danger, seems to increase in his appearance, and becomes more formidable every moment, like the sudden rising of the torrent hemmed in by the valley. And a whole crowd of ideas, concerning the circumstances of domestic sorrow, occasioned by a young warrior's first going forth to battle, is poured upon the mind by these words: "Calmar leaned on his father's spear; that spear "which he brought from Lara's hall, when the "soul of his mother was sad."

The conciseness of Ossian's descriptions is the more proper on account of his subjects. Descriptions of gay and smiling scenes may, with-

out any disadvantage, be amplified and prolonged. Force is not the predominant quality expected in these. The description may be weakened by being diffuse, yet, notwithstanding, may be beautiful still. Whereas, with respect to grand, solemn, and pathetic subjects, which are Ossian's chief field, the case is very different. In these, energy is above all things required. The imagination must be seized at once, or not at all; and is far more deeply impressed by one strong and ardent image, than by the anxious minuteness of laboured illustration.

But Ossian's genius, though chiefly turned towards the sublime and pathetic, was not confined to it: In subjects, also, of grace and delicacy, he discovers the hand of a master. Take, for an example, the following elegant description of Agandecca, wherein the tenderness of Tibullus seems united with the majesty of Virgil. "The "daughter of the snow overheard, and left the "hall of her secret sigh. She came in all her "beauty; like the moon from the cloud of the "east. Loveliness was around her as light. Her "steps were like the music of songs. She saw "the youth, and loved him. He was the stolen "sigh of her soul. Her blue eyes rolled on him

" in secret: And she blest the chief of Morven." Several other instances might be produced of the feelings of love and friendship, painted by our author with a most natural and happy delicacy.

The simplicity of Ossian's manner adds great beauty to his descriptions, and indeed to his whole poetry. We meet with no affected ornaments; no forced refinement; no marks, either in style or thought, of a studied endeavour to shine and sparkle. Ossian appears every where to be prompted by his feelings; and to speak from the abundance of his heart. I remember no more than one instance of what can be called quaint thought in this whole collection of his works. It is in the first book of Fingal, where, from the tombs of two lovers, two lonely yews are mentioned to have sprung, " whose branches wished to meet " on high." This sympathy of the trees with the lovers, may be reckoned to border on an Italian conceit; and it is somewhat curious to find this single instance of that sort of wit in our Celtic poetry.

The " joy of grief," is one of Ossian's remarkable expressions, several times repeated. If any one shall think, that it needs to be justified by a precedent, he may find it twice used by Homer;

in the Iliad, when Achilles is visited by the ghost of Patroclus; and in the Odyssey, when Ulysses meets his mother in the shades. On both these occasions, the heroes, melted with tenderness, lament their not having it in their power to throw their arms round the ghost, "that we might," say they, "in a mutual embrace, enjoy the delight "of grief."

——Κρυεροῖο τεταρπώμεσθα γόοιο *.

But, in truth, the expression stands in need of no defence from authority; for it is a natural and just expression; and conveys a clear idea of that gratification, which a virtuous heart often feels in the indulgence of a tender melancholy. Ossian makes a very proper distinction between this gratification, and the destructive effect of overpowering grief. "There is a joy in grief, "when peace dwells in the breasts of the sad. "But sorrow wastes the mournful, O daughter "of Toscar, and their days are few." To "give "the joy of grief," generally signifies to raise the strain of soft and grave music; and finely characterises the taste of Ossian's age and country.

* Odyssey, ix. 211. Iliad, xxiii 98.

In these days, when the songs of bards were the great delight of heroes, the tragic muse was held in chief honour; gallant actions, and virtuous sufferings, were the chosen theme; preferably to that light and trifling strain of poetry and music, which promotes light and trifling manners, and serves to emasculate the mind. "Strike the harp "in my hall," said the great Fingal, in the midst of youth and victory, "Strike the harp in my "hall, and let Fingal hear the song. Pleasant "is the joy of grief! It is like the shower of "spring, when it softens the branch of the oak; "and the young leaf lifts its green head. Sing "on, O bards! To-morrow we lift the sail."

Personal epithets have been much used by all the poets of the most ancient ages, and when well chosen, not general and unmeaning, they contribute not a little to render the style descriptive and animated. Besides epithets founded on bodily distinctions, a-kin to many of Homer's, we find in Ossian several which are remarkably beautiful and poetical. Such as, Oscar of the future fights, Fingal of the mildest look, Carril of other times, the mildly blushing Evirallin; Bragela, the lonely sun-beam of Dunscaich; a Culdee, the son of the secret cell.

But of all the ornaments employed in descriptive poetry, comparisons, or similes, are the most splendid. These chiefly form what is called the imagery of a poem: And as they abound so much in the works of Ossian, and are commonly among the favourite passages of all poets, it may be expected that I should be somewhat particular in my remarks upon them.

A poetical simile always supposes two objects brought together, between which there is some near relation, or connection, in the fancy. What that relation ought to be, cannot be precisely defined. For various, almost numberless, are the analogies formed among objects, by a sprightly imagination. The relation of actual similitude, or likeness of appearance, is far from being the only foundation of poetical comparison. Sometimes a resemblance, in the effect produced by two objects, is made the connecting principle: Sometimes a resemblance in one distinguishing property or circumstance. Very often two objects are brought together in a simile, though they resemble one another, strictly speaking, in nothing, only because they raise in the mind a train of similar, and what may be called, concordant ideas; so that the remembrance of the one,

when recalled, serves to quicken and heighten the impression made by the other. Thus, to give an instance from our poet, the pleasure with which an old man looks back on the exploits of his youth, has certainly no direct resemblance to the beauty of a fine evening; farther than that both agree in producing a certain calm, placid joy. Yet Ossian has founded upon this, one of the most beautiful comparisons that is to be met with in any poet. "Wilt thou not listen, son of "the rock, to the song of Ossian? My soul is "full of other times; the joy of my youth re- "turns. Thus the sun appears in the west, af- "ter the steps of his brightness have moved be- "hind a storm. The green hills lift their dewy "heads. The blue streams rejoice in the vale. "The aged hero comes forth on his staff; and "his grey hair glitters in the beam." Never was there a finer group of objects. It raises a strong conception of the old man's joy and elation of heart, by displaying a scene, which produces, in every spectator, a corresponding train of plea- sing emotions; the declining sun looking forth in his brightness after a storm; the cheerful face of all nature; and the still life, finely animated by the circumstance of the aged hero, with his

staff and his grey locks; a circumstance both extremely picturesque in itself, and peculiarly suited to the main object of the comparison. Such analogies and associations of ideas as these, are highly pleasing to the fancy. They give opportunity for introducing many a fine poetical picture. They diversify the scene; they aggrandize the subject; they keep the imagination awake and sprightly. For as the judgment is principally exercised in distinguishing objects, and remarking the differences among those which seem like; so the highest amusement of the imagination is to trace likenesses and agreements among those which seem different.

The principal rules which respect poetical comparisons are, that they be introduced on proper occasions, when the mind is disposed to relish them; and not in the midst of some severe and agitating passion, which cannot admit this play of fancy; that they be founded on a resemblance neither too near and obvious, so as to give little amusement to the imagination in tracing it, nor too faint and remote, so as to be apprehended with difficulty; that they serve either to illustrate the principal object, and to render the conception of it more clear and distinct: or, at

least, to heighten and embellish it, by a suitable association of images *.

Every country has a scenery peculiar to itself; and the imagery of a good poet will exhibit it. For as he copies after nature, his allusions will of course be taken from those objects which he sees around him, and which have often struck his fancy. For this reason, in order to judge of the propriety of poetical imagery, we ought to be, in some measure, acquainted with the natural history of the country where the scene of the poem is laid. The introduction of foreign images betrays a poet, copying not from nature, but from other writers. Hence so many lions, and tygers, and eagles, and serpents, which we meet with in the similes of modern poets; as if these animals had acquired some right to a place in poetical comparisons for ever, because employed by ancient authors. They employed them with propriety, as objects generally known in their country; but they are absurdly used for illustration by us, who know them only at second hand, or by description. To most readers of modern poetry, it were more to the purpose to describe

* See Elements of Criticism, ch. 19. Vol. III.

lions or tygers, by similes taken from men, than to compare men to lions. Ossian is very correct in this particular. His imagery is, without exception, copied from that face of nature, which he saw before his eyes; and by consequence may be expected to be lively. We meet with no Grecian or Italian scenery; but with the mists, and clouds, and storms, of a northern mountainous region.

No poet abounds more in similes than Ossian. There are in this collection as many, at least, as in the whole Iliad and Odyssey of Homer. I am indeed inclined to think, that the works of both poets are too much crowded with them. Similes are sparkling ornaments; and, like all things that sparkle, are apt to dazzle and tire us by their lustre. But if Ossian's similes be too frequent, they have this advantage, of being commonly shorter than Homer's; they interrupt his narration less; he just glances aside to some resembling object, and instantly returns to his former track. Homer's similes include a wider range of objects. But in return, Ossian's are, without exception, taken from objects of dignity, which cannot be said for all those which Homer employs. The sun, the moon, and the stars,

clouds and meteors, lightning and thunder, seas and whales, rivers, torrents, winds, ice, rain, snow, dews, mist, fire and smoke, trees and forests, heath and grass and flowers, rocks and mountains, music and songs, light and darkness, spirits and ghosts; these form the circle, within which Ossian's comparisons generally run. Some, not many, are taken from birds and beasts; as eagles, sea-fowl, the horse, the deer, and the mountain-bee; and a very few from such operations of art as were then known. Homer has diversified his imagery by many more allusions to the animal world; to lions, bulls, goats, herds of cattle, serpents, insects; and to the various occupations of rural and pastoral life. Ossian's defect in this article, is plainly owing to the desert, uncultivated state of his country, which suggested to him few images beyond natural inanimate objects, in their rudest form. The birds and animals of the country were probably not numerous; and his acquaintance with them was slender, as they were little subjected to the uses of man.

The great objection made to Ossian's imagery, is its uniformity, and the too frequent repetition of the same comparisons. In a work so thick

sown with similes, one could not but expect to find images of the same kind sometimes suggested to the poet by resembling objects; especially to a poet like Ossian, who wrote from the immediate impulse of poetical enthusiasm, and without much preparation of study or labour. Fertile as Homer's imagination is acknowledged to be, who does not know how often his lions and bulls and flocks of sheep, recur with little or no variation: nay, sometimes in the very same words? The objection made to Ossian is, however, founded, in a great measure, upon a mistake. It has been supposed, by inattentive readers, that wherever the moon, the cloud, or the thunder, returns in a simile, it is the same simile, and the same moon, or cloud, or thunder, which they had met with a few passages before. Whereas very often the similes are widely different. The object, whence they are taken, is indeed in substance the same; but the image is new; for the appearance of the object is changed; it is presented to the fancy in another attitude; and clothed with new circumstances, to make it suit the different illustrations for which it is employed. In this lies Ossian's great art; in so happily varying the form of the few natural appear-

ances with which he was acquainted, as to make them correspond to a great many different objects.

Let us take for one instance the moon, which is very frequently introduced into his comparisons; as in northern climates, where the nights are long, the moon is a greater object of attention, than in the climate of Homer; and let us view how much our poet has diversified its appearance. The shield of a warrior is like "the darkened moon when it moves a dun circle through "the heavens." The face of a ghost, wan and pale, is like "the beam of the setting moon." And a different appearance of a ghost, thin and indistinct, is like "the new moon seen through "the gathered mist, when the sky pours down "its flaky snow, and the world is silent and "dark;" or in a different form still, is like "the "watery beam of the moon, when it rushes from "between two clouds, and the mid-night shower "is on the field." A very opposite use is made of the moon in the description of Agandecca: "She came in all her beauty, like the moon from "the cloud of the East." Hope, succeeded by disappointment, is "joy rising on her face, and "sorrow returning again, like a thin cloud on

" the moon." But when Swaran, after his defeat, is cheered by Fingal's generosity, " His " face brightened like the full moon of heaven, " when the clouds vanish away, and leave her " calm and broad in the midst of the sky." Vinvela is " bright as the moon when it trembles " o'er the western wave;" but the soul of the guilty Uthul is " dark as the troubled face of " the moon, when it foretels the storm." And by a very fanciful and uncommon allusion, it is said of Cormac, who was to die in his early years, " Nor long shalt thou lift the spear, " mildly shining beam of youth! Death stands " dim behind thee, like the darkened half of the " moon behind its growing light."

Another instance of the same nature may be taken from mist, which, as being a very familiar appearance in the country of Ossian, he applies to a variety of purposes, and pursues through a great many forms. Sometimes, which one would hardly expect, he employs it to heighten the appearance of a beautiful object. The hair of Morna is " like the mist of Cromla, when it " curls on the rock, and shines to the beam of " the west."——" The song comes with its mu- " sic to melt and please the ear. It is like soft

" mist, that rising from a lake pours on the si-
" lent vale. The green flowers are filled with
" dew. The sun returns in its strength, and the
" mist is gone." * But, for the most part, mist is employed as a similitude of some disagreeable or terrible object. " The soul of Nathos was " sad, like the sun in the day of mist, when his " face is watery and dim." " The darkness of " old age comes like the mist of the desert." The face of a ghost is " pale as the mist of Crom-" la." " The gloom of battle is rolled along as " mist that is poured on the valley, when storms " invade the silent sun-shine of heaven." Fame suddenly departing, is likened to " mist that flies

* There is a remarkable propriety in this comparison. It is intended to explain the effect of soft and mournful music. Armin appears disturbed at a performance of this kind. Carmor says to him, " Why bursts the sigh " of Armin? Is there a cause to mourn? The song comes " with its music to melt and please the ear. It is like " soft mist, &c." that is, such mournful songs have a happy effect to soften the heart, and to improve it by tender emotions, as the moisture of the mist refreshes and nourishes the flowers; whilst the sadness they occasion is only transient, and soon dispelled by the succeeding occupations and amusements of life: " The sun returns in " its strength, and the mist is gone."

" away before the rustling wind of the vale." A ghost, slowly vanishing, to " mist that melts by " degrees on the sunny hill." Cairbar, after his treacherous assassination of Oscar, is compared to a pestilential fog. " I love a foe like Cath- " mor," says Fingal, " his soul is great; his arm " is strong; his battles are full of fame. But " the little soul is like a vapour that hovers " round the marshy lake. It never rises on the " green hill, lest the winds meet it there. Its " dwelling is in the cave; and it sends forth the " dart of death." This is a simile highly finished. But there is another which is still more striking, founded also on mist, in the 4th book of Temora. Two factious chiefs are contending; Cathmor the king interposes, rebukes, and silences them. The poet intends to give us the highest idea of Cathmor's superiority; and most effectually accomplishes his intention by the following happy image. " They sunk from the " king on either side; like two columns of morn- " ing mist, when the sun rises between them, on " his glittering rocks. Dark is their rolling on " either side; each towards its reedy pool." These instances may sufficiently shew with what richness of imagination Ossian's comparisons a-

bound, and at the same time, with what propriety of judgment they are employed. If his field was narrow, it must be admitted to have been as well cultivated as its extent would allow.

As it is usual to judge of poets from a comparison of their similes more than of other passages, it will perhaps be agreeable to the reader, to see how Homer and Ossian have conducted some images of the same kind. This might be shewn in many instances. For as the great objects of nature are common to the poets of all nations, and make the general store-house of all imagery, the ground-work of their comparisons must of course be frequently the same. I shall select only a few of the most considerable from both poets. Mr Pope's translation of Homer can be of no use to us here. The parallel is altogether unfair between prose, and the imposing harmony of flowing numbers. It is only by viewing Homer in the simplicity of a prose translation, that we can form any comparison between the two bards.

The shock of two encountering armies, the noise and the tumult of battle, afford one of the most grand and awful subjects of description; on which all epic poets have exerted their

strength. Let us first hear Homer. The following description is a favourite one, for we find it twice repeated in the same words *. "When "now the conflicting hosts joined in the field of "battle, then were mutually opposed shields, "and swords, and the strength of armed men. "The bossy bucklers were dashed against each "other. The universal tumult rose. There "were mingled the triumphant shouts and the "dying groans of the victors and the vanquished. "The earth streamed with blood. As when "winter torrents, rushing from the mountains, "pour into a narrow valley, their violent waters. "They issue from a thousand springs, and mix "in the hollowed channel. The distant shepherd "hears on the mountain, their roar from afar. "Such was the terror and the shout of the en-"gaging armies." In another passage, the poet, much in the manner of Ossian, heaps simile on simile, to express the vastness of the idea, with which his imagination seems to labour. "With "a mighty shout the hosts engage. Not so "loud roars the wave of ocean, when driven "against the shore by the whole force of the

* Iliad, iv. 446. and Iliad, viii. 60.

" boisterous north ; not so loud in the woods of " the mountain, the noise of the flame, when ri- " sing in its fury to consume the forest ; not so " loud the wind among the lofty oaks, when the " wrath of the storm rages ; as was the clamour " of the Greeks and Trojans, when, roaring ter- " rible, they rushed against each other." *

To these descriptions and similes, we may oppose the following from Ossian, and leave the reader to judge between them. He will find images of the same kind employed ; commonly less extended ; but thrown forth with a glowing rapidity which characterises our poet. " As " Autumn's dark storms pour from two echoing " hills, towards each other, approached the he- " roes. As two dark streams from high rocks " meet and mix, and roar on the plain ; loud, " rough, and dark in battle, meet Lochlin and " Inisfail. Chief mixed his strokes with chief, " and man with man. Steel clanging, sound- " ed on steel. Helmets are cleft on high ; blood " bursts and smokes around.—As the troubled " noise of the ocean, when roll the waves " on high ; as the last peal of the thunder of

* Iliad, xiv. 398.

" heaven, such is the noise of battle."—" As roll " a thousand waves to the rock, so Swaran's host " came on ; as meets a rock a thousand waves, " so Inisfail met Swaran. Death raises all his " voices around, and mixes with the sound of " shields.—The field echoes from wing to wing, " as a hundred hammers that rise by turns on the " red son of the furnace."—As a hundred winds " on Morven ; as the streams of a hundred hills ; " as clouds fly successive over heaven; or as " the dark ocean assaults the shore of the de- " sert ; so roaring, so vast, so terrible, the armies " mixed on Lena's echoing heath." In several of these images, there is a remarkable similarity to Homer's; but what follows is superior to any comparison that Homer uses on this subject. " The groan of the people spread over the hills ; " it was like the thunder of night, when the " cloud bursts on Cona; and a thousand ghosts " shriek at once on the hollow wind." Never was an image of more awful sublimity employed to heighten the terror of battle.

Both poets compare the appearance of an army approaching, to the gathering of dark clouds. " As when a shepherd," says Homer, " beholds " from the rock a cloud borne along the sea by

" the western wind; black as pitch it appears " from afar sailing over the ocean, and carrying " the dreadful storm. He shrinks at the sight, " and drives his flock into the cave: Such, " under the Ajaces, moved on, the dark, the " thickened phalanx to the war."——" They " came," says Ossian, " over the desert like " stormy clouds, when the winds roll them " over the heath; their edges are tinged with " lightning; and the echoing groves foresee the " storm." The edges of the cloud tinged with lightning, is a sublime idea; but the shepherd and his flock, render Homer's simile more picturesque. This is frequently the difference between the two poets. Ossian gives no more than the main image, strong and full: Homer adds circumstances and appendages, which amuse the fancy by enlivening the scenery.

Homer compares the regular appearance of an army, to " clouds that are settled on the moun- " tain top, in the day of calmness, when the " strength of the north wind sleeps." * Ossian, with full as much propriety, compares the appearance of a disordered army, to " the moun-

* Iliad, v. 522.

" tain cloud, when the blast hath entered its " womb; and scatters the curling gloom on eve- " ry side." Ossian's clouds assume a great many forms; and, as we might expect from his climate, are a fertile source of imagery to him. " The " warriors followed their chiefs, like the gather- " ing of the rainy clouds, behind the red meteors " of heaven." An army retreating without coming to action, is likened to " clouds, that ha- " ving long threatened rain, retire slowly behind " the hills." The picture of Oithona, after she had determined to die, is lively and delicate. " Her soul was resolved, and the tear was dried " from her wildly-looking eye. A troubled joy " rose on her mind, like the red path of the " lightning on a stormy cloud." The image also of the gloomy Cairbar, meditating, in silence, the assassination of Oscar, until the moment came when his designs were ripe for execution, is extremely noble, and complete in all its parts. " Cairbar heard their words in silence, like the " cloud of a shower; it stands dark on Cromla, " till the lightning bursts its side. The valley " gleams with red light; the spirits of the storm " rejoice. So stood the silent king of Temora; " at length his words are heard."

Homer's comparison of Achilles to the Dog Star, is very sublime. " Priam beheld him rush- " ing along the plain, shining in his armour, " like the star of autumn : bright are its beams, " distinguished amidst the multitude of stars in " the dark hour of night. It rises in its splen- " dour ; but its splendour is fatal; betokening " to miserable men, the destroying heat *." The first appearance of Fingal, is, in like manner, compared by Ossian, to a star or meteor. " Fin- " gal, tall in his ship, stretched his bright lance " before him. Terrible was the gleam of his " steel ; it was like the green meteor of death, " setting in the heath of Malmor, when the tra- " veller is alone, and the broad moon is darken- " ed in heaven." The hero's appearance in Homer, is more magnificent ; in Ossian, more terrible.

A tree cut down, or overthrown by a storm, is a similitude frequent among poets for describing the fall of a warrior in battle. Homer employs it often. But the most beautiful, by far, of his comparisons, founded on this object, indeed one of the most beautiful in the whole Iliad,

* Iliad, xxii. 26.

is that on the death of Euphorbus: "As the "young and verdant olive, which a man hath "reared with care in a lonely field, where the "springs of water bubble around it; it is fair "and flourishing; it is fanned by the breath of "all the winds, and loaded with white blossoms; "when the sudden blast of a whirlwind descend- "ing, roots it out from its bed, and stretches it "on the dust *." To this, elegant as it is, we may oppose the following simile of Ossian's, relating the death of the three sons of Usnoth. "They fell, like three young oaks which stood "alone on the hill. The traveller saw the love- "ly trees, and wondered how they grew so lone- "ly. The blast of the desert came by night, "and laid their green heads low. Next day he "returned; but they were withered, and the "heath was bare." Malvina's allusion to the same object, in her lamentation over Oscar, is so exquisitely tender, that I cannot forbear giving it a place also. "I was a lovely tree in "thy presence, Oscar! with all my branches "round me. But thy death came, like a blast "from the desert, and laid my green head low.

* Iliad, xvii. 53.

" The spring returned with its showers; but no " leaf of mine arose." Several of Ossian's similes taken from trees, are remarkably beautiful, and diversified with well chosen circumstances; such as that upon the death of Ryno and Orla: " They have fallen like the oak of the desert; " when it lies across a stream, and withers in the " wind of the mountains:" Or that which Ossian applies to himself; " I, like an ancient oak " in Morven, moulder alone in my place; the " blast hath lopped my branches away; and I " tremble at the wings of the north."

As Homer exalts his heroes by comparing them to Gods, Ossian makes the same use of comparisons taken from spirits and ghosts. Swaran " roared in battle, like the shrill spirit of a storm " that sits dim on the clouds of Gormal, and en- " joys the death of the mariner." " His people " gathered around Erragon, like storms around " the ghost of night, when he calls them from " the top of Morven, and prepares to pour them " on the land of the stranger." " They fell be- " fore my son, like groves in the desert, when " an angry ghost rushes through night, and takes " their green heads in his hand." In such images, Ossian appears in his strength; for very sel-

dom have supernatural beings been painted with so much sublimity, and such force of imagination, as by this poet. Even Homer, great as he is, must yield to him in similes formed upon these. Take, for instance, the following, which is the most remarkable of this kind in the Iliad. "Meriones followed Idomeneus to battle, like "Mars the destroyer of men, when he rushes to "war. Terror, his beloved son, strong and "fierce, attends him; who fills with dismay the "most valiant hero. They come from Thrace, "armed against the Ephyrians and Phlegyans; "nor do they regard the prayers of either; but "dispose of success at their will *." The idea here, is undoubtedly noble: but observe what a figure Ossian sets before the astonished imagination, and with what sublimely terrible circumstances he has heightened it. "He rushed in "the sound of his arms, like the dreadful spirit "of Loda, when he comes in the roar of a thou-"sand storms, and scatters battles from his eyes. "He sits on a cloud over Lochlin's seas. His "mighty hand is on his sword. The winds lift

* Iliad, xiii. 298.

" his flaming locks. So terrible was Cuthullin " in the day of his fame."

Homer's comparisons relate chiefly to martial subjects, to the appearances and motions of armies, the engagement and death of heroes, and the various incidents of war. In Ossian, we find a greater variety of other subjects illustrated by similes; particularly, the songs of bards, the beauty of women, the different circumstances of old age, sorrow, and private distress; which give occasion to much beautiful imagery. What, for instance, can be more delicate and moving, than the following simile of Oithona's, in her lamentation over the dishonour she had suffered? " Chief of Strumon," replied the sighing maid, " why didst thou come over the dark blue wave " to Nuath's mournful daughter? Why did not " I pass away in secret, like the flower of the " rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strews " its withered leaves on the blast?" The music of bards, a favourite object with Ossian, is illustrated by a variety of the most beautiful appearances that are to be found in nature. It is compared to the calm shower in spring; to the dews of the morning on the hill of roes; to the face of the blue and still lake. Two similes on this

subject, I shall quote, because they would do honour to any of the most celebrated classics. The one is; "Sit thou on the heath, O bard! "and let us hear thy voice; it is pleasant as the "gale of the spring that sighs on the hunter's "ear, when he wakens from dreams of joy, and "has heard the music of the spirits of the hill." The other contains a short, but exquisitely tender image, accompanied with the finest poetical painting. "The music of Carril was like the "memory of joys that are past, pleasant and "mournful to the soul. The ghosts of depart-"ed bards heard it from Slimora's side. Soft "sounds spread along the wood; and the silent "valleys of night rejoice." What a figure would such imagery and such scenery have made, had they been presented to us, adorned with the sweetness and harmony of the Virgilian numbers!

I have chosen all along to compare Ossian with Homer, rather than Virgil, for an obvious reason. There is a much nearer correspondence between the times and manners of the two former poets. Both wrote in an early period of society; both are originals; both are distinguished by simplicity, sublimity, and fire. The correct elegance of Virgil, his artful imitation of

Homer, the Roman stateliness which he every where maintains, admit no parallel with the abrupt boldness and enthusiastic warmth of the Celtic bard. In one article, indeed, there is a resemblance. Virgil is more tender than Homer; and thereby agrees more with Ossian; with this difference, that the feelings of the one are more gentle and polished, those of the other more strong; the tenderness of Virgil softens, that of Ossian dissolves and overcomes the heart.

A resemblance may be sometimes observed between Ossian's comparisons, and those employed by the sacred writers. They abound much in this figure, and they use it with the utmost propriety*. The imagery of Scripture exhibits a soil and climate altogether different from those of Ossian; a warmer country, a more smiling face of nature, the arts of agriculture and of rural life much farther advanced. The wine press, and the threshing floor, are often presented to us, the cedar and the palm-tree, the fragrance of perfumes, the voice of the turtle, and the beds of lilies. The similes are, like Ossian's, generally short, touching on one point of

* See Dr Lowth, de Sacra Poesi Hebræorum.

resemblance, rather than spread out into little episodes. In the following example may be perceived what inexpressible grandeur poetry receives from the intervention of the Deity. "The "nations shall rush like the rushings of many "waters; but God shall rebuke them, and they "shall fly far off, and shall be chased as the "chaff of the mountains before the wind, and "like the down of the thistle before the whirl-"wind." *

Besides formal comparisons, the poetry of Ossian is embellished with many beautiful metaphors: Such as that remarkably fine one applied to Deugala; "She was covered with the "light of beauty; but her heart was the house "of pride." This mode of expression, which suppresses the mark of comparison, and substitutes a figured description in room of the object described, is a great enlivener of style. It denotes that glow and rapidity of fancy, which, without pausing to form a regular simile, paints the object at one stroke. "Thou art to me the "beam of the east, rising in a land unknown." "In peace, thou art the gale of spring; in war,

* Isaiah, xvii. 13.

" the mountain storm." " Pleasant be thy rest,
" O lovely beam, soon hast thou set on our hills!
" The steps of thy departure were stately, like
" the moon on the blue trembling wave. But
" thou hast left us in darkness, first of the maids
" of Lutha!—Soon hast thou set, Malvina! but
" thou risest, like the beam of the east, among
" the spirits of thy friends, where they sit in
" their stormy halls, the chambers of the thun-
" der." This is correct, and finely supported; but, in the following instance, the metaphor, though very beautiful at the beginning, becomes imperfect before it closes, by being improperly mixed with the literal sense. " Trathal went
" forth with the stream of his people; but they
" met a rock: Fingal stood unmoved; broken
" they rolled back from his side. Nor did they
" roll in safety; the spear of the king pursued
" their flight."

The hyperbole is a figure which we might expect to find often employed by Ossian; as the undisciplined imagination of early ages generally prompts exaggeration, and carries its objects to excess; whereas longer experience, and farther progress in the arts of life, chasten men's ideas and expressions. Yet Ossian's hyperboles ap-

pear not to me, either so frequent or so harsh as might at first have been looked for; an advantage owing, no doubt, to the more cultivated state, in which, as was before shewn, poetry subsisted among the ancient Celtæ, than among most other barbarous nations. One of the most exaggerated descriptions in the whole work, is what meets us at the beginning of Fingal, where the scout makes his report to Cuthullin of the landing of the foe. But this is so far from deserving censure that it merits praise, as being, on that occasion, natural and proper. The scout arrives, trembling and full of fears; and it is well known, that no passion disposes men to hyperbolize more than terror. It both annihilates themselves in their own apprehension, and magnifies every object which they view through the medium of a troubled imagination. Hence all those indistinct images of formidable greatness, the natural marks of a disturbed and confused mind, which occur in Moran's description of Swaran's appearance, and in his relation of the conference which they held together; not unlike the report which the affrighted Jewish spies made to their leader of the land of Canaan. "The "land through which we have gone to search

" it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants
" thereof; and all the people that we saw in it,
" are men of a great stature: and there saw we
" giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the
" giants; and we were in our own sight as grass-
" hoppers, and so were we in their sight." *

With regard to personifications, I formerly observed that Ossian was sparing, and I accounted for his being so. Allegorical personages he has none; and their absence is not to be regretted. For the intermixture of those shadowy beings, which have not the support even of mythological or legendary belief, with human actors, seldom produces a good effect. The fiction becomes too visible and phantastic; and overthrows that impression of reality, which the probable recital of human actions is calculated to make upon the mind. In the serious and pathetic scenes of Ossian especially, allegorical characters would have been as much out of place, as in tragedy; serving only unseasonably to amuse the fancy, whilst they stopped the current and weakened the force of passion.

With apostrophes, or addresses to persons ab-

* Numbers, xiii. 32, 33.

sent or dead, which have been, in all ages, the language of passion, our poet abounds; and they are among his highest beauties. Witness the apostrophe, in the first book of Fingal, to the maid of Inistore, whose lover had fallen in battle; and that inimitably fine one of Cuthullin to Bragela, at the conclusion of the same book. He commands the harp to be struck in her praise; and the mention of Bragela's name, immediately suggesting to him a crowd of tender ideas; "Dost "thou raise thy fair face from the rocks," he exclaims, "to find the sails of Cuthullin? The "sea is rolling far distant, and its white foam "shall deceive thee for my sails." And now his imagination being wrought up to conceive her as, at that moment, really in this situation, he becomes afraid of the harm she may receive from the inclemency of the night; and, with an enthusiasm, happy and affecting, though beyond the cautious strain of modern poetry, "Retire," he proceeds, "retire, for it is night, my love, "and the dark winds sigh in thy hair. Retire "to the hall of my feasts, and think of the times "that are past; for I will not return till the "storm of war has ceased. O Connal, speak of "wars and arms, and send her from my mind;

" for lovely with her raven hair is the white-bo-
" somed daughter of Sorglan." This breathes all the native spirit of passion and tenderness.

The addresses to the sun, to the moon, and to the evening star, must draw the attention of every reader of taste, as among the most splendid ornaments of this collection. The beauties of each are too great, and too obvious, to need any particular comment. In one passage only of the address to the moon, there appears some obscurity. " Whither dost thou retire from thy course,
" when the darkness of thy countenance grows?
" Hast thou thy hall like Ossian? Dwellest thou
" in the shadow of grief? Have thy sisters fallen
" from Heaven? Are they who rejoiced with
" thee at night, no more? Yes, they have fallen,
" fair light! and thou dost often retire to mourn." We may be at a loss to comprehend, at first view, the ground of these speculations of Ossian, concerning the moon; but when all the circumstances are attended to, they will appear to flow naturally from the present situation of his mind. A mind under the dominion of any strong passion, tinctures with its own disposition every object which it beholds. The old bard, with his heart bleeding for the loss of his friends, is me-

ditating on the different phases of the moon. Her waning and darkness presents to his melancholy imagination the image of sorrow; and presently the idea arises, and is indulged, that, like himself she retires to mourn over the loss of other moons, or of stars, whom he calls her sisters, and fancies to have once rejoiced with her at night, now fallen from heaven. Darkness suggested the idea of mourning, and mourning suggested nothing so naturally to Ossian as the death of beloved friends. An instance precisely similar of this influence of passion, may be seen in a passage which has always been admired of Shakspeare's King Lear. The old man on the point of distraction, through the inhumanity of his daughters, sees Edgar appear disguised like a beggar and a madman.

Lear. Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art thou come to this?

Couldest thou leave nothing; Didst thou give them all?

Kent. He hath no daughters, Sir.

Lear. Death, traitor! nothing could have subdued nature,

To such a lowness, but his unkind daughters.

KING LEAR, ACT III, SCENE V.

The apostrophe to the winds, in the opening of Darthula, is in the highest spirit of poetry. "But the winds deceive thee, O Darthula: and

" deny the woody Etha to thy sails. These are " not thy mountains, Nathos, nor is that the " roar of thy climbing waves. The halls of Cair- " bar are near, and the towers of the foe lift " their head. Where have ye been, ye southern " winds, when the sons of my love were deceived? " But ye have been sporting on plains, and pur- " suing the thistle's beard. O that ye had been " rustling in the sails of Nathos, till the hills of " Etha rose! till they rose in their clouds, and " saw their coming chief." This passage is remarkable for the resemblance it bears to an expostulation with the wood nymphs, on their absence at a critical time; which, as a favourite poetical idea, Virgil has copied from Theocritus, and Milton has very happily imitated from both.

Where were ye, nymphs! when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie;
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona, high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream. *

* Milton's Lycidas. See Theocrit. Idyll. I.

Πᾶ ποκ' ἆρ ἦσθ' ὄκα Λαφνις ἐτακετο; πᾶ πωκα, Νυμφαι, &c.

And Virg. Eclog. 10.

Quæ nemora, aut qui vos saltus habuere, puellæ, &c.

Having now treated fully of Ossian's talents, with respect to description and imagery, it only remains to make some observations on his sentiments. No sentiments can be beautiful without being proper; that is, suited to the character and situation of those who utter them. In this respect, Ossian is as correct as most writers. His characters, as above observed, are in general well supported; which could not have been the case, had the sentiments been unnatural or out of place. A variety of personages of different ages, sexes, and conditions, are introduced into his poems; and they speak and act with a propriety of sentiment and behaviour, which it is surprising to find in so rude an age. Let the poem of Darthula, throughout, be taken as an example.

But it is not enough that sentiments be natural and proper. In order to acquire any high degree of poetical merit, they must also be sublime and pathetic.

The sublime is not confined to sentiment alone. It belongs to description also; and whether in description or in sentiment, imports such ideas presented to the mind, as raise it to an uncommon degree of elevation, and fill it with admira-

tion and astonishment. This is the highest effect either of eloquence or poetry: and to produce this effect, requires a genius glowing with the strongest and warmest conception of some object awful, great, or magnificent. That this character of genius belongs to Ossian, may, I think, sufficiently appear from many of the passages I have already had occasion to quote. To produce more instances, were superfluous. If the engagement of Fingal with the spirit of Loda, in Carric-thura; if the encounters of the armies, in Fingal; if the address to the sun, in Carthon; if the similes founded on the ghosts and spirits of the night, all formerly mentioned, be not admitted as examples, and illustrious ones too, of the true poetical sublime, I confess myself entirely ignorant of this quality in writing.

All the circumstances, indeed, of Ossian's composition, are favourable to the sublime, more perhaps than to any other species of beauty. Accuracy and correctness; artfully connected narration; exact method and proportion of parts, we may look for in polished times. The gay and the beautiful, will appear to more advantage in the midst of smiling scenery and pleasurable themes. But amidst the rude scenes of

nature, amidst rocks and torrents, and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the sublime. It is the thunder and the lightning of genius. It is the offspring of nature, not of art. It is negligent of all the lesser graces, and perfectly consistent with a certain noble disorder. It associates naturally with that grave and solemn spirit, which distinguishes our author. For the sublime is an awful and serious emotion; and is heightened by all the images of trouble, and terror, and darkness.

> Ipse pater, media nimborum in nocte, coruscâ
> Fulmina mollitur dextrâ; quo maxima motu
> Terra tremit; fugere feræ; et mortalia corda
> Per gentes, humilis stravit pavor; ille, flagranti
> Aut Atho, aut Rhodopen, aut alta Ceraunia telo
> Dejicit.—— VIRG. GEORG. I.

Simplicity and conciseness are never-failing characteristics of the style of a sublime writer. He rests on the majesty of his sentiments, not on the pomp of his expressions. The main secret of being sublime, is to say great things in few, and in plain words: for every superfluous decoration degrades a sublime idea. The mind rises and swells, when a lofty description or senti-

ment is presented to it, in its native form. But no sooner does the poet attempt to spread out this sentiment or description, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the transport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the sublime is gone. Hence the concise and simple style of Ossian, gives great advantage to his sublime conceptions; and assists them in seizing the imagination with full power. *

* The noted saying of Julius Cæsar to the pilot in a storm, "Quid times? Cæsarem vehis;" is magnanimous and sublime. Lucan, not satisfied with this simple conciseness, resolved to amplify and improve the thought. Observe, how every time he twists it round, it departs farther from the sublime, till, at last, it ends in tumid declamation.

Sperne minas, inquit, Pelagi, ventoque furenti
Trade sinum. Italiam, si cœlo auctore, recusas,
Me, pete. Sola tibi causa hæc est justa timoris
Vectorem non nosse tuum; quem numina nunquam
Destituunt; de quo male tunc fortuna meretur,
Cum post vota venit; medias perrumpe procellas
Tutelâ secure meâ. Cœli iste fretique,
Non puppis nostræ, labor est. Hanc Cæsare pressam
A fluctu defendit onus.
——Quid tantâ strage paratur,
Ignoras? Quærit pelagi cœlique tumultu
Quid præstet fortuna mihi.——

PHARSAL. v. 575.

Sublimity, as belonging to sentiment, coincides in a great measure with magnanimity, heroism, and generosity of sentiment. Whatever discovers human nature in its greatest elevation; whatever bespeaks a high effort of soul; or shews a mind superior to pleasures, to dangers, and to death, forms what may be called the moral or sentimental sublime. For this, Ossian is eminently distinguished. No poet maintains a higher tone of virtuous and noble sentiment, throughout all his works. Particularly in all the sentiments of Fingal, there is a grandeur and loftiness proper to swell the mind with the highest ideas of human perfection. Wherever he appears, we behold the hero. The objects which he pursues, are always truly great; to bend the proud; to protect the injured; to defend his friends; to overcome his enemies by generosity more than by force. A portion of the same spirit actuates all the other heroes. Valour reigns; but it is a generous valour, void of cruelty, animated by honour, not by hatred. We behold no debasing passions among Fingal's warriors; no spirit of avarice or of insult; but a perpetual contention for fame; a desire of being distinguished and remembered for gallant actions; a love of justice;

and a zealous attachment to their friends and their country. Such is the strain of sentiment in the works of Ossian.

But the sublimity of moral sentiments, if they wanted the softening of the tender, would be in hazard of giving a hard and stiff air to poetry. It is not enough to admire. Admiration is a cold feeling, in comparison of that deep interest which the heart takes in tender and pathetic scenes; where, by a mysterious attachment to the objects of comparison, we are pleased and delighted, even whilst we mourn. With scenes of this kind Ossian abounds; and his high merit in these, is incontestible. He may be blamed for drawing tears too often from our eyes; but that he has the power of commanding them, I believe no man, who has the least sensibility, will question. The general character of his poetry, is the heroic mixed with the elegiac strain; admiration tempered with pity. Ever fond of giving, as he expresses it, "the joy of grief," it is visible, that on all moving subjects, he delights to exert his genius; and accordingly, never were there finer pathetic situations, than what his works present. His great art in managing them lies in giving vent to the simple and natural emo-

tions of the heart. We meet with no exaggerated declamation; no subtle refinements on sorrow; no substitution of description in place of passion. Ossian felt strongly himself; and the heart when uttering its native language never fails, by powerful sympathy, to affect the heart. A great variety of examples might be produced. We need only open the book to find them every where. What, for instance, can be more moving, than the lamentations of Oithona, after her misfortune? Gaul, the son of Morni, her lover, ignorant of what she had suffered, comes to her rescue. Their meeting is tender in the highest degree. He proposes to engage her foe, in single combat, and gives her in charge what she is to do, if he himself should fall. "And shall the "daughter of Nuath live?" she replied, with a bursting sigh. "Shall I live in Tromathon and "the son of Morni low? My heart is not of "that rock; nor my soul careless as that sea, "which lifts its blue waves to every wind, and "rolls beneath the storm. The blast, which "shall lay thee low, shall spread the branches "of Oithona on earth. We shall wither toge-"ther, son of car-borne Morni! The narrow "house is pleasant to me; and the grey stone

" of the dead; for never more will I leave thy " rocks, sea-surrounded Tromathon!——Chief " of Strumon, why camest thou over the waves " to Nuath's mournful daughter? Why did I not " pass away in secret, like the flower of the rock, " that lifts its fair head unseen, and strews its " withered leaves on the blast? Why didst thou " come, O Gaul! to hear my departing sigh?— " O had I dwelt at Duvranna, in the bright " beams of my fame! Then had my years come " on with joy; and the virgins would bless my " steps. But I fall in youth, son of Morni, and " my father shall blush in his hall."

Oithona mourns like a woman; in Cuthullin's expressions of grief after his defeat, we behold the sentiments of a hero, generous but desponding. The situation is remarkably fine. Cuthullin, rouzed from his cave, by the noise of battle, sees Fingal victorious in the field. He is described as kindling at the sight. " His hand " is on the sword of his fathers; his red-rolling " eyes on the foe. He thrice attempted to rush " to battle; and thrice did Connal stop him;" suggesting, that Fingal was routing the foe; and that he ought not, by the show of superflu-

ous aid, to deprive the king of any part of the honour of a victory, which was owing to him alone. Cuthullin yields to this generous sentiment; but we see it stinging him to the heart with the sense of his own disgrace. "Then, "Carril, go," replied the chief, "and greet the "king of Morven. When Lochlin falls away "like a stream after rain, and the noise of the "battle is over, then be thy voice sweet in his "ear, to praise the king of swords. Give him "the sword of Caithbat; for Cuthullin is wor- "thy no more to lift the arms of his fathers. "But, O ye ghosts of the lonely Cromla! Ye "souls of chiefs that are no more! Be ye the "companions of Cuthullin, and talk to him in "the cave of his sorrow. For never more shall "I be renowned among the mighty in the land. "I am like a beam that has shone: Like a mist "that has fled away; when the blast of the "morning came, and brightened the shaggy side "of the hill. Connal! talk of arms no more: "departed is my fame. My sighs shall be on "Cromla's wind; till my footsteps cease to be "seen. And thou, white-bosomed Bragela! "mourn over the fall of my fame; for vanquish-

" ed, I will never return to thee, thou sun-beam " of Dunscaich !"

——————Æstuat ingens
Uno in corde pudor, luctusque, et conscia virtus.

Besides such extended pathetic scenes, Ossian frequently pierces the heart by a single unexpected stroke. When Oscar fell in battle, " No " father mourned his son slain in youth ; no bro- " ther, his brother of love ; they fell without " tears, for the chief of the people was low." In the admirable interview of Hector with Andromache, in the sixth Iliad, the circumstance of the child in his nurse's arms, has often been remarked, as adding much to the tenderness of the scene. In the following passage relating to the death of Cuthullin, we find a circumstance that must strike the imagination with still greater force. " And is the son of Semo fallen ?" said Carril with a sigh. " Mournful are Tura's " walls, and sorrow dwells at Dunscaich. Thy " spouse is left alone in her youth ; the son of " thy love is alone. He shall come to Bragela, " and ask her why she weeps. He shall lift his " eyes to the wall, and see his father's sword. " Whose sword is that ? he will say ; and the

" soul of his mother is sad." Soon after Fingal had shewn all the grief of a father's heart for Ryno, one of his sons, fallen in battle, he is calling, after his accustomed manner, his sons to the chase. " Call," says he, " Fillan and Ry-" no—" But he is not here—My son rests on " the bed of death."—This unexpected start of anguish is worthy of the highest tragic poets ;

> If she comes in, she'll sure speak to my wife—
> My wife !—my wife—What wife ?—I have no wife—
> Oh insupportable ! Oh heavy hour !
>
> Othello, Act v. Scene vii.

The contrivance of the incident in both poets is similar ; but the circumstances are varied with judgment. Othello dwells upon the name of wife, when it had fallen from him, with the confusion and horror of one tortured with guilt. Fingal, with the dignity of a hero, corrects himself, and suppresses his rising grief.

The contrast which Ossian frequently makes between his present and his former state, diffuses over his whole poetry, a solemn pathetic air, which cannot fail to make impression on every heart. The conclusion of the Songs of Selma, is particularly calculated for this purpose. No-

thing can be more poetical and tender, or can leave upon the mind a stronger and more affecting idea of the venerable and aged bard. "Such "were the words of the bards in the days of the "song; when the king heard the music of harps, "and the tales of other times. The chiefs ga- "thered from all their hills, and heard the love- "ly sound. They praised the voice of Cona;* "the first among a thousand bards. But age is "now on my tongue, and my soul has failed. "I hear, sometimes, the ghosts of bards, and "learn their pleasant song. But memory fails "on my mind; I hear the call of years. They "say, as they pass along; Why does Ossian "sing? Soon shall he lie in the narrow house, "and no bard shall raise his fame. Roll on, ye "dark-brown years! for ye bring no joy in "your course. Let the tomb open to Ossian, "for his strength has failed. The sons of the "song are gone to rest. My voice remains, "like a blast, that roars lonely on a sea-sur- "rounded rock, after the winds are laid. The "dark moss whistles there, and the distant ma- "riner sees the waving trees."

* Ossian himself is poetically called the voice of Cona.

Upon the whole ; if to feel strongly, and to describe naturally, be the two chief ingredients in poetical genius, Ossian must, after fair examination, be held to possess that genius in a high degree. The question is not, whether a few improprieties may be pointed out in his works ; whether this, or that passage, might not have been worked up with more art and skill, by some writer of happier times ? A thousand such cold and frivolous criticisms, are altogether indecisive as to his genuine merit. But, has he the spirit, the fire, the inspiration of a poet ? Does he utter the voice of nature ? Does he elevate by his sentiments ? Does he interest by his descriptions ? Does he paint to the heart as well as to the fancy ? Does he make his readers glow, and tremble, and weep ? These are the great characteristics of true poetry. Where these are found, he must be a minute critic indeed, who can dwell upon slight defects. A few beauties of this high kind, transcend whole volumes of faultless mediocrity. Uncouth and abrupt, Ossian may sometimes appear, by reason of his conciseness ; but he is sublime, he is pathetic, in an eminent degree. If he has not the extensive knowledge, the regular dignity of narration, the ful-

ness and accuracy of description, which we find in Homer and Virgil, yet in strength of imagination, in grandeur of sentiment, in native majesty of passion, he is fully their equal. If he flows not always like a clear stream, yet he breaks forth often like a torrent of fire. Of art too, he is far from being destitute; and his imagination is remarkable for delicacy as well as strength. Seldom or never is he either trifling or tedious; and if he be thought too melancholy, yet he is always moral. Though his merit were in other respects much less than it is, this alone ought to entitle him to high regard, that his writings are remarkably favourable to virtue. They awake the tenderest sympathies, and inspire the most generous emotions. No reader can rise from him, without being warmed with the sentiments of humanity, virtue, and honour.

Though unacquainted with the original language, there is no one but must judge the translation to deserve the highest praise, on account of its beauty and elegance. Of its faithfulness and accuracy, I have been assured by persons skilled in the Gaelic tongue, who, from their youth, were acquainted with many of these poems of Ossian. To transfuse such spirited and fer-

vid ideas from one language into another; to translate literally, and yet with such a glow of poetry; to keep alive so much passion, and support so much dignity throughout, is one of the most difficult works of genius, and proves the translator to have been animated with no small portion of Ossian's spirit.

The measured prose which he has employed, possesses considerable advantages above any sort of versification he could have chosen. Whilst it pleases and fills the ear with a variety of harmonious cadences, being, at the same time, freer from constraint in the choice and arrangement of words, it allows the spirit of the original to be exhibited with more justness, force, and simplicity. Elegant, however, and masterly as Mr Macpherson's translation is, we must never forget, whilst we read it, that we are putting the merit of the original to a severe test. For, we are examining a poet stripped of his native dress: divested of the harmony of his own numbers. We know how much grace and energy the works of the Greek and Latin poets receive from the charm of versification in their original languages. If then, destitute of this advantage, exhibited in literal version, Ossian still has power to please

as a poet; and not to please only, but often to command, to transport, to melt the heart; we may very safely infer, that his productions are the offspring of true and uncommon genius; and we may boldly assign him a place among those whose works are to last for ages.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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