

T H E
S O N G S of S E L M A *.

STAR of the falling night! fair is thy light in the west! thou liftest thy unshorn head from thy cloud: thy steps are stately on thy hill. What dost thou behold in the plain? The stormy winds are laid. The murmur of the torrent comes from afar. Roaring waves climb the distant rock. The flies of evening are on their feeble wings, and the hum of their course is on the field. What dost thou behold, fair light? But thou dost smile and depart. The waves come with joy around thee, and bathe thy lovely hair. Farewel, thou silent beam!—Let the light of Ossian's soul arise.

* This poem fixes the antiquity of a custom, which is well known to have prevailed afterwards, in the north of Scotland, and in Ireland. The bards, at an annual feast, provided by the king or chief, repeated their poems, and such of them as were thought, by him, worthy of being preserved, were carefully taught to their children, in order to have them transmitted to posterity.—It was one of those occasions that afforded the subject of the present poem to Ossian.—It is called in the origi-

nal, the songs of Selma, which title it was thought proper to adopt in the translation.

The poem is entirely lyric, and has great variety of versification. The address to the evening star, with which it opens, has in the original all the harmony that numbers could give it; flowing down with all that tranquility and softness, which the scene described naturally inspires.—Three of the songs which are introduced in this piece, were published among the fragments of ancient poetry, printed last year.

AND it does arise in its strength ! I behold my departed friends. Their gathering is on Lora, as in the days that are past.—Fingal comes like a watry column of mist ; his heroes are around. And see the bards of the song, gray-haired Ullin ; stately Ryno ; Alpin *, with the tuneful voice, and the soft complaint of Minona !—How are ye changed, my friends, since the days of Selma's feast ! when we contended, like the gales of the spring, that, flying over the hill, by turns bend the feebly-whistling grafs.

MINONA † came forth in her beauty ; with down-cast look and tearful eye ; her hair flew slowly on the blast that rushed unfrequent from the hill.—The souls of the heroes were sad when she raised the tuneful voice ; for often had they seen the grave of Salgar ‡, and the dark dwelling of white-bosomed Colma ||. Colma left alone on the hill, with all her voice of music ! Salgar promised to come : but the night descended round.—Hear the voice of Colma, when she sat alone on the hill !

COLMA.

IT is night ;—I am alone, forlorn on the hill of storms. The wind is heard in the mountain. The torrent shrieks down the rock. No hut receives me from the rain ; forlorn on the hill of winds.

* Alpin is from the same root with Albion, or rather Albin, the ancient name of Britain ; Alp, *high Inland*, or *country*. The present name of our island has its origin in the Celtic tongue ; so that those who derived it from any other, betrayed their ignorance of the ancient language of our country.—*Breac't in*, *variegated island*, so called from the face of the country,

from the natives painting themselves, or from their party-coloured cloaths.

† Ossian introduces Minona, not in the ideal scene in his own mind, which he had described ; but at the annual feast of Selma, where the bards repeated their works before Fingal.

‡ Sealg-'er, *a hunter*.

|| Cul-math, *a woman with fine hair*.

RISE, moon! from behind thy clouds; stars of the night appear! Lead me, some light, to the place where my love rests from the toil of the chase! his bow near him, unstrung; his dogs panting around him. But here I must sit alone, by the rock of the mossy stream. The stream and the wind roar; nor can I hear the voice of my love.

WHY delays my Salgar, why the son of the hill, his promise? Here is the rock, and the tree; and here the roaring stream. Thou didst promise with night to be here. Ah! whither is my Salgar gone? With thee I would fly, my father; with thee, my brother of pride. Our race have long been foes*; but we are not foes, O Salgar!

CEASE a little while, O wind! stream, be thou silent a while! let my voice be heard over the heath; let my wanderer hear me. Salgar! it is I who call. Here is the tree, and the rock. Salgar, my love! I am here. Why delayest thou thy coming?

Lo! the moon appeareth. The flood is bright in the vale. The rocks are grey on the face of the hill. But I see him not on the brow; his dogs before him tell not that he is coming. Here I must sit alone.

BUT who are these that lie beyond me on the heath? Are they my love and my brother?—Speak to me, O my friends! they answer not. My soul is tormented with fears.—Ah! they are dead. Their swords are red from the fight. O my brother! my brother! why hast thou slain my Salgar? why, O Salgar! hast thou slain my brother? Dear were ye both to me! what shall I say in your praise? Thou wert fair on the hill among thousands; he was

terrible in fight. Speak to me; hear my voice, sons of my love! But alas! they are silent; silent for ever! Cold are their breasts of clay!

Oh! from the rock of the hill; from the top of the windy mountain, speak ye ghosts of the dead! speak, I will not be afraid.—Whither are ye gone to rest? In what cave of the hill shall I find you? No feeble voice is on the wind: no answer half-drowned in the storms of the hill.

I sit in my grief. I wait for morning in my tears. Rear the tomb, ye friends of the dead; but close it not till Colma come. My life flies away like a dream: why should I stay behind? Here shall I rest with my friends, by the stream of the founding rock. When night comes on the hill; when the wind is on the heath; my ghost shall stand in the wind, and mourn the death of my friends. The hunter shall hear from his booth. He shall fear but love my voice. For sweet shall my voice be for my friends; for pleasant were they both to me.

SUCH was thy song, Minona softly-blushing maid of Torman. Our tears descended for Colma, and our souls were sad.—Ullin came with the harp, and gave the song of Alpin.—The voice of Alpin was pleasant: the soul of Ryno was a beam of fire. But they had rested in the narrow house: and their voice was not heard in Selma.—Ullin had returned one day from the chace, before the heroes fell. He heard their strife on the hill; their song was soft but sad. They mourned the fall of Morar, first of mortal men.. His soul was like the soul of Fingal; his sword like the sword of Oscar.—But he fell, and his father mourned: his sister's eyes were full of tears.—Minona's eyes were full of tears, the sister of car-borne Morar.

Morar. She retired from the song of Ullin, like the moon in the west, when she foresees the shower, and hides her fair head in a cloud.—I touched the harp, with Ullin; the song of mourning rose.

RYNO.

THE wind and the rain are over: calm is the noon of day. The clouds are divided in heaven. Over the green hills flies the inconstant sun. Red through the stony vale comes down the stream of the hill. Sweet are thy murmurs, O stream! but more sweet is the voice I hear. It is the voice of Alpin, the son of the song, mourning for the dead. Bent is his head of age, and red his tearful eye. Alpin, thou son of the song, why alone on the silent hill? why complainest thou, as a blast in the wood; as a wave on the lonely shore?

ALPIN.

MY tears, O Ryno! are for the dead; my voice, for the inhabitants of the grave. Tall thou art on the hill; fair among the sons of the plain. But thou shalt fall like Morar*; and the mourner shall sit on thy tomb. The hills shall know thee no more; thy bow shall lie in the hall, unstrung.

THOU wert swift, O Morar! as a roe on the hill; terrible as a meteor of fire. Thy wrath was as the storm. Thy sword in battle, as lightning in the field. Thy voice was like a stream after rain; like thunder on distant hills. Many fell by thy arm; they were consumed in the flames of thy wrath.

BUT when thou didst return from war, how peaceful was thy brow! Thy face was like the sun after rain; like the moon in the

* Mór-ér, *great man*.

silence of night ; calm as the breast of the lake when the loud wind is laid.

NARROW is thy dwelling now ; dark the place of thine abode. With three steps I compass thy grave, O thou who wast so great before ! Four stones, with their heads of moss, are the only memorial of thee. A tree with scarce a leaf, long grass which whistles in the wind, mark to the hunter's eye the grave of the mighty Morar. Morar ! thou art low indeed. Thou hast no mother to mourn thee ; no maid with her tears of love. Dead is she that brought thee forth. Fallen is the daughter of Morglan.

Who on his staff is this ? who is this, whose head is white with age, whose eyes are red with tears, who quakes at every step.—It is thy father *, O Morar ! the father of no son but thee. He heard of thy fame in battle ; he heard of foes dispersed. He heard of Morar's fame ; why did he not hear of his wound ? Weep, thou father of Morar ! weep ; but thy son heareth thee not. Deep is the sleep of the dead ; low their pillow of dust. No more shall he hear thy voice ; no more shall he awake at thy call. When shall it be morn in the grave, to bid the slumberer awake ?

FAREWEL, thou bravest of men ! thou conqueror in the field ! but the field shall see thee no more ; nor the dark wood be lightened with the splendor of thy steel. Thou hast left no son. But the song shall preserve thy name. Future times shall hear of thee ; they shall hear of the fallen Morar.

THE grief of all arose, but most the bursting sigh of Armin †. He remembers the death of his son, who fell in the days of his

* Torman, the son of Carthul, lord of I-mora, one of the western isles. king of Gorma, *i. e.* the blue island, supposed to be one of the Hebrides.

† Armin, a hero. He was chief or petty

youth. Carmor * was near the hero, the chief of the echoing Galmal. Why bursts the sigh of Armin, he said? Is there a cause to mourn? The song comes, with its music, to melt and please the soul. It is like soft mist, that, rising from a lake, pours on the silent vale; the green flowers are filled with dew, but the sun returns in his strength, and the mist is gone. Why art thou sad, O Armin, chief of sea-surrounded Gorma?

SAD! I am indeed: nor small my cause of woe!—Carmor, thou hast lost no son; thou hast lost no daughter of beauty. Colgar the valiant lives; and Annira fairest maid. The boughs of thy family flourish, O Carmor! but Armin is the last of his race. Dark is thy bed, O Daura! and deep thy sleep in the tomb.—When shalt thou awake with thy songs? with all thy voice of music?

RISE, winds of autumn, rise; blow upon the dark heath! streams of the mountains, roar! howl, ye tempests, in the top of the oak! walk through broken clouds, O moon! show by intervals thy pale face! bring to my mind that sad night, when all my children fell; when Arindal the mighty fell; when Dura the lovely failed.

DAURA, my daughter! thou wert fair; fair as the moon on the hills of Fura †; white as the driven snow; sweet as the breathing gale. Arindal, thy bow was strong, thy spear was swift in the field: thy look was like mist on the wave; thy shield, a red cloud in a storm. Armar, renowned in war, came, and fought Daura's love; he was not long denied; fair was the hope of their friends.

* Cear-mór, a tall dark-complexioned man. † Fuar-a, cold island.

ERATH, son of Odgal, repined ; for his brother was slain by Armar. He came disguised like a son of the sea : fair was his skiff on the wave ; white his locks of age ; calm his serious brow. Fairest of women, he said, lovely daughter of Armin ! a rock not distant in the sea, bears a tree on its side ; red shines the fruit afar. There Armor waits for Daura. I came to carry his love along the rolling sea.

SHE went ; and she called on Armar. Nought answered, but the son * of the rock. Armor, my love ! my love ! why tormentest thou me with fear ? hear, son of Ardnart, hear : it is Daura who calleth thee ! Erath the traitor fled laughing to the land. She lifted up her voice, and cried for her brother and her father. Arindal ! Armin ! none to relieve your Daura.

HER voice came over the sea. Arindal my son descended from the hill ; rough in the spoils of the chase. His arrows rattled by his side ; his bow was in his hand : five dark gray dogs attended his steps. He saw fierce Erath on the shore : he seized and bound him to an oak. Thick fly the thongs † of the hide around his limbs ; he loads the wind with his groans.

ARINDAL ascends the deep in his boat, to bring Daura to land. Armar came in his wrath, and let fly the gray-feathered shaft. It sung ; it sunk in thy heart, O Arindal my son ! for Erath the traitor thou diedst. The oar is stopped at once ; he panted on the rock

* By *the son of the rock* the poet means count, called it *mac-talla* ; *the son who dwells in the rock*.

† The poet here only means that Erath was bound with leathern thongs.

and expired. What is thy grief, O Daura, when round thy feet is poured thy brother's blood.

THE boat is broken in twain by the waves. Armar plunges into the sea, to rescue his Daura or die. Sudden a blast from the hill comes over the waves. He sunk, and he rose no more.

ALONE, on the sea-beat rock, my daughter was heard to complain. Frequent and loud were her cries; nor could her father relieve her. All night I stood on the shore. I saw her by the faint beam of the moon. All night I heard her cries. Loud was the wind; and the rain beat hard on the side of the mountain. Before morning appeared, her voice was weak. It died away, like the evening-breeze among the grass of the rocks. Spent with grief she expired. And left thee Armin alone: gone is my strength in the war, and fallen my pride among women.

WHEN the storms of the mountain come; when the north lifts the waves on high; I sit by the founding shore, and look on the fatal rock. Often by the setting moon I see the ghosts of my children. Half-viewless, they walk in mournful conference together. Will none of you speak in pity? They do not regard their father. I am sad, O Carmor, nor small my cause of woe!

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 gathered from all their hills, and heard the lovely 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,

* Ossian is sometimes poetically called *the voice of Cona*.

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 on 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-surrounded rock, after the winds are laid. The dark moss whistles there, and the distant mariner sees the waving trees.

CALTHON