

O I T H Ó N A:

A P O E M*.

DARKNESS dwells around Dunlathmon, though the moon shews half her face on the hill. The daughter of night turns her eyes away; for she beholds the grief that is coming.—The son of Morni is on the plain; but there is no found in the hall. No

* Gaul, the son of Morni, attended Lathmon into his own country, after his being defeated in Morven, as related in the preceding poem. He was kindly entertained by Nuäth, the father of Lathmon, and fell in love with his daughter Oithona.—The lady was no less enamoured of Gaul, and a day was fixed for their marriage. In the meantime Fingal, preparing for an expedition into the country of the Britons, sent for Gaul. He obeyed, and went; but not without promising to Oithona to return, if he survived the war, by a cer-

tain day.—Lathmon too was obliged to attend his father Nuäth in his wars, and Oithona was left alone at Dunlathmon, the seat of the family.—Dunrommath, lord of Uthal, supposed to be one of the Orkneys, taking advantage of the absence of her friends, came and carried off, by force, Oithona, who had formerly rejected his love, into Tromáthon, a desert island, where he concealed her in a cave.

Gaul returned on the day appointed; heard of the rape, and sailed to Tromáthon, to revenge himself on Dunrommath.

No long-streaming * beam of light comes trembling through the gloom. The voice of Oithona † is not heard amidst the noise of the streams of Duvranna.—

WHITHER art thou gone in thy beauty, dark-haired daughter of Nuäth? Lathmon is in the field of the valiant, but thou didst promise to remain in the hall; thou didst promise to remain in the hall till the son of Morni returned. Till he returned from Strumon, to the maid of his love. The tear was on thy cheek at his departure; the sigh rose in secret in thy breast. But thou dost not come to meet him, with songs, with the lightly-trembling sound of the harp.—

SUCH were the words of Gaul, when he came to Dunlathmon's towers. The gates were open and dark. The winds were blustering in the hall. The trees strowed the threshold with leaves; and the murmur of night is abroad.—Sad and silent, at a rock, the son of Morni sat: his soul trembled for the maid; but he knew not

math. When he landed, he found Oithona disconsolate, and resolved not to survive the loss of her honour.—She told him the story of her misfortunes, and she scarce ended, when Dunrommath, with his followers, appeared at the further end of the island. Gaul prepared to attack him, recommending to Oithona to retire, till the battle was over.—She seemingly obeyed; but she secretly armed herself, rushed into the thickest of the battle, and was mortally wounded.—Gaul pursuing the flying enemy, found her just expiring on

the field: he mourned over her, raised her tomb, and returned to Morven.—Thus is the story handed down by tradition; nor is it given with any material difference in the poem, which opens with Gaul's return to Dunlathmon, after the rape of Oithona.

* Some gentle taper
——visit us

With thy long levelled rule of streaming
light. MILTON.

† Oi-thóna, *the virgin of the wave.*

whither to turn his course. The son ‡ of Leth stood at a distance, and heard the winds in his bushy hair. But he did not raise his voice, for he saw the sorrow of Gaul.

SLEEP descended on the heroes. The visions of night arose. Oithona stood in a dream, before the eyes of Morni's son. Her dark hair was loose and disordered: her lovely eye rolled in tears. Blood stained her snowy arm. The robe half hid the wound of her breast. She stood over the chief, and her voice was heard.

SLEEPS the son of Morni, he that was lovely in the eyes of Oithona? Sleeps Gaul at the distant rock, and the daughter of Nuäth low? The sea rolls round the dark isle of Tromáthon; I sit in my tears in the cave. Nor do I sit alone, O Gaul, the dark chief of Cuthal is there. He is there in the rage of his love.—And what can Oithona do?

A ROUGHER blast rushed through the oak. The dream of night departed. Gaul took his aspen spear; he stood in the rage of wrath. Often did his eyes turn to the east, and accuse the lagging light.—At length the morning came forth. The hero lifted up the sail. The winds came rustling from the hill; and he bounded on the waves of the deep.—On the third day arose Tromathon*, like a blue shield in the midst of the sea. The white wave roared against

‡ Morlo, the son of Leth, is one of Fingal's most famous heroes. He and three other men attended Gaul on his expedition to Tromáthon.

* *ἐφάνη ὄρεα σκιδέντα*
Γαίης Φαιηκῶν,——

——ὥς ὅτε ῥῖνον ἐν ηἰρεοιδεῖ ποντῷ.
HOM. Od. v. 280.

Then swell'd to fight Phæacia's dusky coast,
And woody mountains half in vapours lost;
That lay before him indistinct and vast,
Like a broad shield amid the watry waste.

† Tróm-thón, *heavy or deep-sounding wave.*

its rocks; sad Oithona sat on the coast. She looked on the rolling waters, and her tears descend.—But when she saw Gaul in his arms, she started and turned her eyes away. Her lovely cheek is bent and red; her white arm trembles by her side.—Thrice she strove to fly from his presence; but her steps failed her as she went.

DAUGHTER of Nuäth, said the hero, why dost thou fly from Gaul? Do my eyes send forth the flame of death? Or darkens hatred in my soul? Thou art to me the beam of the east rising in a land unknown. But thou coverest thy face with sadness, daughter of high Dunlathmon! Is the foe of Oithona near? My soul burns to meet him in battle. The sword trembles on the side of Gaul, and longs to glitter in his hand.—Speak, daughter of Nuäth, dost thou not behold my tears?

CAR-BORNE chief of Strumon, replied the fighting maid, why comest thou over the dark-blue wave to Nuäth's mournful daughter? Why did I not pass away in secret, like the flower of the rock, that lifts its fair head unseen, and strows its withered leaves on the blast? Why didst thou come, O Gaul, to hear my departing sigh? I pass away in my youth; and my name shall not be heard. Or it will be heard with sorrow, and the tears of Nuäth will fall. Thou wilt be sad, son of Morni, for the fallen fame of Oithona. But she shall sleep in the narrow tomb, far from the voice of the mourner.—Why didst thou come, chief of Strumon, to the sea-beat rocks of Tromathon.

I CAME to meet thy foes, daughter of car-borne Nuäth! the death of Cuthal's chief darkens before me; or Morni's son shall fall.—Oithona! when Gaul is low, raise my tomb on that oozy rock; and

when the dark-bounding ship shall pass, call the sons of the sea ; call them, and give this sword, that they may carry it to Morni's hall ; that the grey-haired hero may cease to look towards the desert for the return of his son.

AND shall the daughter of Nuäth live, she replied with a bursting sigh ? Shall I live in Tromáthon, 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 together, son of car-borne Morni !—The narrow house is pleasant to me, and the gray stone of the dead : for never more will I leave thy rocks, sea-surrounded Tromáthon !—Night * came on with her clouds, after the departure of Lathmon, when he went to the wars of his fathers, to the moss-covered rock of Duthórmoth ; night came on, and I sat in the hall, at the beam of the oak. The wind was abroad in the trees. I heard the sound of arms. Joy rose in my face ; for I thought of thy return. It was the chief of Cuthal, the red-haired strength of Dunrommath. His eyes rolled in fire : the blood of my people was on his sword. They who defended Oithona fell by the gloomy chief.—What could I do ? My arm was weak ; it could not lift the spear. He took me in my grief, amidst my tears he raised the sail. He feared the returning strength of Lathmon, the brother of unhappy Oithona.—But behold, he comes with his people ! the dark wave is divided before him !—Whither wilt thou turn thy steps, son of Morni ? Many are the warriors of Dunrommath !

* Oithona relates how she was carried away by Dunrommath.

My steps never turned from battle, replied the hero, as he unsheathed his sword; and will I begin to fear, Oithona, when thy foes are near? Go to thy cave, daughter of Nuath, till our battle cease. Son of Leth, bring the bows of our fathers; and the sounding quiver of Morni. Let our three warriors bend the yew. Our selves will lift the spear. They are an host on the rock; but our souls are strong.

THE daughter of Nuath went to the cave: a troubled joy rose on her mind, like the red path of the lightning on a stormy cloud.—Her soul was resolved, and the tear was dried from her wildly-looking eye.—Dunrommath slowly approached; for he saw the son of Morni. Contempt contracted his face, a smile is on his dark-brown cheek; his red eye rolled, half-conceal'd, beneath his shaggy brows.

WHENCE are the sons of the sea, begun the gloomy chief? Have the winds driven you to the rocks of Tromathon? Or come you in search of the white-handed daughter of Nuath? The sons of the unhappy, ye feeble men, come to the hand of Dunrommath. His eye spares not the weak; and he delights in the blood of strangers. Oithona is a beam of light, and the chief of Cuthal enjoys it in secret; wouldst thou come on its loveliness like a cloud, son of the feeble hand!—Thou mayst come, but shalt thou return to the halls of thy fathers?

DOST thou not know me, said Gaul, red-haired chief of Cuthal? Thy feet were swift on the heath, in the battle of car-borne Lathmon; when the sword of Morni's son pursued his host, in Morven's woody land. Dunrommath! thy words are mighty, for thy warriors
gather

gather behind thee. But do I fear them, son of pride? I am not of the race of the feeble.

GAUL advanced in his arms; Dunrommath shrunk behind his people. But the spear of Gaul pierced the gloomy chief, and his sword lopped off his head, as it bended in death.—The son of Morni shook it thrice by the lock; the warriors of Dunrommath fled. The arrows of Morven pursued them: ten fell on the mossy rocks. The rest lift the sounding sail, and bound on the echoing deep.

GAUL advanced towards the cave of Oithona. He beheld a youth leaning against a rock. An arrow had pierced his side; and his eye rolled faintly beneath his helmet.—The soul of Morni's son is sad, he came and spoke the words of peace.

CAN the hand of Gaul heal thee, youth of the mournful brow? I have searched for the herbs of the mountains; I have gathered them on the secret banks of their streams. My hand has closed the wound of the valiant, and their eyes have blessed the son of Morni. Where dwelt thy fathers, warrior? Were they of the sons of the mighty? Sadness shall come, like night, on thy native streams; for thou art fallen in thy youth.—

MY fathers, replied the stranger, were of the sons of the mighty; but they shall not be sad; for my fame is departed like morning mist. High walls rise on the banks of Duvranna; and see their mossy towers in the stream; a rock ascends behind them with its bending firs. Thou mayst behold it far distant. There my brother dwells. He is renowned in battle: give him this glittering helmet.

THE helmet fell from the hand of Gaul; for it was the wounded Oithona. She had armed herself in the cave, and came in search of death. Her heavy eyes are half closed; the blood pours from her side.—

SON of Morni, she said, prepare the narrow tomb. Sleep comes, like a cloud, on my soul. The eyes of Oithona are dim. O had I dwelt at Duvranna, in the bright beam 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.—

SHE fell pale on the rock of Tromáthon. The mournful hero raised her tomb.—He came to Morven; but we saw the darkness of his soul. Ossian took the harp in the praise of Oithona. The brightness of the face of Gaul returned. But his sigh rose, at times, in the midst of his friends, like blasts that shake their unfrequent wings, after the stormy winds are laid.

C R O M A: