

T H E

D E A T H of C U C H U L L I N :

A P P O E M*.

IS the wind on Fingal's shield? Or is the voice of past times in my hall? Sing on, sweet voice, for thou art pleasant, and carriest away my night with joy. Sing on, O Bragela, daughter of Car-borne Songlan!

I T

* Tradition throws considerable light on the history of Ireland, during the long reign of Fingal, the son of Comhal, in Morven.—Arth, the son of Cairbre, supreme king of Ireland, dying, was succeeded by his son Cormac, a minor.—The petty kings and chiefs of the tribes met at Temora, the royal palace, in order to chuse, out of their own number, a guardian to the young king. Disputes, concerning the choice of a proper person, run high, and it was resolved to end all differences by giving the tuition of the young king to Cuchullin, the son of Semo, who had rendered himself famous by his great actions, and who resided, at the time, with Connal, the son of Caithbat, in Ulster.

Cuchullin was but three and twenty years old, when he assumed the management of

affairs in Ireland: and the invasion of Swaran happened two years after. In the twenty-seventh year of Cuchullin's age, and the third of his administration, Torlath, the son of Cantéla, set up for himself in Connaught, and advanced towards Temora, in order to dethrone Cormac. Cuchullin marched against him, came up with him at the Lake of Lego, and totally defeated his forces. Torlath fell in the battle by Cuchullin's hand; but as he himself pressed too eagerly on the flying enemy, he was mortally wounded by an arrow, and died the second day after.

The good fortune of Cormac fell with Cuchullin: many set up for themselves, and anarchy and confusion reigned. At last Cormac was taken off, nobody knew

IT is the white wave of the rock, and not Cuchullin's sails. Often do the mists deceive me for the ship of my love! when they rise round some ghost, and spread their gray skirts on the wind. Why dost thou delay thy coming, son of the generous Semo?—Four times has autumn returned with its winds, and raised the seas of Togorma*,

how; and Cairbar, one of the competitors for the throne, having defeated all his rivals, became sole monarch of Ireland.—The family of Fingal, who were in the interest of Cormac's family, were resolved to deprive Cairbar of the throne he had usurped; in particular, Oscar the son of Ossian had determined to revenge the death of Cathol, his friend, who had been assassinated by Cairbar.—The threats of Oscar reached Cairbar's ears: he invited him in a friendly manner to a feast which he had prepared at the royal palace of Temora, resolving to pick a quarrel, and have some pretext for killing him.

The quarrel happened; the followers of both fought, and Cairbar and Oscar fell by mutual wounds: in the mean time Fingal arrived from Scotland with an army, defeated the friends of Cairbar, and re-established the family of Cormac in the possession of the kingdom.—The present poem concerns the death of Cuchullin. It is, in the original, called *Duan loch Leigo*, i. e. *The Poem of Lego's Lake*, and is an episode introduced in a great poem, which celebrated the last expedition of Fingal into Ireland. The greatest part of the poem is lost, and nothing remains but some episodes, which a few old people in the north

of Scotland retain on memory.—Cuchullin is the most famous Champion in the Irish traditions and poems; in them he is always called the *redoubtable Cuchullin*; and the fables concerning his strength and valour are innumerable. Ossian thought his expedition against the Fir-bolg, or Belgæ of Britain, a subject fit for an epic poem; which was extant till of late, and was called *Tora-na-tana*, or a *Dispute about Possessions*, as the war which was the foundation of it, was commenced by the British Belgæ, who inhabited Ireland, in order to extend their territories.—The fragments that remain of this poem are animated with the genuine spirit of Ossian; so that there can be no doubt that it was of his composition.

* Togorma, i. e. *The island of blue waves*, one of the Hebrides, was subject to Connal, the son of Caithbat, Cuchullin's friend.—He is sometimes called the son of Colgar, from one of that name who was the founder of the family.—Connal, a few days before the news of Torlath's revolt came to Temora, had sailed to Togorma, his native isle; where he was detained by contrary winds during the war in which Cuchullin was killed.

since

since thou hast been in the roar of battles, and Bragéla distant far.— Hills of the isle of mist! when will ye answer to his hounds?— But ye are dark in your clouds, and sad Bragéla calls in vain. Night comes rolling down: the face of ocean fails. The heath-cock's head is beneath his wing: the hind sleeps with the hart of the desert. They shall rise with the morning's light, and feed on the mossy stream. But my tears return with the sun, my sighs come on with the night. When wilt thou come in thine arms, O chief of mossy Tura?

PLEASANT is thy voice in Offian's ear, daughter of car-borne Sorglan! But retire to the hall of shells; to the beam of the burning oak.—Attend to the murmur of the sea: it rolls at Dunfcaich's walls: let sleep descend on thy blue eyes, and the hero come to thy dreams.

CUCHULLIN sits at Lego's lake, at the dark rolling of waters. Night is around the hero; and his thousands spread on the heath: a hundred oaks burn in the midst, the feast of shells is smoking wide.—Carril strikes the harp, beneath a tree; his gray locks glitter in the beam; the rustling blast of night is near, and lifts his aged hair.—His song is of the blue Togorma, and of its chief, Cuchullin's friend.

WHY art thou absent, Connal, in the day of the gloomy storm? The chiefs of the south have convened against the car-borne Cormac: the winds detain thy sails, and thy blue waters roll around thee. But Cormac is not alone: the son of Semo fights his battles. Semo's son his battles fights! the terror of the stranger! he that is

like the vapour of death *, slowly borne by sultry winds. The sun reddens in its presence, the people fall around.

SUCH was the song of Carril, when a son of the foe appeared; he threw down his pointless spear, and spoke the words of Torlath: Torlath the chief of heroes, from Lego's fable surge: he that led his thousands to battle, against car-borne Cormac. Cormac who was distant far, in Temora's † echoing halls: he learned to bend the bow of his fathers; and to lift the spear. Nor long didst 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.

CUCHULLIN rose before the bard ‡, that came from generous Torlath; he offered him the shell of joy, and honoured the son of songs. Sweet voice of Lego! he said, what are the words of Torlath? Comes he to our feast or battle, the car-borne son of Cantéla ||?

HE comes to thy battle, replied the bard, to the sounding strife of spears.—When morning is gray on Lego, Torlath will fight

* Οἷη δ' ἐκ μεφέων ἐρεθιστὴν φαίνεται ἀήρ
καύματος ἐξ ἀνέμοιο δυσαέος ὄρνυμενοιο.

HOM. II. 5.

As vapours blown by Auster's sultry breath,
Pregnant with plagues, and shedding seeds
of death,

Beneath the rage of burning Sirius rise,
Choke the parch'd earth, and blacken all
the skies.

POPE.

† The royal palace of the Irish kings;
Teamhrath according to some of the
bards,

‡ The bards were the heralds of ancient times; and their persons were sacred on account of their office. In later times they abused that privilege; and as their persons were inviolable, they satyrised and lampooned so freely those who were not liked by their patrons, that they became a public nuisance. Screened under the character of heralds, they grossly abused the enemy when he would not accept the terms they offered.

|| Cean-teola', head of a family.

on the plain : and wilt thou meet him, in thine arms, king of the isle of mist ? Terrible is the spear of Torlath ! it is a meteor of night. He lifts it, and the people fall : death fits in the lightning of his sword.

Do I fear, replied Cuchullin, the spear of car-borne Torlath ? He is brave as a thousand heroes ; but my soul delights in war. The sword rests not by the side of Cuchullin, bard of the times of old ! Morning shall meet me on the plain, and gleam on the blue arms of Semo's son.—But sit thou, on the heath, O bard ! and let us hear thy voice : partake of the joyful shell ; and hear the songs of Temora.

THIS is no time, replied the bard, to hear the song of joy ; when the mighty are to meet in battle like the strength of the waves of Lego. Why art thou so dark, Slimora * ! with all thy silent woods ? No green star trembles on thy top ; no moon-beam on thy side. But the meteors of death are there, and the gray watry forms of ghosts. Why art thou dark, Slimora ! with thy silent woods ?

HE retired, in the sound of his song ; Carril accompanied his voice. The music was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul. The ghosts of departed bards heard it from Slimora's side. Soft sounds spread along the wood, and the silent valleys of night rejoice.—So, when he sits in the silence of noon, in the valley of his breeze, the humming of the mountain bee comes to Ossian's ear : the gale drowns it often in its course ; but the pleasant sound returns again.

RAISE, said Cuchullin, to his hundred bards, the song of the noble Fingal : that song which he hears at night, when the dreams

* *Slia'-mór, great hill.*

of his rest descend: when the bards strike the distant harp, and the faint light gleams on Selma's walls. Or let the grief of Lara rise, and the sighs of the mother of Calmar *, when he was fought, in vain, on his hills; and she beheld his bow in the hall.—Carril, place the shield of Caithbat on that branch; and let the spear of Cuchullin be near; that the sound of my battle may rise with the gray beam of the east.

THE hero leaned on his father's shield: the song of Lara rose. The hundred bards were distant far: Carril alone is near the chief. The words of the song were his; and the sound of his harp was mournful.

ALCLETHA † with the aged locks! mother of car-borne Calmar! why dost thou look towards the desert, to behold the return of thy son? These are not his heroes, dark on the heath: nor is that the voice of Calmar: it is but the distant grove, Alcletha! but the roar of the mountain wind!

WHO ‡ bounds over Lara's stream, sister of the noble Calmar? Does not Alclétha behold his spear? But her eyes are dim! Is it not the son of Matha, daughter of my love?

* Calmar the son of Matha. His death is related at large, in the third book of Fingal. He was the only son of Matha; and the family was extinct in him.—The seat of the family was on the banks of the river Lara, in the neighbourhood of Lego, and probably near the place where Cuchullin lay; which circumstance suggested to him, the lamentation of Alclétha over her son.

† Ald-cla'tha, *decaying beauty*: probably a poetical name given the mother of Calmar, by the bard himself.

‡ Alcletha speaks. Calmar had promised to return, by a certain day, and his mother and his sister Alona are represented by the bard as looking, with impatience, towards that quarter where they expected Calmar would make his first appearance.

IT is but an aged oak, Alcletha! replied the lovely weeping Alona*; it is but an oak, Alclétha, bent over Lara's stream. But who comes along the plain? sorrow is in his speed. He lifts high the spear of Calmar. Alclétha, it is covered with blood!

BUT it is covered with the blood of foes †, sister of car-borne Calmar! his spear never returned unstained with blood ‡, nor his bow from the strife of the mighty. The battle is consumed in his presence: he is a flame of death, Alona!—Youth || of the mournful speed! where is the son of Alcletha? Does he return with his fame? in the midst of his echoing shields?—Thou art dark and silent!—Calmar is then no more. Tell me not, warrior, how he fell, for I cannot hear of his wound.—

WHY dost thou look towards the desert, mother of car-borne Calmar?—

SUCH was the song of Carril, when Cuchullin lay on his shield: the bards rested on their harps, and sleep fell softly around.—The son of Semo was awake alone; his soul was fixed on the war.—The burning oaks began to decay; faint red light is spread around.—A feeble voice is heard: the ghost of Calmar came. He stalked in the beam. Dark is the wound in his side. His hair is disordered and loose. Joy sits darkly on his face; and he seems to invite Cuchullin to his cave.

* Alúine, *exquisitely beautiful*.

† Acletha speaks.

‡ From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan returned not back, and the sword

of Saul returned not empty. 2 Sam. i. 22.

|| She addresses herself to Larnir, Calmar's friend, who had returned with the news of his death.

SON of the cloudy night! said the rising chief of Erin; Why dost thou bend thy dark eyes on me, ghost of the car-borne Calmar? Wouldest 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 Lara! if thou now dost advise to fly!—But, Calmar, I never fled. I never feared † the ghosts of the desert. Small is their knowledge, and weak their hands; their dwelling is in the wind.—But my soul grows in danger, and rejoices in the noise of steel. Retire thou to thy cave; thou art not Calmar's ghost; he delighted in battle, and his arm was like the thunder of heaven.

HE retired in his blast with joy, for he had heard the voice of his praise. The faint beam of the morning rose, and the sound of Caithbat's buckler spread. Green Ullin's warriors convened, like the roar of many streams.—The horn of war is heard over Lego; the mighty Torlath came.

Why dost thou come with thy thousands, Cuchullin, said the chief of Lego. I know the strength of thy arm, and thy soul is an unextinguished fire.—Why fight we not on the plain, and let our hosts behold our deeds? Let them behold us like roaring waves, that tumble round a rock: the mariners hasten away, and look on their strife with fear.

THOU risest, like the sun, on my soul, replied the son of Semo. Thine arm is mighty, O Torlath! and worthy of my wrath. Retire, ye men of Ullin, to Slimora's shady side; behold the chief of

* See Calmar's speech, in the first book of Fingal.

† See Cuchullin's reply to Connal, concerning Crugal's ghost. Fin. b. 2.

Erin, in the day of his fame.—Carril! tell to mighty Connal, if Cuchullin must fall, tell him I accused the winds which roar on Togorma's waves.—Never was he absent in battle, when the strife of my fame arose.—Let this sword be before Cormac, like the beam of heaven: let his counsel sound in Temora in the day of danger.—

HE rushed, in the sound of his arms, like the terrible spirit of Loda*, when he comes in the roar of a thousand storms, and scatters battles from his eyes.—He sits on a cloud over Lochlin's seas: his mighty hand is on his sword, and the winds lift his flaming locks.—So terrible was Cuchullin in the day of his fame.—Torlath fell by his hand, and Lego's heroes mourned.—They gather around the chief like the clouds of the desert.—A thousand swords rose at once; a thousand arrows flew; but he stood like a rock in the midst of a roaring sea.—They fell around; he strode in blood: dark Slimora echoed wide.—The sons of Ullin came, and the battle spread over Lego.—The chief of Erin overcame; he returned over the field with his fame.—

But pale he returned! The joy of his face was dark. He rolled his eyes in silence.—The sword hung, unsheathed, in his hand, and his spear bent at every step.

* Loda, in the third book of Fingal, is mentioned as a place of worship in Scandinavia: by the *spirit of Loda*, the poet probably means Odin, the great deity of the northern nations. He is described here with all his terrors about him, not unlike Mars, as he is introduced in a simile, in the seventh Iliad.

——— οἷός τε πελώριος ἔρχεται Ἄρης·
Ὅς τ' εἰσὶν πόλεμονδε μετ' ἀνέρας, οὔσε κρονίων
Θυμοβόρου ἔριδος μενεΐ ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι.
So stalks in arms the grisly god of Thrace,
When Jove to punish faithless men prepares,
And gives whole nations to the waste of wars.

POPE.

CARRIL, said the king in secret, the strength of Cuchullin fails. My days are with the years that are past: and no morning of mine shall arise.—They shall seek me at Temora, but I shall not be found. Cormac will weep in his hall, and say, “Where is Tura’s chief?”—But my name is renowned! my fame in the song of bards.—The youth will say in secret, O let me die as Cuchullin died; renown cloathed him like a robe; and the light of his fame is great. Draw the arrow from my side; and lay Cuchullin beneath that oak. Place the shield of Caithbat near, that they may behold me amidst the arms of my fathers.—

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. Who is that, like the hart of the desert, in the murmur of his course?—His eyes look wildly round in search of his friend.—Connal, son of Colgar, where hast thou been, when the mighty fell? Did the seas of Togorma roll round thee? Was the wind of the south in thy sails?

* The Irish historians have placed Cuchullin in the first century.—The translator has given his reasons for fixing him in the third, in the dissertation which is prefixed to this collection. In other particulars the accounts of Keating and O’Flaherty coincide pretty nearly with Ossian’s poems, and the traditions of the Highlands and Isles. They say that he was killed in the twenty-seventh year of his age, and they

give him a great character for his wisdom and valour.

† Conloch, who was afterwards very famous for his great exploits in Ireland. He was so remarkable for his dexterity in handling the javelin, that when a good marksman is described, it has passed into a proverb, in the north of Scotland, *He is unerring as the arm of Conloch.*

The mighty have fallen in battle, and thou wast not there.—Let none tell it in Selma, nor in Morven's woody land; Fingal will be sad, and the sons of the desert mourn.

By the dark rolling waves of Lego they raised the hero's tomb.—
—Luäth †, at a distance, lies, the companion of Cuchullin, at the chace.—Blest || be thy soul, son of Semo; thou wert mighty in battle.—Thy strength was like the strength of a stream: thy speed like the eagle's * wing.—Thy path in the battle was terrible: the steps of death were behind thy sword.—Blest be thy soul, son of Semo; car-borne chief of Dunscach!

THOU hast not fallen by the sword of the mighty, neither was thy blood on the spear of the valiant.—The arrow came, like the sting of death in a blast: nor did the feeble hand, which drew the bow, perceive it. Peace to thy soul, in thy cave, chief of the isle of Mist!

THE mighty are dispersed at Temora: there is none in Cormac's hall. The king mourns in his youth, for he does not behold thy coming. The sound of thy shield is ceased: his

† It was of old, the custom to bury the favourite dog near the master. This was not peculiar to the ancient Scots, for we find it practised by many other nations in their ages of heroism.—There is a stone shewn still at Dunscach in the isle of Sky, to which Cuchullin commonly bound his dog Luath.—The stone goes by his name to this day.

|| This is the song of the bards over Cuchullin's tomb. Every stanza closes with some remarkable title of the hero, which was always the custom in funeral elegies.—The verse of the song is a lyric measure, and it was of old sung to the harp.

* They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. 2 Sam. i. 23.

foes are gathering round. Soft be thy rest in thy cave, chief of Erin's wars!

Bragéla will not hope thy return, or see thy sails in ocean's foam.
 —Her steps are not on the shore: nor her ear open to the voice of thy rowers.—She sits in the hall of shells, and sees the arms of him that is no more.—Thine eyes are full of tears, daughter of car-borne Sorglan!—Blest be thy soul in death, O chief of shady Cromla!

DAR - THULA,