

OBSERVATIONS on Mr. Mac Pherson's Dissertations and Notes on the Poems, entitled, FINGAL and TEMORA.

By

Charles O'Conor

MR. Mac Pherson was not as unfortunate as Mr. Innes, in travelling alone.—He most consistently informs us, that he took oral tradition alone, for his guide; when all historical scripture failed him. By this inerrable compass, he sails back into remote ages, and discovers there a new monarchy of Scots in Britain, to make us amends for the ruin of the old; which Buchanan took so much pains to immortalize and adorn.

A little low Aslutia runs through the whole game which this writer would play upon us:— [1] "He cannot say how early the monarchy of the *Gaedhil*, or Scots, began in Britain; but that it flourished in the first century, under *Thrathal*, (which, by the way, is not a Scottish name) he is certain. The monarchy of the Scots in Ireland had still, he assumes, a later beginning; but without lustre or consequence, save only what it received from the parent-country, (the Highlands) which hardly could preserve this its own infant colony from being strangled in its Irish cradle." The same spirit which possessed his countrymen, Dempster, Chambers and Lesley, to claim the Scots, celebrated through Europe, in the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries, as natives of the Highlands; hath seized on Mr. Mac Pherson, to transfer thither the nativity of our Scottish heroes, in the heathen times: He well knew, however, that the errors of the former writers could not be supported; and, therefore, like the false mother, he would now divide the child, and support his pretensions, from the informations of [2] *Ossian*, or *Ossian*, whom he represents (very wisely, for his scheme) as an illiterate bard, who lived in an illiterate age!

John Fordun's scheme of monarchy was plausible, in an ignorant age. The scheme before us would be absolutely ridiculous, in any. It required some knowledge in the ancient state of Ireland and Scotland, to annihilate the former; the latter, leaning solely on blind tradition, in its dotage, cannot stand.—Before we dig its grave, it may not be improper to inform the reader, previously, that the father of the aforesaid venerable *Ossian* (famous in history, for military skill and jurisprudence and famous in romance, for marvellous exploits,) was known, and is still known, in Ireland and [3] Scotland, by the name of *Fionn Mac Cumhail*. The histories of the learned, the traditions of the vulgar, gave him no other name.—At present, our mistake is rectified.—By poetical baptism, this Prince is, in the poems before us, called *Fingal*; and by historical creation, he is dubbed [4] King of Scotland!—Stripped of his native country, stripped of his very name, he is made ample amends in a diadem!—Nor doth it import, that no such name as Fingal, can be found in the regal lists of Ireland or Scotland, or that all ancient and modern history is silent of such a Monarch.—Ossian's authority is sufficient for recognizing his Majesty's title;—and it would be historical high-treason to controvert it with his Majesty's own dear son. With such authority, Mr. Mac Pherson may bear down upon us very triumphantly.—He may contend for it, that Ossian's power over the history, should extend to the geography, of this Island:— That Moylena (famous for its two Battles; one in the second, the other in the tenth century) ought to remain in Ulster, where Ossian placed it, not in the King's County, where it lies at present; and that nothing but geographical tyranny could remove [5] *Teamor*, (his *Temora*) the seat of the ancient Irish Kings, from the same Northern province, into Meath, where it obstinately remains still; notwithstanding the writ of recaption, which Mr. Mac Pherson took out against it, in 1764; that he might replace it on the old foundations: He may, I say, contend for the rectitude of all this; and, indeed, with as much justice, as for a monarchy of Scots, in Britain, full five hundred years before the true time!

In truth, there would be no end of pointing out the topographical ignorance of Ossian, in omitting, as well as misplacing, some of those most noted places of Ireland; which must naturally come within the plan of his poems: His invention, however, is very prolific; and is particularly so, where poetry wants it least, or is disgraced by it. In that case, it is amazing, that Mr. Mac Pherson did not set OSSIAN right; as he had materials for it; as the originals were in his own hands; and as he might safely give Ossian some topographical accuracy, in the translation. By disarming criticism from that quarter, he would have weakened its power over others, where its sentence would be doubtful and arbitrary; instead of being decisive and fatal, as we shall soon find it.—Thus, instead of Eamhain, or Eamania, the celebrated seat of the Kings of Ulster, which Ossian never once mentions, we have the castle of [6] Tura, many ages before a single castle was built in the kingdom: And, instead of Craove-roe, the Academy near Eamania for teaching the use of arms, he gives us Muri's Hall; a name as little known to all ancient writers, as Tura itself.—From numberless instances of such forgeries, omissions, and misplacings, the reader will be enabled to form a proper judgment of Ossian, as well as of Ossian's translator.

That the poems of Fingal and Temora have no foundation in the history of the ancient Scots, is an idea that we are very far from establishing. They are evidently founded on the romances, and vulgar stories of the [7] *Tan-Bo-Cualgney* war, and those of the *Fiana Ereann*.—The poet, whoever he was, picked up many of the names of men and places to be found in those tales, and invention made up the rest. In digesting these poems into the present forms, chronology was overlooked, and the actors of different ages are all made coevals. Ossian, an ancient bard of the third century, is pitched upon, as a proper author, to gain admiration for such compositions; and the more (it should seem) as he was himself an illiterate bard, and that his works ran unmixed through the clear stream of oral tradition, through so short a period as eleven hundred years!—This, then, is the foundation, and this the secret, of the poems before us; but, surely, too much of the secret is revealed, and a little more art would be necessary, to gain them a colour of antiquity.

To bring heroes together, who lived in distant periods of time; and to omit many of the celebrated names of the age, wherein the scene is laid, may, perhaps, be granted to the license of poetry; particularly to a modern, who ventures on a blast from the epic trump.—But to supply the omission of such names, by others, unknown to antiquity, and mere exotics too, without [8] vernacular cadence, is too much; and still more so, when manners and customs are introduced, characteristic of ulterior times only.—Oisín, the Son of Fionn Mac Cumhail, could not take such license; since poetic inspiration never pretended to extend so far. He could not case up his own father in burnished corselet, or steel panoply, nor stud his chariot with costly gems, many ages before coats of mail, or inlaid ornaments, were known in his native country.—This, I say, he could not have done; but it was very easy to Ossian, the Son of Fingal: OSSIAN, the poetic Grandfather of Mr. James Mac Pherson, the poetic grandson, could do it; and therefore did do it.

In truth, the absurdity of inserting into these poems of Fingal and Temora, customs, unknown in Ireland, or North-Britain, until long after the decease of the supposed author, brings a proof not to be invalidated, that the exhibiter of these modern customs, is a mere modern poet. The omission of the religious machinery is not indeed a proof equally strong; but one decisive enough, as to the poet's ignorance of the druidic theology. Mr. Mac Pherson easily foresaw, that this omission would create mistrust, and, unfortunately, enhances our suspicion, by a most silly effort to account for it. [9] "Before Ossian's time, (he tells us) the Druidic religion was set aside."—But he goes on:—"The power of the Druids, to elect a Vergobretus, was at an end."—"Upon their utter overthrow, the office of a Vergobretus became hereditary, and the established religion was abolished." This is the substance of his long-winded detail of the ruin of the Druids.—All our remains of ancient history are against him; and what authority does he oppose to their testimony?—His own; his own only!—Who, ever, before the appearance of this new historical revelation, heard of a Vergobretus (so called) among the Caledonians? or, indeed, among any other Celtic people, the Ædui, in Gaul, alone excepted? [10] It is Cæsar who gives us the name, and describes the office;

and that in a corner only of the extensive country he conquered. Had Cæsar never wrote, we should never hear of the name. Let it be admitted, however, that, as Vergobretus signifies a judge, and that we need not dispute about a word, when the thing, that is, the office of a despotic magistrate, is intended: yet, who informed Mr. Mac Pherson of a civil war between the Druids and a supreme officer, the temporary despot of their own choice? Who, I say, informed him of the doctrine of hereditary right's being established in Caledonia, so many ages before the idea of such a right was conceived in these islands, or indeed, any other Northern country? Could such a revolution, for which we have his bare word only, produce, as he pretends, an utter abolition of the established religion of those times?—It is superlatively absurd to suppose it. It is ridiculous to assert it.—All ancient history contradicts it.

Reformation, indeed, might be useful in those days, as in our own; and ancient anecdotes inform us, that, in the reign of Cormac O'Cuinn, such a reform was unsuccessfully attempted here in Ireland. Popular superstition was too strong for that Monarch's power, or philosophy, to be shaken by either: Yet, with all the success, that the rage of reformation, or spirit of tyranny, could require; can we suppose, that any spiritual revolution, in those heathen days, could, thus, as it were, instantly, produce a total suppression of the ritual ceremonial, and doctrinal parts of the ancient worship? Hypothetical folly alone, could suppose and effect it.

Mr. Mac Pherson is, undoubtedly, a man of good natural abilities, cultivated by reading and reflection: and yet, I know not from what fatality, he appears as destitute of common-sense, as of decency, in most of his assumptions (for they are no better) on the subject before us. He wants decency, in the illiberal abuse of all ancient and modern writers, who endeavoured to throw lights upon the ancient state of Ireland, and North-Britain; and he wants common-sense; in points, which his cooler judgment would doubtless correct; had not the rage of national invective taken absolute possession of his whole faculties. In such a mood he must be, when he advances, that "in the period, when property is established among men, and that they enter into associations for mutual defence; THEN is their state the region of complete barbarism and ignorance."—The words are to be found in p. 18 and 19 of his Dissertation on TEMORA; (Dublin Edition) and a man of his knowledge could not betray such ignorance of the state of civil Society; but upon the principle we have laid down.

In the long controversy about Fordun's historical hypothesis, the writers of North-Britain pretended to authority, ancient and modern:—Mr. Mac Pherson pretends to neither; and, were we to choose an adversary, with no better view than the ease of refutation, he, doubtless, would be our man. But we proceed on a better motive, from the hope that much of our ancient Scottish history may yet be exhibited in a useful light; and from the fear that the prevalent prejudices against it may be strengthened, even by such an hypothetical chimera as we have already partly exposed. In the part we are now beginning to consider, our adversary is exactly in the case of one, who should draw, by lot, for a hundred wild notions, and hit upon the wildest. It must surely be so, when it comes out for him, and us, his readers, that "the first Christian missionaries in Caledonia, [11] took possession of the groves and other lurking places of the detested Druids!" Doth he not here draw with the most unexampled effrontery on the credulity of mankind? —Was it to recommend themselves to the Caledonians, that these holy men have thus filled the seats of deceit and superstition?—Was this seclusion from society, this criminal adoption of the practices of their detested predecessors, the proper method for preaching the doctrine, and enforcing the example of our Divine Master?—The absurdity of all this is great; and what comes in the rear of the account is prodigious; when he informs us, that these missionaries took the name of *culdees*, from sequestering themselves in the caves and groves of the Druid fugitives! In truth, the sequestration, here to be considered, is that of the author of such reports, from common sense, or common shame; for common knowledge is out of the Question.—*Culdee* (in the Gaelic, or Scotie, *Ceile-De*) signifies one sequestered, or espoused to God. This is so well known to every man of common skill in our language, that it is not to be contended for. We are only to remark; that Mr. Mac Pherson's

[12] *CULDICH* is not to be supported, otherwise than as an uncouth barbarism in language; as ill explained, as it is ill applied. In learning of the literal sense of *Culdee* (properly *Cele-De.*) he might be well informed by some of his learned countrymen in the Highlands. Buchanan knew the meaning of the word well, by calling them *Dei Cultores*, as Mr. O'Flaherty calls them *Colidei*. — They were, in fact, a society, or college, of religious; sequestered after, not before, the Scots were converted to Christianity. They sequestered themselves in conventual communities, not in the groves or caves of the ancient Druids.

Mr. Mac Pherson's hereditary monarchy of Scots examined.

WHEN the imagination is once fermented in the depths of an hypothesis, a fever, and, in its progress, a frenzy, of the mind ensues. This distemper seldom admits of any remedy; and in this state it was that Mr. Mac Pherson conceived, that the old hereditary monarchy he reared on the new foundations of Ossian, would certainly stand, could he but persuade his readers, that the historical writings, still preserved in the old Scottish language, are no better than a crude and indigested heap of fables; what, no doubt, the interest of his hypothesis required they should be. Argument comes little to his assistance in this part of his task; but disingenuity, railing, and national abuse, supply its place. He condemns our old authors, without any trial, and generously hires himself out to be their executioner; as is, like certain Indian enthusiasts, he conceived that the murder of his best friends entitled him to the inheritance of their good qualities. But, granting, in pity to his distemper, what can never be granted to any other writer, that his conjectures (from Mr. Innes) concerning our ancient chronicles are just; yet still his hypothesis would gain nothing by it.—The proofs are coming forward.

They should not indeed come forward so readily, had he not entangled himself, or had Ossian not entangled him, in a genealogical and chronological snare; which a writer, of any common vigilance in the art of forgery, might easily avoid. Let us first catch hold of him in Fingal's [13] war with Caracalla, son to the Emperor Severus: a war, wherein, after remarking on the unfairness of the Roman historians, in concealing the ruin of their Army, and omitting the exploits of the Caledonian hero who ruined it; we are to observe, in the next place, that this war fell out in the year 211: Fingal, this conqueror of the best Roman army that Britain ever beheld, was then a beardless youth, according to our Northern historian, and consequently, we may, without mistake, place his birth about the year 191, or 192; and hence to the end of the Temorean war, and death of Oscar, Mr. Mac Pherson computes [14] precisely 56 years, allowing nineteen years a-piece to each generation from Fingal to Oscar inclusive.—The hypothesis is barely admissible, and therefore allowable, to such an adversary as we have to deal with.—Shall we take the same license with the three other retrograde descents from Fingal to Trenmor, who reigned, according to Mr. Mac Pherson, in the first century? No: But we must take still a much more inadmissible liberty;— Instead, therefore, of the aforesaid precipitation of births, by so few intermediate years as 19 years to each; let us, in favour of our adversary, treble that number of years, in our retrograde genealogy, and this will place the birth of Trenmor about the time that Mr. Mac Pherson's scheme requires. This, then, being settled to his satisfaction, we request the Reader to mark the glaring absurdity of this computation; —each of the princes in one series of descents, requiring the patriarchal interval, such as that between Abraham and Moses, from one generation to another; and in the immediate subsequent line, each prince coming the father of another, before he was well of age to mount the tall steed, and resign his wooden hobby horse!

How contrary such a scheme is to experience, and to the technical canon established upon it, by Sir Isaac Newton, and the best chronologers, need not be shown: But Mr. Mac Pherson has established a chronological canon of his own, resembling the rack of Procrustes, shortening or stretching the generations of men, as it best answered the purposes, and fitted the standard, of Ossian's genealogical torture?

Mr. Mac Pherson is so condescending as to grant a monarchy of Scots in Ireland, so early as the first century: " A colony (says he) of Caledonian Highlanders [15] established themselves in Ulster, some time before the Incarnation; where they lay in great peril of extirpation from the Firbolgs, had not Trathal, the King, or *Vergobret*, of Scotland, sent his brother Conor to their aid— Through that aid," (he tells us) "the Caledonian power became so superior in Ireland, that, in a convention of the states, Conar was elected King of the whole island. Hence the Scottish monarchy of Ireland had its commencement, and was established on the principle of hereditary right, till the succession was interrupted in the fifth generation by an insurrection of the Firbolgs.—In this civil scuffle, Cormac, the son of Artho, a Minor-Monarch, under guardianship, was murdered, &c."

Let us now analyse this hopeful account.—according to our accurate author, this young King Cormac was the fifth generation from Trenmor, King of Caledonia in the first century:—Let us allow 33 years (not 19) to each generation, and the birth of this son of Artho (as he is called) will fall in the year 165; and in course of nature it could not be much more or less. Again: take in the five reigns, from Conar (who, he says, reigned towards the close of the first century) to the death of the minor Cormac, at 25 Years, one reign with the other; and the numerical total, added to the last 30 years of the first century, will place that young Monarch's death in the year 155; and the mean difference between that and 165, will place his death in the year 160. This technical rule will not be excepted to, by any one versed in the canons of technical chronology, except in the instances being too favourable to Mr. Mac Pherson. Now Fingal, who, it is said, quitted his exploits in Lochlin, to attack and defeat Caracalla the year 211, and who is exhibited to us as then in his early youth, must be born about the Year 190, and consequently could not come to Temora about the Year 160, to avenge the death of his cousin Cormac unless we suppose it could be done 30 years or thereabouts before Fingal himself was born.

But this ill-fated account drags still more absurdity along with it: For, in fact, Fingal, who is represented as the third generation from Trenmor, should by the course of nature be dead, before Cormac, the fifth generation from the same Trenmor, was murdered——Nay more: Had the beardless youth Fingal defeated Caracalla in 211; how could he be the grandfather of Oscar, who was (*ex Hypothesi*) killed in Temora, fifty years before that Time?

Here we dismiss his genealogical and chronological analysis, although not for want of matter; and Mr. Mac Pherson must be now convinced that a great deal is left unsaid, which would throw more sunshine on his or Ossian's forgery. Indeed, as they have contrived the matter, it is a womb teeming with inconsistencies and absurdities; which, like the children of sin, in the *Paradise Lost*, prey upon the bowels of their common mother.—And all this is truly the more wonderful, as a little more systematical penetration, reconcilable with itself and with the common course of nature, would so far preclude the triumph of an adversary, and silence the most peevish criticism.

His account of Swaran, King of Lochlyn's Invasion of Ireland, in the third century, is of a piece with his other assertions; when it is a fact indisputable, that the Scandinavians, who obtained the name of Lochlyns, made no incursions into Britain and Ireland, until the eighth century, not long after the time (as a judicious [16] writer observes) that their intercourses with the Saxons made them expert navigators. He, however, who could assert proleptically, that hereditary right was established lineally among the ancient Scottish Monarchs, and that minor Kings conducted their administration by guardians, could as readily furnish Swaran in the third century with floating castles, spreading their wings of canvas, and threatening Destruction to remote Nations.

But we had enough of anticipation of national manners, genealogical incongruities, and geographical ignorance. They should ever pass unnoticed in a mere modern romance, had it not been believed by some (for some have believed Mr: Mac Pherson, on his bare word) "that the account is little [17] interlarded with fable, and that the compositions of Ossian are not less valuable, for the light they throw on the ancient state of Scotland and Ireland, than they are for their poetical merit." This is the point driven at, to gain a monarchy of Scots in Britain 800 Years before the true time; a point not to be carried, unless credulity itself was lulled into a state of dotage, and

brought to conceive that the language of the ancient Scots, (till preserved in our old writings, ought to be set aside in favour of Ossian's Erse, a dialect kept from corruption by the salt of oral tradition only, and luckily preserved from the infidelity of books, or errors of transcribers, who, in the course of a thousand years, might commit such mistakes as would set the learned hard to rectify. Upon this principle, he rejects our literary productions; and, to show upon what grounds; he doth not scruple to advance, that the ancient Gaelic, or Scotie, "[18] was preserved, from age to age, among an illiterate people, who were sunk in extreme ignorance and barbarism, ever since the Saxons took possession of the lowlands." Thus it is, that he divides his contempt for his readers, between bare-faced imposition, on the one hand, and national slander, on the other: But the readers of South-Britain will hardly take his bare word for it, that any language can be preserved in its classical integrity through many ages, among an unlettered people; and the gentry of the Highlands know best what is due to him, for representing their ancestors as the most ignorant barbarians, in contradiction to Adamnan and Bede, writers of the seventh and eighth centuries, who represent them as a civilized lettered nation.

We must not bear too hard on this gentleman; and we must confess, that the interest of his scheme required that he should falsify all ancient history, to cover some of his paradoxes. He knew well that the modern Erse of Ossian would prove his works to be mere modern poems; and in that distress it was necessary for him to advance, that the Gaelic, preserved in the ancient writings, is the real jargon, and that the Erse of an illiterate bard and illiterate nation, is the genuine classic dialect: The interest of his scheme, I say, required that he should advance all this; and had he done it, without railing, or national abuse, his prudence might stand unimpeached, whatever became of his honesty; but bad manners, mounted on the back of fraud, is too much; and he must charge himself with the chastisement due to the double provocation.

Let us now listen a little to the arguments he brings in proof of the purity of Ossian's language [19].—"The manners of the people, the unadulterated recitations of their bards, and their exemption from all foreign mixtures, preserved the original integrity of this language through so long a succession of ages."—Ridiculous and false is the assertion!—Did not the British Scots mix with the Picts in the ninth century? Were not the Hebrides, by [20] Buchanan's own Confession, an hundred and sixty years in the possession of the Danes? Were not such mixtures sufficient to corrupt the language of a people he wisely pronounces the most ignorant barbarians? Could any Art, but that of [21] letters alone, preserve the ancient compositions of such, or indeed of any nation?—But as this is not an improper place for it, we will mention in few words what the truth of history warrants, relatively to the Gaelic spoken in the Highlands. Before Malcolm Canmore's reign, that language was well preserved in North-Britain. It was in his days the court-language; when it ceased to be so, soon after that prince's times; and that it was no longer cultivated in schools and colleges, it naturally degenerated into a corrupt dialect. The little which Mr. Mac Pherson has produced, from Ossian, is (very unfortunately for his paradox) mere jargon, and below the samples from the same country, prefixed by Mr. Lloid to his *Archæologia Britannica*. It is precisely of the same stamp with the wretched lines he produces as Irish compositions, without Irish language to save appearances; both are incontrovertibly out of the same mint, without any resemblance to the ancient verses of the sixth and seventh centuries, produced in the Annals of the Four Masters, or any other classical writings of the posterior ages. In fact, since the days of the Bruces and Baliols, the inhabitants of the Highlands do not pretend that they kept any schools, or academies, for the preservation of their language: The Irish kept many, and the few manuscripts, discovered lately in Scotland, are confessed by [22] Sir George Mac Kenzie to be Irish, not Erse compositions. In the mother country alone, has this language been preserved in its classical purity. The settlements on our sea coasts, in the ninth century, by the Danes and other Normans, did not effect the minutest change in our language. The interior parts of the Kingdom were safe from the settlements, though not from the incursions, of these rovers; and before their entrance, the Irish (as is confessed on all hands) were the freest nation in Europe from any foreign mixtures. Even after

the English invasion, under Henry II. the newcomers (beyond the English Pale) adopted the language of the natives, and forgot their own. Through the means of schools and seminaries, it has been preserved in Thomond, in Conaught, Tirconall, and Tyrone, down to the days of Queen Elizabeth, and is at this day preserved in our old books. It is by such means alone that ancient languages can be preserved; and that man must be ridiculous indeed, who contends, that they can be preserved by any other. Let him borrow what plumes he will from the wing of oral tradition, or from the arrogance of a wild imagination, yet still

Movet cornicula risum

Furtivis nudata coloribus.[23]

In good Truth, when one considers how Mr. Mac Pherson and Ossian have compounded matters between themselves, it is extremely hard to maintain any degree of seriousness, or forbear entering into the humour of their plan of a high monarchy of Scots, in Britain, so early as the first century.

"Do, Ossian; make you a Collection of our old vulgar tales about the Tain-Bo-Cuailgne, and Fiana Ereann. Give old Fionn Mac Cumhaill the new name of FINGAL, and make Cuchollin, who died in the beginning of the first century, coeval with him, who died in the third. Interpolate as many facts of your own, as will give us a more magnificent monarchy in Scotland, than that of John Fordun, which has been annihilated by some late historians and critics.—I will be your translator and dissertator.—I alone will ensure your wares, and make a good market, before we are detected!"

"The task will be difficult, Mr. Mac Pherson."

"Not at all, Ossian. Deal you in generals, as much as possible: should your commentator mistake, in descending to particulars, he alone will bear the blame. If *Carachuil* be not *Caracalla*, or *Caros Carausius*, the fault will be mine, not yours."

"True: But should we not be very cautious as to manners, and adopt none, but such as suit the times wherein we lay the scene?"

"No doubt, Ossian, were you a mere modern bard; but as you are, or must be, an ancient, the public will take you at your word. You may therefore spread the circle of poetic license very wide, and introduce the manners and customs of .posterior times. I mean, as much of either, as will trim your epic machinery, and give your works all the epic ornaments, that we shall deem expedient for our secret design. Nay more, Ossian! you may, in this view, embark your old heroes in ships of magnificent structure, instead of the curachs used in the days of your supposed father; you may case up these sons of renown in shining coats of mail; and you may safely commit geographical violence, by transplanting Moylena and Temora from their native country, as easily as you have done Fingal himself. No man, at this great distance of time, will controvert your locomotive power."

"Ay, Mr. Mac Pherson; but should we not be careful not [to] outrage genealogical nature? And how would it look, if I were not somewhat consistent with that nature, in the account of my own supposed ancestors?"

"Be not too scrupulous, Ossian: If you give too few generations between your two principal eras, I will make your account consistent still, by contracting and stretching the intermediate times of these generations, as Milton did his devils in Pandemonium, this this will pass on a credulous public; at least until you and I have our private ends out of it."

"Right, Mr. Mac Pherson: But what shall we do with the old Irish chronicles and language, which stand in the way? Leave that to me, Ossian: I will prove the former to be no better than a fardel of crude and indigested tales, and the latter a corrupt jargon. Nay more: I will demonstrate, (for *Demonstration* comes not from *Demon*, the Devil, as some have maintained) I will, I say, demonstrate, that all antiquity has been grossly mistaken, in peopling our Highlands from Ireland, or indeed in peopling the British Islands with different Nations of Celts, who spoke different languages. For, Ossian, it is for the interest of your scheme and mine, that they should speak but one, common to all. I will prove that oral tradition alone is sufficient in my hands, for setting aside

all foreign and domestic accounts relating to our own Kingdom of Morven. With this tradition, I say, we will lay Lochlyn waste; and people Ireland with our Highland colonies. Still more, Ossian, I will demonstrate, that your Erse is the pure Scotie, or Gaelic, spoken in the third century!"

"And what more, Mr. Mac Pherson? What more, Ossian! Why, I will prevail with our learned hypercritic, Dr. Blair [24], to summon a cloud of witnesses from the Highlands and Hebrides, to depose upon their poetical conscience, that you and I are as honest fellows, as ever played a first and second fiddle, in a poetical concert!"

Ludicrous as this representation may appear, and ridiculous as it is, in fact; yet there is nothing fallacious or exaggerated in it; as it exhibits the farce, and displays the intention of Mr. Mac Pherson's Scheme, in its full extent. We now return to the consideration of his other paradoxes.

He asserts, on his own authority, (for his system required it) that the ancient Caledonians were of the same stock with the Gaedhils, or ancient Scots. Where is the proof? He has it ready most etymologically; for words of any resemblance are sufficient for his purpose. It lies (says he) in two single monosyllables [25], *Caël* and *Dun*, or *Don*; and hence the Celts of the hills were called Caledonians. But, most unfortunately for this etymology, the Scots never called themselves cal, (which signifies a narrow straight) but Gaedhill; and so their neighbours, the ancient Britons, named them, with very little variation; nor doth the word *Don* (generally a prepositive particle) signify an hill, fortified hill, and not seldom a fortress on low ground: instances are innumerable. Lame, however, as this etymology of *Caël* and *Don* must appear, it is one of the most plausible in all his Dissertations and Notes; most of his other conjectures being so remote from the true radicals, that they answer no end, but that of rendering their author ridiculous: in truth, with such license as he has taken, no man can be at a loss for a meaning to any ancient compound. It is the long-exploded nonsense of etymologists revived; and as he has the merit of re-instating it, let him take the reward, such as his countryman Buchanan assigned to all dreamers like him [26]. "*Isto enim modo quidlibet et quolibet licebit effingere.*"

But what utterly ruins his etymology of *Caledonians* from *Caël Don*, is, that those he ignorantly calls Cal, were not settled in North Britain, until several ages after Tacitus had mentioned the Caledonians as inhabitants of that country. Mr. Innes [27], his countryman, has shown clearly, that the Caledonians were the nation, known in after-ages by the name of Picts; and Buchanan asserts, upon the best grounds, that *planissime PICTI fuerunt* [28]. To show, however, how much these writers have mistaken the matter, Mr. Mac Pherson (*une contre tous* [29]) advances, on his own bare word, that the Picts and Scots were originally the same people, and spoke one common language; and this consciously, in contradiction to [30] Bede, a living witness when the Picts and Scots were two powerful nations, as different in their language as in their original. Shall we reject such an evidence, with all antiquity on his side, in favour of Mr. Mac Pherson's nightmare assumptions, and rickety etymologies?

This novel word *Caël* has thrown him into a magical circle; and it were to be wished that some second-sighted exorcist had conjured him out of it. Before this is done, we have only to remind the sober reader, of one charm in the word, which exceeds any that this writer hath hitherto been possessed of. [31] "From the double meaning" (says he) of the word *Caël*, which signifies strangers, as well as Gauls, 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 on that account." Who, but one possessed, could write at this wild rate? Let the reader, however; be satisfied, that the ancient Scots never called themselves *Caël*, but *Gaedhil*, and that they distinguished all strangers by the name of *Gaill*, or *Gauls*; all our ancient and modern writers, Buchanan himself, will prove this. None, but Mr. Mac Pherson, ever dreamed that the Scots were absurd enough to call all strangers by their own name!

Nothing, certainly, can be more disgusting than this task of exposing writers, who bid defiance to all authority and argument, to support a crazy system. If they had not, like him we have

to deal with, acquired some reputation, and that thoroughly from the ignorance of the Public on the subject, it should by no means be attempted: even in that case, we are losers by our labour. If we do not unmask them, it will be said we cannot. When we do, we are deemed impertinent for expecting attention to things so easily refuted [32]; though without the refutation, the forgery might pass for genuine facts. It is some satisfaction, however, that this disadvantage, on our side, will not be so great on that of the reader. Through the examination of some particulars, he will be convinced how much Mr. Mac Pherson has imposed upon him. To examine inferior particulars, when that end is obtained, would be to injure him; we are therefore hastening to the conclusion.

Of the original of the *Caël* (meaning the ancient Scots) he gives such an account as we are to take on his bare etymological word. In the early ages, "they were" (says he) "a rambling, that is, a vagabond Nation, and hence received the name of Scots." Who, but a genuine descendant of the old Picts, could give so malevolent, and yet so untrue, a representation of a Nation; who, far from being rovers, have been longer fixed to their several countries, than any other European people? Mr. Maitland [33], a Lowlander, and less virulent than the Pict, is more favourable, and derives the name of Scot, from the *scoths*, or boats, with which it was customary with them to invade Britain. The reader, however, may prefer the more general account delivered down by the Gaedhils themselves, that they retained the name of *Kinea-Scuit* or *Scuits*, from their Celto-Scythian ancestors.

With equal etymological knowledge, Mr. Mac Merlon deduces the name of [34] *Cruithnidh* (Picts) from cultivating the soil, and being corn-eaters; because it so happens, that, in the Gaelic, the word *Cruithneacht* signifies wheat. Mr. Maitland, on the other hand, deduces this name from *Peacht*, *Fighters*, and with equal justice. It is, in truth, the etymological frenzy, on both sides; and the reader will, no doubt, prefer the account given by the old Scottish writers, because it is natural and obvious: They inform us, that they got the Name of [35] *Cruithnigh* i.e. *Painters*, from the custom of painting their bodies; and this account is confirmed by the Roman authors, who called them *Picti*, or Picts, on that very account.

With writers of this stamp it is, *quocunquo modo rem*; [36] and, for want of better, such poor shifts have been made use of, to support an hypothesis tottering on all sides. To establish a monarchy of Scots in Caledonia, in the first age of the Christian era, it was necessary to assume, that the [37] Scots and Picts were originally but one Nation, who spoke one common language; and this assumption he would fain convert into a demonstration, by informing us, that the names of men and places in Pictland are of Gaelic original. He is widely mistaken. Those ancient names are of Celtic original, as most of the ancient names of towns, rivers and districts in Europe, are, to this day; what [38] Mons. Bullet has fully proved in his learned Memoirs of the Celtic language. Will this prove that the several Celtic nations spoke one common language? Was it possible to do it, through the course of so many ages, migrations and conquests? Indeed they must, and they did, for the greater part, make use of the same words, not the same construction. Their several syntaxes varied so, as to render one Celtic nation's dialect unintelligible to another; and all varied more or less from the simple original Celtic, as the modern English and High Dutch differ from the maternal Teutonic; as the modern Italian and Spanish from the original Latin. Do not proofs crowd upon this argument? Have not three different Celtic tongues prevailed in Gaul, even in [39] Cæsar's time? But what need of dead proofs, when we have living evidences of the truth here advanced? The Gomæraeg spoken at this day in North Wales, and the Gaelic spoken in Ireland, are as different in their syntactic constructions, as any two such tongues can well be. There is little kindred, but that of words, between them; and are we not informed by Bede, (as above observed) a living witness of what he advances, that the Pictish tongue differed from both? Is not Bede a better informer of what happened in the sunshine, under his own eye, than a crazy writer of our own days, who gropes in the dark, a thousand years after him?

How stupidly doth this writer endeavour to gain credit to forgery, by suggesting that different countries contend about the birth of Ossian, as seven cities have formerly contended for

that of old Homer.—"While some," says he, "doubt of the authenticity of Ossian's compositions, others as strenuously appropriate them to the Irish." How well-grounded the doubts of some have been, we have already seen; and what the ignorant have conjectured, it matters not; while the fact is glaring, that Ossian's compositions are as authentic, and as locally appropriated, as any such ever were, or ever can be. The modern sentiments, manners, customs and allusions they contain, affix them to modern times; and the ignorance of chronology, geography, and ancient history, shows that OSSIAN, the son of FINGAL, was in no degree fit to personate OISIN, the son of FIONN, in the description of things to which that prince was coeval. The son of Fingal, therefore, lived near our own times, and it is best known to Mr. Mac Pherson, whether he is not, in the whole, or in part, alive to this day. Be it as it may; be he living, dying, or dead; entire, maimed, or interpolated; his Erse language betrays him, and gives us the land of his nativity with as much precision, as the shadow on Ahab's dial did the time of the day; And pity it is that the parity does not hold out in the other particular; as the sun of history would, in that case, go ten degrees back on Mr. Mac Pherson's chronological time-plate, to gain poor OSSIAN a long poetical day, and establish a monarchy of Scots in Britain, five hundred years before it really commenced!

The Poems of Fingal and Temora lie under the disadvantage (from the specimens produced) of being delivered in a modern corrupt dialect. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, we confess, and confess with pleasure, that they are the compositions of a fine lively genius, and that they exhibit a considerable share of poetical merit in Mr. Mac Pherson's translation. They recommend themselves, by an apparent antique dress, and an oriental scriptural turn in the expression; without any mixture of the fanatical cant of the times. The novelty of the plan, and seemingly artless construction of the whole, are very engaging. An affecting grace in the sentiment, and an imagery nobly sublime, unite in several parts. But then, these beauties are disgraced by a marvellous, injudicious, even to puerility; a frequent reiteration of the same ideas, and a poor machinery. In the notion, however, that such poems of the epic species are works of a remote antiquity, their inequalities and blemishes are easily overlooked, in favour of their beauties and wild ornaments; when, had another notion prevailed of their being mere modern compositions, a reverse judgment would, doubtless, be made; partly from the ungenerous unwillingness to find much merit in a modern genius, and partly from the ungenerous pleasure taken in detesting his deformities. The author of the poems was well aware of such a judgment, and, very wisely, put a supposed ancient bard in his own place; and in fact, had he paid any regard to purity of language, and to the manners, customs and history of the age in which his scene is laid, the fraud would be an innocent one, and, perhaps, pass for a long time, for what it was intended it should pass.

It is time to come to a cessation with Mr. Mac Pherson, at least for the reader's sake, of whose indulgence we stand greatly in need, for so long an attention to a few only of his capital impositions and paradoxes. We may claim some right to this indulgence, as we have left untouched many more; some, for which he has been sufficiently chastised by others; and some, which come within the refutation of the common vulgar, who speak the Gaelic language in both Isles. But, as to most of his reasonings on the authenticity of oral tradition, through so many ages as elapsed from the third to the fifteenth century; we had the discretion not to meddle much with them. They happily share the fate of Cadmus's earth-born host, and no sooner start out of the mud, than they encounter and kill one another. Had he been a little more sparing of national invective, and less petulant in his fastidiousness of all ancient and modern writers who treated on Scottish affairs before him, he would be entitled to the treatment due to pardonable ignorance, and superstitious partiality to a novel system. A quite different treatment is due to illiberal abuse, and aggressing insolence; I might add, conscious untruths also, (that meanest guilt of a man of honour) if decency did not forbid our making so vile a charge to a gentleman, who had a liberal education, and has talents to adorn it.

We would, however, gladly be rid of all suspicion, by an information from himself, whether he was unconscious of a glaring untruth, when he asserts, that [40] we of Ireland call the Erse

emphatically a *Chaëlic*, and our own Language *Caelic Erinnach*? It is a distinction that never yet was made, either in written records, or among the vulgar. Whether, again, he is unconscious of a great untruth, when he tells us that *Caelic Erinnach* signifies the *Caledonian Irish*? Has he not told us, in a note to the poem, entitled, The Death of CUCHOLLIN, that it was no anachronism to make that hero coeval with Fingal, and that he gave us the reasons, in the Dissertation prefixed to the Epic Poem of Fingal? Was he not conscious of an untruth, in this instance, since he did not favour us with a single line, in that Dissertation, to clear up the anachronism?

This writer vauntingly tells us, that all objections to his system (so he calls it) can give him no concern, as he can easily set them aside. Why was he not as good as his word? Why did he not, in this course of two years, set aside the animadversions of the learned author, who so abundantly detected his forgeries, as well as ignorance, in the *Journal des Sçavans* of Paris? What now will his patrons say? Will they not complain that he imposed on their credulity, and construe his silence into a premeditated scheme, to seduce them out of their coin, and pay them in counters.

As the writer of the present remarks on the books of Fingal and Temora, hath written some *Dissertations* on the ancient history of this Kingdom, with which that of Scotland had been for many ages connected, he found himself under this necessity of showing, that whatever objections might lie against what he has collected, yet, that none offered by Mr. Mac Pherson can affect him. Far from writing with an intention to deceive, the author of these *Dissertations* is always open to correction, and will be thankful for it. Much is still to be investigated on this subject, and by abler hands; not indeed from the low principle which gratifies silly curiosity, or a sillier vanity; but from a desire to discover as much as can be discovered, of a people, who had arts of civilization of their own, and manners, which, however barbarous to us, yet inferred, and produced also, a cultivation of the human mind.

It now occurs, and, though out of its proper place, it may be proper to remind the reader, that near a third part of Mr. Mac Pherson's prolix Dissertation on Temora is taken up in quoting, and ridiculing also, some putrid lines which he ascribes to Irish bards.—Silly man! The ridicule recoils doubly on his own head. Since he was engaged in a system of forgery, why did he not throw some sort of veil over it, to pain an adversary, and hoodwink criticism? Should he not give us those lines in the Irish language, instead of the vulgar Erse? Is not this hiding the bird's head, while the tail hangs out? But we have done. Thus far have we pushed him, with justice. To push him further might be deemed severity. Let us rather soften our charge, and, after making every possible allowance for the goodness of the intention, let us confess, that no gentleman, or sharper, ever knew less of the trade of an able impostor, than the most memorable Mr. JAMES MAC PHERSON.

March 24, 1766.

Notes

1. See the Dissertation and Notes on Temora, by Mr. Mac Pherson.
2. In his first publication of Poems from the Erse, he calls this bard *Oscian* and in the later translations, *Ossian*: This shows his little knowledge of the Gaelic, or Scottish Language. *Oisin* is the true reading, and so written in all our ancient manuscripts.
3. See Mr. Martin's Travels into Scotland, in his Description of the Isle of Skye p. 152.
4. See Dissertat. to Fingal. Dub. Edit. p. 20.
5. See Mr Mac Pherson's Advertisement prefixed to the Poem of Temora.
6. See Fingal, p. 1.
7. The *Tan-Bo-Cualgney* War, wherein Cuchullin, Ferdia, Conall Cearnach, Fergus Mac Ray, &c. signalized themselves, was carried on some few years before the commencement of the Christian era. Finn Mac Cumhaill and the Fiana Ereann flourished in the third century. M. Mac Pherson or Ossian makes them contemporaries. Vid. Ogyg. p. 128.

8. Such as Semo, Puno, Favi, and numberless other names. Matha is indeed found in many old Mss. but being the name of one of the four Evangelists, it was not introduced until after the reception of Christianity.
9. See the Dissertat. to Fingal p. 5. 6. et seq.
10. *Vergobretum vocant Ædúi, qui creatur annuus, et vita necisque in suos habet potestatem.* Cæsar. Bell. Gallic lib. X ["The Ædúi call him the *Vergobretum*, who is appointed each year, and holds power of life and death over them." Caesar, Gallic War, Book 10.]
11. See the Dissertat. on Fingal. p. 8.
12. Dissertat. on Fingal. p. 9.
13. See Dissert. on Fingal. p. 10.
14. See Temora. 225. 226,
15. See the Dissertat. on Temora. p. 14. et seq.
16. See a Pamphlet, entitled, "FINGAL a Knight-Errant." Lond. Edit. 1765.
17. See the Preface to Fingal.
18. See the Dissert. to Temora, p.29
19. See the Dissert. to Fingal.
20. Rer. Scotie. lib. I. p. 22.
21. *Illæ linguæ quotidie moriuntur, quotidie nascuntur, quæ pendent ex libidine imperitæ multitudinis.* Muret. (["Those languages that depend on the whim of the ignorant multitude die each day, and are born each day." Marc Antoine Muret (1526-1585), *Orationes*, vol. 2, no. 22 (Trans. by Michael Gilleland)]
22. See his Advertisement to the Defence of the Royal line of Scots.
23. "The crow is laughable when stripped of his stolen colours." (Horace).
24. See the Appendix to Dr. Blair's Dissertation on Ossian's Poems.
25. See the Dissertation on Temora, p. 9.
26. "In this way you can derive whatever and whoever you like." Buchanan's *History of Scotland*. p. 3.
27. Essay on the ancient inhabitants of Scotland, Vol. I. p.45, 48, et reliq.
28. Rer. Scotie. lib. I. p. 54.
29. "One against all".
30. Histor. Eccles. Gent. Ang. Cap. I.
31. Dissert. to Temora, p. 9.
32. C'est avec grand plaisir, que je quitte la plume: on auroit continué à garder le silence, si, de ce qu'on le gardoit, plusieurs personnes n'avoient conclu qu'on y étoit réduit. Défense de L'ESPRIT DES LOIX, p. 196. "It is with great pleasure that I lay down my pen; I would have preferred to have remained silent, were it not that many people would have concluded that I had nothing to say." Montesquieu, *Defence of the Spirit of the Laws*, p.196
33. History of Scotland, Vol. I. p. 110.
34. Dissert. To Temora p.11
35. Ogyg. Part III. p. 188. and Mr. Innes's Critical Essay, Vol. I. p. 58, 63, &c.
36. "By whatever means."
37. Dissert. on Temora, p. 12, et reliq.
38. Mem. de la Langue Celtique, Vol. I.
39. Bell. Gallic. lib. I.
40. See the Dissert. on Temora, Dub. Edit. P. 29.