

ON THE POEMS OF OISIN.

By Professor Connellan, of Queen's College, Cork.

(READ 3RD FEBRUARY, 1859)

 INTRODUCTION.

For nearly one hundred years a controversy has been carried on by Irish and Scotch writers respecting the authenticity of Ossian's poems, while both parties have claimed Ossian as their own countryman. My object is to prove from ancient records and other authorities that Oisín, Finn the son of Cumhall, and the Fiana, were Irishmen and not Scotchmen; and that the poems published by Macpherson were fabrications, founded upon fragments of the compositions of Oisín and other Irish bards, which made their way into the Highlands of Scotland.

In the first place it will be necessary to shew that Ireland alone was called *Scotia* or Scotland, and the inhabitants *Scoti* or Scots, until the eleventh century, when, for the first time, Caledonia, or North Britain, received the name of *Scotia*; and also, that the Scots of that country were colonists from Ireland, while the language spoken in the Highlands of Scotland and that of Ireland were identically the same.

It is evident that the Irish were known as *Scoti* or Scots, at a very early period; the oldest Irish manuscripts bear testimony to this fact, and Tigearnach in his *Annals* adds his testimony. Tigearnach was Abbot of Clonmacnois, and his death is recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, A.D. 1088. He was one of the most learned men of the 11th century, and his *annals* are considered as a high authority on ancient Irish history. They are written partly in Latin, and partly in Irish; and by one not blindly credulous, as at the very first page of the work we read, "*Omnia monumenta Scotorum usque Cimbaoth incerta erant*,"—"all the records of the *Scots*, till the time of Cimbaoth, were uncertain." He lived in the 3rd century A.C.

But the most unexceptionable authorities on this head are those foreign

writers who mention Ireland under the name of *Scotia*, and call the inhabitants *Scoti*: we can trace such authorities from the 3rd to the 12th century.

The first writer who mentions the Irish as Scots is Porphyry, the Platonic philosopher: he is quoted by St. Jerome, in a letter to Ctesiphon, about A.D. 413, and reported to have spoken of the Irish as *Scoticæ gentes*. This testimony is cited by Usher against Dempster. The passage runs, "neque enim Britannia, et Scoticæ gentes, omnesque, usque ad oceanum, per circuitum barbaræ nationes, Moysen prophetasque cognoverant"—"For neither Britain, nor the Scottish people, nor all the surrounding barbarous nations as far as the ocean, had known Moses and the prophets."

The Roman poet Claudian in the 4th century, speaking of the battles of Stilicho, with the Britons, and Picts, and the Scots of Ireland, says,

"Totam cum Scotus Iernem
"Movit, et infesto spumavit remige Tethys."

"When the Scot moved all Ireland, and ocean foamed with hostile oars." The same writer also, in his praise of the Roman general Theodosius, when celebrating his victories in Britain, mentions the Scots of Ireland in the following passage:—

"Maduerunt, Saxone fuso,
"Orcades; incaluit Pictorum sanguine Thule;
"Scotorum cumulos flevit glacialis Ierne."
"The Orkney isles were moist with Saxon gore;
"Thule grew warm with Pictish blood; and icy
"Ireland mourned the heaps of slaughtered Scots."

Here the word "Ierne" confirms the fact that the inhabitants of Ireland were Scots; and Buchanan, as well as other Scotch writers, have admitted that these passages in Claudian, where reference is made to the *Scoti*, are applicable to Ireland.

Ethicus the Cosmographer, in his Description of Europe, speaks of Ireland in these words, "Hibernia a Scotorum gentibus colitur," "Ireland is inhabited by the Scots."

St. Prosper, who died in A.D. 466, speaking of the mission of Palladius into Ireland says, "Ad Scotos in Christum credentes, ordinatur a Papa Celestino Palladius et primus episcopus mittitur," "Palladius is ordained by Pope Celestine, and sent as the first bishop to the Scots believing in Christ."

Palladius was the precursor, or the colleague of St. Patrick in the mission

to Ireland; and St. Patrick himself in his writings calls the Irish, *Scots*: nor do the Scots of North Britain lay claim to either of these Saints as missionaries. It is well known, and generally admitted, that the first missionary to North Britain was our own countryman St. Columbkil.

If any doubts existed as to the evidence above quoted in favour of Ireland, they are utterly removed by the testimony of Orosius, the celebrated Spanish historian, who, writing about the year 416, mentions Ireland thus:

“Hibernia insula inter Britanniam et Hispaniam sita, &c.; hæc propriæ Britanniae, spatio terrarum angustior, sed coeli solique temperie magis utilis; a *Scotorum* gentibus colitur; huic etiam Mevania insula proxima est, et ipsa spatio non parva, solo commoda, æque a *Scotorum* gentibus habitatur.”—“Hibernia an island situated between Britain and Spain, &c.: it is nearer to Britain, and smaller in the extent of its territory, but more serviceable from the nature of its climate and its soil: it is inhabited by *Scottish* nations; the Isle of Man is the nearest to it, and that also is of considerable size, and of good soil, and is likewise inhabited by *Scottish* nations.”

In the sixth century, Gildas Britannus, in his querulous history of the Destruction of Britain, having told us that his country was trodden under foot by two cruel nations, the Picts from the North, and the Scots from the West, afterwards says, “Revertuntur impudentes grassatores Hiberni domum,”—“These impudent Irish plunderers returned home.” The same writer calls St. George’s Channel “Scythica vallis,” or the Scythian valley, as it was the sea which separated from Britain the Irish Scots, whom he considered to be of Scythian origin.

St. Isidore, Bishop of Seville, who flourished about A.D. 630, also calls Ireland Scotia. “Scotia,” says he, “which is one and the same with Ireland, is the next island to Britain, of less extent, but of a far more fertile soil. It stretches from South to North; its southern coasts look towards Iberia (Spain) whence the island borrowed the name of Ibernia. But it is also called Scotia, because it is inhabited by the Scots.”

The celebrated Anglo-Saxon historian Bede, who lived 672-735, speaks of Ireland to the following effect:—“But Ireland from the salubrity and mildness of its climate far surpasses Britain, so that the snow rarely remains there more than three days: no man makes hay for winter’s provision, or builds stables for his beasts of burden. The island abounds in milk and

"honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish or fowl; and it is remarkable for deer and goats. *It is properly the country of the Scots*, who migrating thence, added a third nation in Britain to the Britons and the Picts."

The same writer, in his History, 3, 27, says, "Many of the nobility and gentry of the English nation were there (i.e. in Ireland) at that time, who having left their own country, resorted thither for the purpose of studying divinity, or of leading a life of continency. The *Scots* received them all in a most friendly manner, affording them maintenance, books to read, and teachers to instruct them gratuitously."

Saint Donatus, Bishop of Fiesuli, who died in the year 840, calls Ireland *Scotia*, in a Latin poem descriptive of this country, which is quoted by De Burgo in his *Hibernia Dominicana*, p. 8 :—



"Finibus occiduis describitur optima tellus,
 "Nomine, et antiquis Scotia scripta libris;
 "Insula dives opum, gemmarum, vestis et auri;
 "Commoda corporibus aëre, sole, solo.
 "Melle fluit, pulchris et lacteis Scotia campis,
 "Vestibus atque armis, frugibus, arte, viris.
 "Ursorum rabies nulla est ibi: saeva leonum,
 "Semina nec unquam Scotica terra tulit.
 "Nulla venena nocent, nec serpens serpit in herba;
 "Nec conquesta canit garrula rana lacu.
 "In qua Scotorum gentes habitare merentur,
 "Inclyta gens hominum milite, pace, fide."
 "Far westward lies an isle of ancient fame,
 "By nature bless'd, and Scotia is her name;
 "An island rich; exhaustless is her store
 "Of veiny silver, and of golden ore;
 "Her fruitful soil for ever teems with wealth,
 "With gems her waters, and her air with health.
 "Her verdant fields with milk and honey flow,
 "Her woolly fleeces vie with virgin snow;
 "Her waving furrows float with bearded corn,
 "And arms and arts her envied sons adorn.
 "No savage bear with ruthless fury roves,
 "Nor ravening lion through her sacred groves;
 "No poison there infects, no scaly snake
 "Creeps through the grass, nor frog annoys the lake;
 "An island worthy of its pious race,
 "In war triumphant, and unmatched in peace."

In the 9th century, Eginhard, secretary to Charlemagne, in his *Annals*, under the year 780, says that the Norwegians who invaded Ireland, *the island of the Scots*, were put to flight. And again, at the year 812, he

adds, "A fleet of the Normans invaded Ireland, an island of the Scots ;
 "and when they joined battle with the Scots, a great number of the Nor-
 "mans were slain, and the rest basely ran away ; after which the fleet
 "returned home."

We may state also that Nennius, the British historian, mentions Ireland under the name of *Scotia*, and calls the inhabitants *Scoti* ; and in speaking of the colonies of Ireland, he says, "Novissime venerunt *Scoti* a partibus "Hispaniae ad Hiberniam." "Last of all came the *Scoti* from parts of "Spain to Ireland."

In a translation into Irish of the Book of Nennius, a copy of which is contained in the Book of Leacan, it is worthy of remark that wherever "*Scoti*" appears in the original, it has been invariably rendered by the word *Gaeil*, by which the Irish translators meant the inhabitants of Ireland.

Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald Barry of Wales, a British writer of the 12th century, calls Ireland *Scotia*, and says that North Britain also got the name of "*Scotia*," because the inhabitants were originally descended from the Irish.

Pinkerton, a Scotch writer, in his inquiry into the History of Scotland, says, "By the consent of all antiquity, the name 'Scoti' belonged to the "Irish alone until the 11th century." Then, and not till then, did modern Scotland gain the name of *Scotia* ; its ancient name was *Alba* or *Albain*, anglicised *Albion* and *Albany* ; and to the present day the people of Scotland are called by the Irish *Albanaigh* or "Albanians." But from the 12th to the 16th century, various Latin writers thought proper to distinguish between the two countries, by calling Ireland *Scotia Major*, and Scotland *Scotia Minor*, or else *Vetus et Nova Scotia*, "old and new Scotland."

Archbishop Usher is of opinion that North Britain or Caledonia did not get the name of *Scotia* until the 11th century. "For neither Dalriada " (he says) which till the year 840 was the seat of British Scots, nor all "Albany did immediately upon the reduction of the Picts obtain the name "of *Scotia* ; but this event was brought about when the Picts and Scots "grew together, gradually, into one nation, and by this coalition the memory "of the Pictish people became quite obsolete, which did not come to pass "until the 11th century ; so I am of opinion that no writer of the precedent "periods can be produced, who ever spoke of Albany by the name of "*Scotia*." However the name *Scotia* came after this into common use,

when the English began to call the Hibernians, in their own language, "Irish," and in Latin *Iros* and *Irenses*, and their country "Ireland." The name "Ireland" was then propagated among the Germans, French, Spaniards, Italians, and the very Arabians. For the Nubian geographer, about the year 1150, calls Ireland by the name *Irelanda*, and Albany by that of *Scotia*.

Bede, aware of the origin of the Scots of Albany, mentions them under that name, but he is always careful to distinguish between the Scots who inhabited Ireland and the Scots of Britain: and never, in any of his works, does he call North Britain by the name of *Scotia*.

From a very early period of our history we find that colonies from Ireland settled in Albain or Scotland. It is stated in the Book of Leacan, that the Picts came from Thrace, and landed in Ireland, whence they proceeded by direction of the Milesians who then governed the country, to North Britain, of which they took possession. The Picts intermarried with the Milesians, and some of them remained in the North of Ireland, in the present county of Antrim, where they became a powerful sept, and are frequently mentioned in our annals.

The Fir-bolg, who rebelled against the Milesians in the first century, were called Athach Tuatha, a name which has been latinised Attacotti, and anglicised Attacots. They were at length subdued and expelled by Tuathal Teachtmair, or Tuathal the acceptable, a Milesian prince, on his return from exile in Albion. They fled in great numbers to the Hebrides, where they settled, and also along the river Clyde; and becoming mixed there with the Picts, they assisted them in their wars against the Romans, in the third and fourth centuries, being known to the Romans under the name of Attacotti.

As to the Scottish colonists that settled in Caledonia, ancient Irish History informs us that Conaire II, monarch of Ireland, of the Heremonian line, reigned eight years, and died A.D. 220. One of his sons, named Cairbre Riada settled in Ulster, and the country possessed by his people was called Dal Riada, contracted "Reuta," and still called the "Route," which now forms the northern part of the county of Antrim. This Cairbre Riada being an adventurous warrior led his forces into Albain or Caledonia, where he settled a colony in the territory which now forms Argyleshire, and the adjoining districts, during the reign of Art, brother-in-

law of Conaire, and monarch of Ireland, in the early part of the third century. The country conquered by Cairbre Riada in Albion was thenceforth denominated Dal Riada, or the county of Riada, and the colonists were called Dalriedians, like their original stock in Ireland.

The Venerable Bede is conclusive on this point, and puts the subject past controversy; his words are—"In the course of time, Britain received, "after the Britons and Picts, a third colony, who were Scots, in the country "of the Picts. These Scots came from Ireland, under the command of a "general named Reuda, and either by friendship or by the sword procured "settlements for themselves among the Picts, which they still retain. From "the name of their commander they are to this day called Dalreudians; for "*Dal* in this language signifies a 'portion' or 'territory.'"

In the fifth century, Erc the son of Eohee Mumrevar, a descendant of Cairbre Riada, was prince of Dalriada in Ulster; and his sons Fergus, Loarn, and Angus, led another colony from Ulster to Albion, and became masters of the country which now comprises Argyleshire, Bute and the Hebrides. Fergus became the first king of the Albanian Scots of North Britain, and his death is recorded by the annalist Tigearnach, at the year 502, who states that Fergus the Great, son of Erc, accompanied by the race of Dalriada, occupied a part of Britain, and afterwards died there.

In order to secure his throne, Fergus sent to his brother Murtoigh, son of Erc, who was then monarch of Ireland, for the LIA FAIL, or Stone of Destiny, to be inaugurated thereon as king of the Scots in Albion. The stone was sent, but never returned, as the Albanian Scots fancied that while it remained among them, their state would be unshaken, in accordance with an old prophecy, which in Irish runs thus:—

Cineadh Scuit saor an fine
Munab bréag an fhaisdine;
Mar a bhfuighid an Lia Fáil,
Dlighid flaitheas do ghabhail.

which has thus been rendered by Hector Boethius, a Scotch writer, and from him given by Camden:—

Ni fallat fatum, Scoti, quocunque locatum
Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.
"If fate's decrees be not announced in vain,
"Where'er this stone is found the Scots shall reign."

Fergus the son of Erc was succeeded in the Dalriedian monarchy in 529 by his son Domangart, who was also succeeded by his son Comgal in

the year 534. In 558 his brother Gabhran mounted the throne, and he was succeeded by his nephew Conall, son of Comgal in 560. It was this prince who bestowed the island of I, or Iona, upon St. Columbkil in the year 563. In the year 574 Conall died, and was succeeded by his cousin Aodan, who accompanied St. Columbkil in 590, to the great convention held at Drumceat, near Drumachose in the county of Derry, at which Aodh son of Ainmirach presided. According to the Annals of Tigearnach, St. Columbkil departed this life in his monastery at Iona, A.D. 596, on the night of Pentecost, being the 9th June, in the 77th year of his age.

One of the objects of the convention held at Drumceat was to determine the jurisdiction of the Albanian Dalriada. The question at issue (says Dr. Reeves) is variously stated : O'Donnell (who wrote a life of St. Columbkil in the beginning of the 16th century) would have it that Aidan laid claim to the sovereignty of the Irish Dalriada, and required that it should be exempt from the rule of the Irish monarch. Keating and O'Flaherty, on the other hand, state that the dispute arose from the demand of Aidan, the Irish king, to receive tribute from the Albanian prince as from the governor of a colony. They agree, however, as to the decision, which was, that the Irish Dalriada should continue under the dominion of the King of Ireland, and that the sister kingdom should be independent ; with the understanding that either power should be ready, when called upon, to assist the other, in virtue of their national affinity ; and it is fully attested by our Irish annals, that this league was observed, and that a constant intercourse was kept up by the Albanian Scots with the mother country down to the fifteenth century.

Innes, the Scotch writer, who published his work on the origin of the Scots in 1729, acknowledges that the Scots of Albion were from Ireland. "In a word (he adds) I mean those Scots of whom the Scots in Britain are descended, and from whom they took their name." In this work he has given a list of Scottish kings in Albion, whose names are purely Irish.

Kinneth the son of Alpin, or as he is generally called Kinneth MacAlpin, the twenty-third ruler of the Albanian Dalriada, and father-in-law of Aodh Finliath monarch of Ireland, ascended the throne A.D. 838. In the year 842 he conquered the kingdom of the Picts, and became monarch of the entire country between Edinburgh and Caithness. He then removed the Stone of Destiny from Dunstaffnage in Argyleshire, to Scone near Perth,

and inclosed it in a wooden chair, on which he was inaugurated the first king of all Albion or Scotland.

In the year 1058 Malcolm son of Donchad became king of Scotland, and the poem recited by his chief bard at his inauguration is still preserved. A copy of this poem is contained in the Book of MacFirbis, in the Royal Irish Academy, and has been published with a literal translation in the works of the Archaeological Society. It has also been given by Dr. O'Connor in his *Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores*, from two ancient MSS. in the Stowe Library; and Mr. Skene, a Scotch gentleman and an eminent Gaelic scholar, has given an English version of it in the *Transactions of the Iona Club*, published in 1834.

This poem is acknowledged on all hands to be of the utmost value, as the connecting link in the history of the Gaels of Ireland and Scotland. Pinkerton calls it "beyond question the most ancient monument in the Gaelic language of Dalriadic history extant." It is purely Irish, and in the style of language and composition common at the period to which it is ascribed. In it are given the names of the Milesian Kings of Scotland, from the time of Loarn, Fergus and Angus, (the three sons of Erc, of the race of Conaire II.) to the time of Malcolm in the 11th century, with the number of years they reigned over Scotland, respectively. Malcolm, then king of Scotland, felt highly honoured in having it proclaimed to the world, by his chief bard, that he was descended from the monarchs of Ireland.

Sixty kings of the Scottish race reigned in Albion during a period of 784 years, from the time of King Fergus, A.D. 502, to the death of Alexander III., King of Scotland, in the year 1286. In the reign of John Baliol, A.D. 1296, Edward I. King of England, having overrun all Scotland with his victorious arms, conveyed the regalia of that kingdom into England, and among the rest the Stone of Destiny, which the people of Scotland always regarded as a sort of palladium, fancying that while it remained among them their dominion would remain unshaken. To cure the Scots of this opinion, to make them believe that the dissolution of their monarchy was at hand, and to extinguish their hopes of recovering their liberty, king Edward had it conveyed to Westminster Abbey, where it may be seen at this day.

It was about this time that the MacDonnells, Lords of the Isles, or Hebrides, came to Ireland, and formed a settlement in the county of Antrim.

They were famous warriors, known as chiefs of Galloglasses, and afterwards aided the Earl of Desmond in his wars with the English during the 16th century. They became Earls of Antrim in the beginning of the 17th century, and they trace their pedigree up to the Clan Colla, who were Kings of Ulster in the beginning of the fourth age.

Charles O'Connor, in his Dissertations on the History of Ireland, has clearly shewn that the Mac Cathlins, now Campbells, Dukes of Argyle, are descended from Mac Con, Prince of Desmond, and cousin-german of Cairbre Rieda; and O'Flaherty has proved that the Mor-Maors,* or Great Stewards of Lenox and Mars, were descended from Corc, King of Cashel in the fourth century, who, having been expelled from the sovereignty of Munster, retired to Albion, where he married the Princess Mongfinna, daughter of Feredach, King of the Picts, by whom he had three sons, whose descendants became, in after times, Earls and Dukes of Lenox and Richmond.

We are informed in the Annals of the Four Masters and other Irish authorities, that O'Neill, Prince of Tyrone, O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell, and several other Irish chiefs, invited Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, to assume the sovereignty of Ireland, or to send over some prince of his family, as they considered that the house of Bruce had a claim to the crown of Ireland, being maternally descended from the Kings of the Milesian race in Scotland. In accordance with this request, King Robert sent his brother Edward Bruce to Ireland, who landed at Olderfleet, in the bay of Larne, on the coast of Antrim, in the year 1315, with a fleet of 300 sail; and being joined by the Irish princes, he was crowned as King of Ireland near Dundalk.

In the year 1495, O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell, went to visit James IV. King of Scotland, and they made a close alliance, offensive and defensive, in virtue, it would appear, of the old league agreed upon by their ancestors at Drumceat in the sixth century.

It is stated that the same King James designed to come to Ireland, for the purpose of assuming the sovereignty of this country, but that he was dissuaded by O'Donnell. However, in the year 1524, a large force of the men of Scotland came to aid O'Donnell, and they are called by the annalists *Albanaigh*, or "Albanian Scots," by which name the inhabitants of Scotland have always been designated by the Irish writers.

* Maors-Majors.

The invasions of the Scots who were in alliance with O'Neill and O'Donnell, were so frequent during the 16th century, that an act was passed in the Irish parliament, whereby it was made treason to introduce or receive any of the Scots into Ireland, and it was made felony for the Irish or English to intermarry with the Scots, without a license under the Great Seal.

The descent of James VI. (I. of England) from the Scottish monarchs of Ireland has been argued by O'Flaherty, by Charles O'Connor and others; and the King himself acknowledged the fact, in a speech delivered at the Council Table in Whitehall, on the 21st April, 1613:—"There is a double cause (said the King) why I should be careful of the welfare of that people (the Irish): first, as King of England, by reason of the long possession the Crown of England hath had of that land; and also as King of Scotland, for the ancient Kings of Scotland are descended of the Kings of Ireland." (See Cox. Hib. Anglicana, vol. ii. p. 29.)

It is obvious that the colonies from Ireland used the language of their mother country, namely, the Hiberno-Celtic tongue; and we may infer that they spoke and wrote it in its purity from the 3rd to the 16th century, in consequence of the continued intercourse between both nations during that time.

The name common to this language, both in Ireland and Scotland, is *Gaelic*, but the Scotch also call it *Earse*, which is only a corruption of the word "Irish." Hume says, that "the name of Earse or Irish, given by the low country Scots to the language of the Scottish Highlanders, is a certain proof of the traditional opinion, delivered from father to son, that the latter people came originally from Ireland."

Johannes Major, a Scotch historian, who lived in the fifteenth century, was also of this opinion, for he says, "It is from many arguments plain that we derive our origin from the Irish. This we are taught by Bede, an Englishman, who would not be fond of lessening the offspring of his own country; this is evident from the language; for almost half Scotland speak *Irish* at this day, and more did so some time past."

Martin, who wrote an account of the Western Islands, published in London 1716, says, concerning the island of Erisca, "The natives speak the *Irish* tongue more perfectly here than in most of the other islands, partly because of the remoteness, and the small number of those that

“speak English, and partly because some of them are *Scholars*, and versed “in the *Irish language*.”

This fact is amply confirmed by that learned Gaelic scholar, Dr. Shaw, a Highlander, and author of a Gaelic Grammar and Dictionary published in 1780. In his enquiry into the authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, he says that “Ireland had all sorts of schools and colleges, and thither the “youth of England and other countries went for education; and all the “popular stories of the Highlands, at this day, agree that every chieftain “went thither for education and the use of arms, from the fourth until “the fifteenth century. I Columbkil, a monastery on the island of Iona, “was first founded by the munificence of the Irish; and until its dissolu- “tion all the abbots and monks belonging to it, one abbot only excepted, “were Irish. All the highland clergy not only studied but received ordina- “tion in Ireland. The clergy of the islands especially, and those of the “Western coast, were frequently natives of Ireland. Hence it happens, “that all poetical compositions, stories, fables, &c. of any antiquity, which “are repeated in the Highlands at this day, are confessedly in the Irish “Gaelic, and every stanza that is remarkably fine, or obscure, is still called “*Gaelic Dhomhain Eirionach*, i.e. ‘the deep Irish, or pure primitive lan- “guage of Ireland.’ I am conscious (he adds) that without a knowledge “of Irish learning, we know nothing of the Earse as a tongue, the Irish “being a studied language, and the Earse only a distinct provincial dialect.”

Dr. Johnson, in his account of the Western Isles, argues that the Earse or Scotch Gaelic was an unwritten speech, in which nothing that is not very short can be transmitted from one generation to another. The Scotch (he adds) had not even the Bible in their own dialect, but used the Irish translation, which they published in 1690, but printed in the Roman letter instead of the Irish character.

James Macpherson confirms the Doctor’s opinion, for he states, in his Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, that “the inhabitants of the High- “lands had fallen from several concurring circumstances, into the last “degree of ignorance and barbarism;” and Dr. Blair, following in his steps, says that “the inhabitants of the Highlands about two hundred years ago “were in a state of gross ignorance and barbarity.”

No wonder then that their language became very much corrupted; and such has been the case, particularly within the last century, as we find by

their Grammars, which are drawn from the spoken dialect, and not from any ancient manuscripts.

But we are not to infer from this that they had no manuscripts, for the Committee of the Highland Society in their Report on the Poems of Ossian, have given specimens in *fac-similes* of several of their Gaelic MSS., in the Irish character which was common to both countries; and it has been lately ascertained that some of these manuscripts, still in the possession of several gentlemen in Scotland, are as old as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, all written in the Irish character, and in a corresponding style of language with those written in Ireland at the same periods; and in the pedigrees given in these, all the Celtic families of Scotland are traced up to Con of the Hundred Battles, King of Ireland in the second century. The earliest specimens of their printed works shew that they spoke and wrote the Gaelic language as purely as we did in Ireland.

Bishop Carsuel translated the Confession of Faith and some prayers into the Gaelic language for the Gaels of Scotland; and these were printed in the year 1567. His epistle dedicatory is in the purest Irish, as to orthography, syntax, and phraseology.

From this period the Albanian, or Scotch Gaelic, became gradually corrupted, as shown by their publications at different times. A marked deterioration is perceptible in the poems attributed to Ossian by Mr. Macpherson, but which in reality are only translations from his own English originals, for, as he had but an imperfect knowledge of the Gaelic, these translations are so barbarously executed, in point alike of rhyme, spelling and syntax, that the language employed appears to a Gaelic scholar to be nothing else than a miserable patois.

The Gaelic dictionaries of Scotland are certainly the most correct publications they have, because these have, in a great measure, been compiled from our Irish dictionaries; but the mode of spelling words is too frequently in accordance with the vulgarisms of the colloquial dialect, whence it is clear that any person, who wishes to acquire a thorough knowledge of the Scotch Gaelic, should first make himself master of the Hiberno-Celtic, in order that he may learn to discriminate between the mother tongue and a corrupted dialectic variety.

From the evidences adduced we may justly infer that if such a poet as

Macpherson's *Ossian*, a Gael (not a *Pict*.) be it remembered, wrote his poems in North Britain in the third century, he must have been either an Irishman or the descendant of Irishmen who had recently come from ancient Scotia to settle in that country; and his language must have been the pure Irish undefiled of that period, and not the corrupt patois ascribed to him by Macpherson.

We maintain, however, that there was no such Caledonian poet, and we shall hereafter endeavour to discover him elsewhere.
