

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

METRE, ETC.

GENERAL THOMASON, in his introduction to "Ceol Mor" (page 9), expresses his firm conviction that Piobaireachd is regular metrical music, and to-day there are few disposed entirely to disagree with these views. It might be urged that the music is still more regular than even General Thomason thought, otherwise he would probably never have included tunes as correct which contained more, or less, than 16 bars (or its multiple). It is very clearly recognised to-day that Marches, Strathspeys and Reels are strictly metrical, and no player of any consequence would accept a March with, say, seven or nine bars to a part. Yet some players, and good ones too, as well as enthusiasts, are prepared to accept an unmetrical Piobaireachd because it has come down through a few generations of players in a more or less mutilated state!

It is to-day not sufficiently recognised how much has been lost, and how much is incomplete, in consequence of the restrictions imposed after the '45 Rebellion, otherwise we should not be prepared to accept, in such simple faith, versions collected by MacDonald and MacKay and consider them beyond criticism. These remarks should in no way be deemed to disparage the wonderful work of the early pioneers in collecting and recording what they could of the ancient music. More is due to them than is generally accorded. The point must not be overlooked, however, that much has reached us in a mutilated state, and even tunes recorded by MacLeod of Gesto, taken down from the last of the MacCrimmons, are open to question, because, after all, Iain Dubh was a very old man when he dictated the twenty tunes published, and it cannot be certain that the music came down to him from his forebears in an unbroken line, as close study of the conditions after the '45 clearly demonstrates.

Apart from metrical mutilation, it should also be recognised that there were different schools or styles of playing—the MacCrimmon, MacArthur, MacKay, Campbell, etc.—and tunes recorded in staff notation by one school might have been differently recorded by another. Mr. Simon Fraser, of Melbourne, Australia, states that his father was well aware that Angus MacKay recorded various tunes differently to the way they were played by Iain Dubh, and that at the time there was considerable adverse comment on his methods! Even allowing for some distortion of fact

when such points come down a generation, it would seem to suggest that possibly Angus MacKay had a way of his own!

To return to the subject of metre, the time is not far distant, in the Compiler's opinion, when regularity of metre in Piobaireachd will be freely accepted by all, without question, and we may then look forward to more real progress in correction than is apparent to-day!

Broadly speaking, there would appear to be only two main classes of metre, three-lined tunes of 6.6.4. (12.12.8.) metre and four-lined tunes of 4 or 8 bars per line. There are no doubt tunes of two lines of 8 bars each, but it is beyond question there are no correctly recorded tunes of "fancy" metre, especially where the number of bars exceeds or falls short of the proper number.

For the benefit of those not fully conversant with the principles of construction governing 6.6.4. metre tunes it is perhaps advisable to quote General Thomason's definition. He says—"In a primary Pibroch each line is a play upon two sections, each of which is composed of an equal number of bars. It is always a 3.3.2. metre, the first line being composed of the first section played twice followed by the second section once, the second line gives us the first section played once followed by the second section played twice, and in the last line each section is played once. In a primary Pibroch the number of bars must accord with this construction." The principles he so clearly defines are very apparent in 6.6.4. tunes of primitive character (his 3.3.2. is, of course, the same metre) but perhaps not quite so apparent in later tunes of three lines. In fact, it is often necessary to examine a tune, otherwise than a primitive one, very carefully to decide if its metre is 6.6.4. or 4.4.4.4.!

General Thomason, although a keen upholder of metre, seems to have arrived at the conclusion that many tunes are irregular. He quotes the 3.4.2.4.3. metre of "Craigellachie" as being correct, and yet he records the music in 12.12.8.* He gives many tunes as of 4.6.4. (2.3.2.) metre, and yet, by his "concluding remarks," he clearly appreciates the principles of construction governing a 6.6.4. metre tune, and it can only

* The metre of this tune, in the Compiler's opinion, is perhaps open to question. It may possibly prove to be 8.8.8.8. or even 8.8.8. As regards its character, it is certainly more of a Lament than a Gathering; in fact, the Compiler has a version which is called a *Lament*, said to be by Patrick Mor MacCrimmon.

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be assumed that the 4.6.4. metre tunes were printed before he had fully realised the principles of construction referred to, otherwise many of them would no doubt have appeared in 6.6.4. metre form! The twenty-two tunes of 2.3.2. metre will probably be found, the majority at any rate, to be 6.6.4. tunes with two missing bars in the first part. General Thomason refers to a metre of 3.4.3. as peculiar to the MacLeans, and yet the MacLean tunes in "Ceol Mor" appear to be in strictly correct metre, except that on page 93, the "Lament for Lachlan Mor," given as 8.12.8. This is obviously a 12.12.8 (or 6.6.4.) metre tune.

TIME.

Many errors exist in the time in which tunes have been recorded. It is perhaps easy to appreciate the reason, when it is remembered that what has been recorded is the player's expression, and not necessarily the Composer's original measure. The nearer we get to certain fundamental principles in recording tunes in staff notation, the easier is it to follow methods of construction and to correct errors of expression. Piobaireachd has been described as primitive music, let us, therefore, adopt primitive methods of time classification! It will be found there are only two real "times" in Piobaireachd—which might be described as "Even" time and "Triple" or "Three" time. "Even" time is manifest where the regular Variations contain *two* or *four* beats per bar and "Three" time where such bars contain *three* beats. Where "Even" time is manifest each bar of the Ground and its doubling should be divided into *two parts equal in time value*, according to modern standards, whereas in "Three" time each Ground bar should be divided into *three* equal parts.

As regards the actual "time" to be used to record a tune it is suggested that two minims per bar is the most satisfactory standard for the majority of "Even" time tunes, although there are many satisfactorily recorded in six-eight time. "Three" time tunes might perhaps be written with three minims, or perhaps three crotchets, per bar. As regards the Siubhal, the most satisfactory time would appear to be that necessitating the joining together of each pair of notes, for they are then so easily read. In the case of the complicated Variation beats the question is of minor importance, so long as something approaching the correct method of playing them is reached. It is suggested, nevertheless,

that, if an abbreviation is not used, each separate beat should appear with all its notes joined (as was the usual custom until recently).

METHOD OF STUDY.

General Thomason, in his Introduction to "Ceol Mor," page 6, says:—"One of the greatest advantages of the new notation I found to be the easy juxtaposition—very often in the same page—of the corresponding bars of the ground and the several variations, and this threw a new and most unexpected light on the whole subject, for it enabled me not only often to distinguish between a right and a wrong bar, but also to decide between the diverse renderings of conflicting authorities."

This method of study is very sound, and indeed the only way to reconcile versions with a differing number of bars. The method is not easy, however, unless some mechanical contrivance is used. The Compiler uses small thin wooden slabs about one inch wide and two and a half inches long, covered with white paper on one side, upon which is ruled the musical staff. These slabs are "bars," and are laid in rows between grooves on a large board and can be moved along as desired. It is thus possible to make comparisons easily, for the "bars" can be moved along until the corresponding "bars" of the various versions are vertically in line. This results in the missing bars in some versions appearing as blanks! Not only does the system lend itself to the comparison of various versions of a tune as a whole, but it enables comparison to be made of the various parts or lines of a tune, one with the other.

Having completed an analysis in this manner each division of it is numbered (the bars being already numbered) and it is then easy to record the result in tabular form, if it is not considered necessary to make a full permanent record in staff notation.

Such analysis throw, as General Thomason remarks, "a new and most unexpected light on the whole subject." Close study of the Variation notes, which are generally the least liable to mutilation, being so regular in time, etc., will often show up wrong accent in the Ground and in many cases give a clue to the correction of a badly mutilated tune.

Not only is the system of writing the Variation bars under the corresponding Ground bars useful from the point of view of investigation,

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but it is a good system for the publication of Collections and is useful to the learner of a tune, as it assists him to memorise, the Variation bars being so easily identified with the corresponding Ground bars, and the construction being more clearly understood.

In other matters also, method in studying points is of great value. For instance, if the keen student is anxious to form some opinion as to the correctness, or otherwise, of the *Taorluth Fosgailte* Variation in so many tunes, unaccompanied by a *Crunluth Fosgailte*, he has only to make a summary from the various published Collections. He will find there are many cases of a *Taorluth Fosgailte* Variation unaccompanied by the corresponding *Crunluth*, but often followed by the ordinary (closed) *Taorluth* and *Crunluth*. Where, however, a *Crunluth Fosgailte* exists, it is almost invariably accompanied by a *Taorluth Fosgailte* and the other forms do not appear. In the few cases where a *Crunluth Fosgailte* Variation is not accompanied by a similar *Taorluth*, there is generally some reason easily appreciated. The inference is, therefore, there should be no *Taorluth Fosgailte* where the other form of *Taorluth* and *Crunluth* is found and that such Variations have crept into tunes possibly through the habit of playing as many variations as possible, probably some little time before Donald MacDonald and Angus MacKay commenced collecting. Indeed, the existence of the *Fosgailte Taorluth*, with two beats per bar in "Three" time tunes (tunes with three beats per bar) is in-itself evidence the Variation is foreign and cannot belong to the tune. There are, of course, comparatively modern tunes which err in containing a *Fosgailte Taorluth* with no corresponding *Fosgailte Crunluth*, and Composer's MS. may show clearly that the inclusion of such a *Fosgailte* Variation (with the other form) was intentional, but this goes to prove only how much knowledge of construction has been lost!

In other matters careful *methodical* study will bring out points not easily discernible to the casual student.

ABBREVIATIONS.

There is possibly no class of music so adaptable to an abbreviated form as most of the Variations in a *Piobaireachd*. General Thomason, in his valuable "Ceol Mor" collection, adopted a system of abbreviation for many movements in the *Urlar* or Ground and for the Variations, but the signs he uses are generally so complicated, and there is such a variety of them (even for the same beat), it is usually necessary to "translate" a tune to ordinary staff notation before it is playable by an ordinary piper!

In the remarks under the head "Method of Study," General Thomason is quoted with reference to the advantage to be gained by placing the corresponding Variation bars under those of the Ground, etc. To do this some simple form of abbreviation is necessary, in the case of beats requiring, in full staff notation, a great deal of space.

In this publication a simple form of abbreviation is adopted for such regular beats as *Leumluth*, *Taorluth* and *Crunluth*. This consists of the initial note of the beat with an extended "tail" at right angles to the stem and will, it is expected, be easily understood by any student of the music from the name given to the Variation. In the case of *Breabach* beats the abbreviation refers, of course, to the first part of the beat and the added notes are shown separately. This abbreviation could also indicate the triplet of the *Taorluth Fosgailte*, the fourth note being shown in addition. For the *Crunluth Fosgailte* Variation, where, besides the initial note of the beat, the second note must also be given, it would be sufficient to join the two notes and extend the "tail," the name given to the Variation making its nature clear.

In some cases lines of staff notation may be saved by some reference explaining the differences between the Singling and the Doubling, etc., and it is anticipated that no difficulty will be experienced by the reader in following such references.