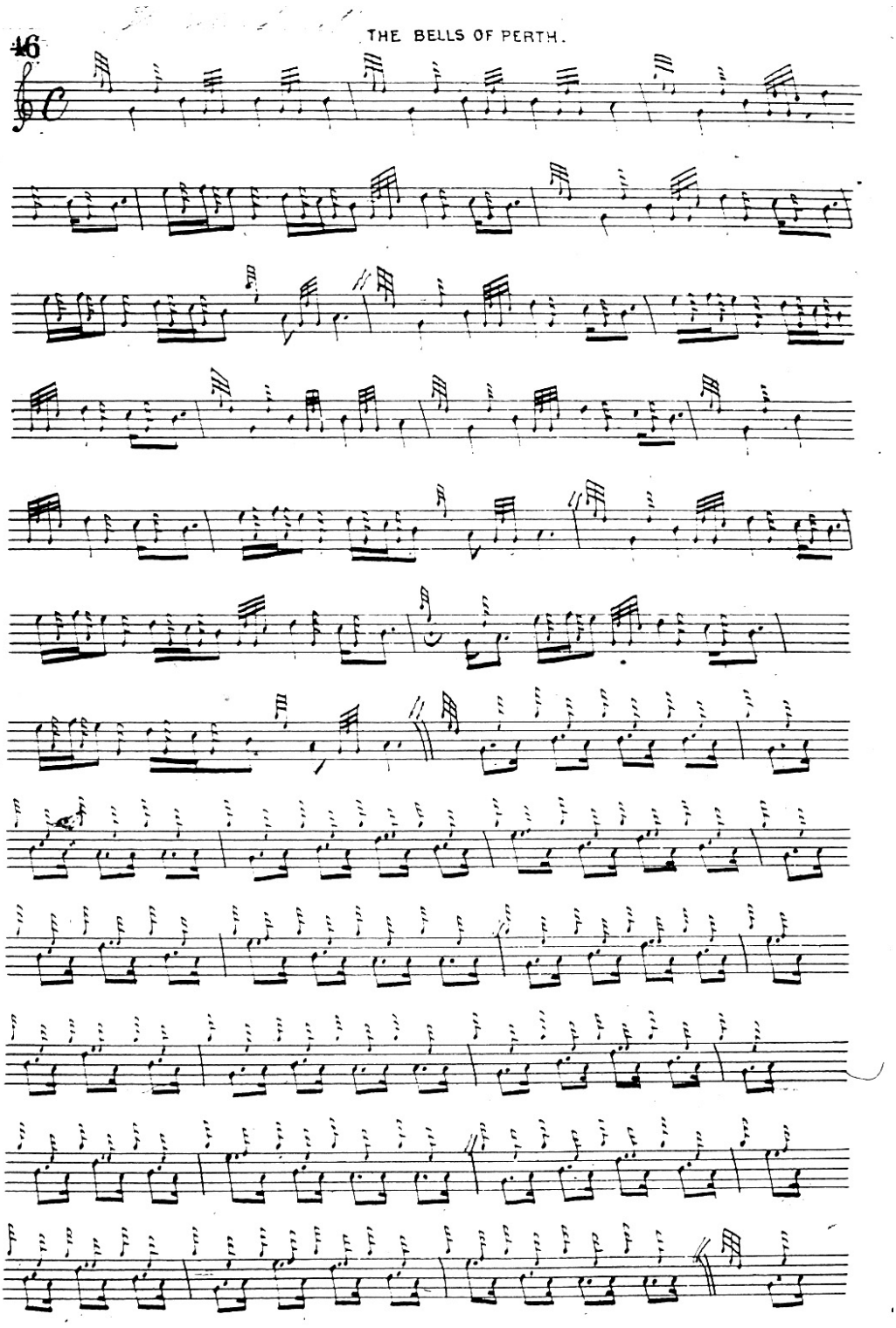
The Bells of Perth

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:
– **Donald MacDonald,** ff.46-52;
– **MacArthur/MacGregor,** ff.15-17;
– **Robert Meldrum**, ff.159-162;

and in the following published sources:
– **Frans Buisman and Andrew Wright**, eds., *The MacArthur—MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd (1820),* p.133;
– **Angus MacKay**, *Ancient Piobaireachd,* pp.106-9;
– **Donald MacPhee**, *Collection of Piobaireachd,* i, 42-5;
– **C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor,* pp. 73-5;
– **David Glen**, *Collection of Ancient Piobaireachd,* pp.77-81;
– **Charles Bannatyne**, in *Piobaireachd Society Collection (first series),* ii, 5-7;
– **G. F. Ross**, *MacCrimmon and Other Piobaireachd, pp.54-5.*

There are basically two ways of doing this tune and we see the first of them in **Donald MacDonald**'s manuscript as follows:



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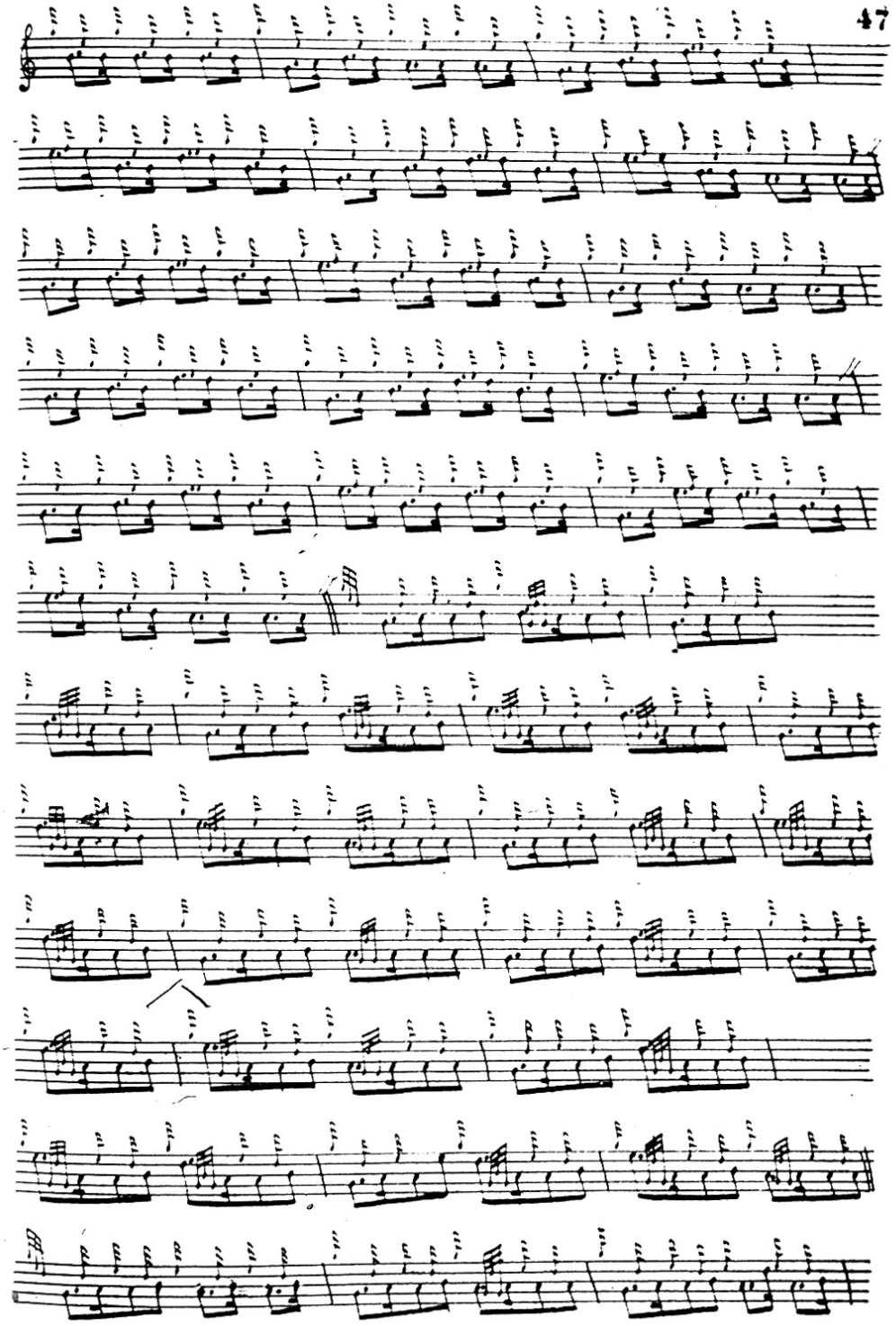

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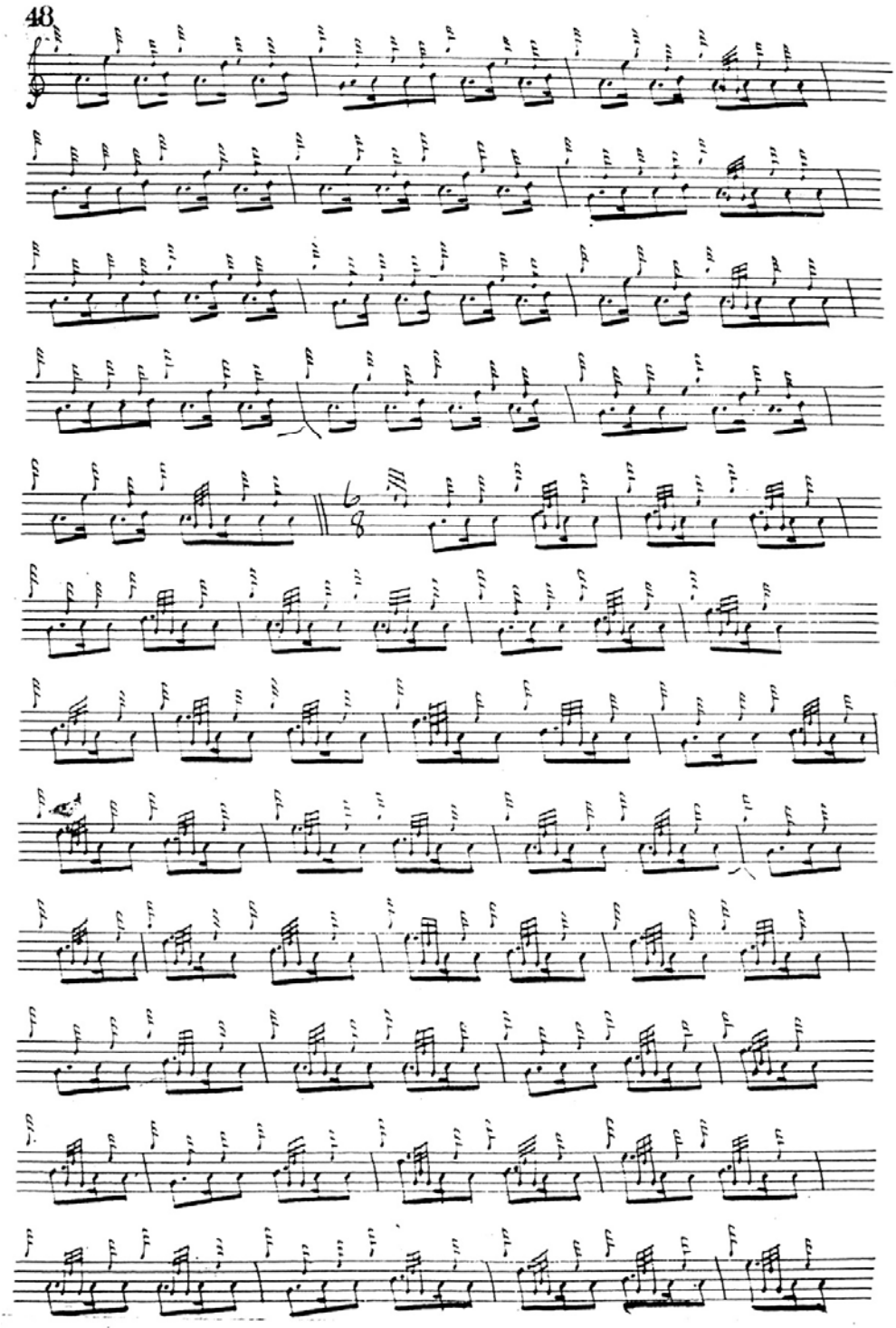

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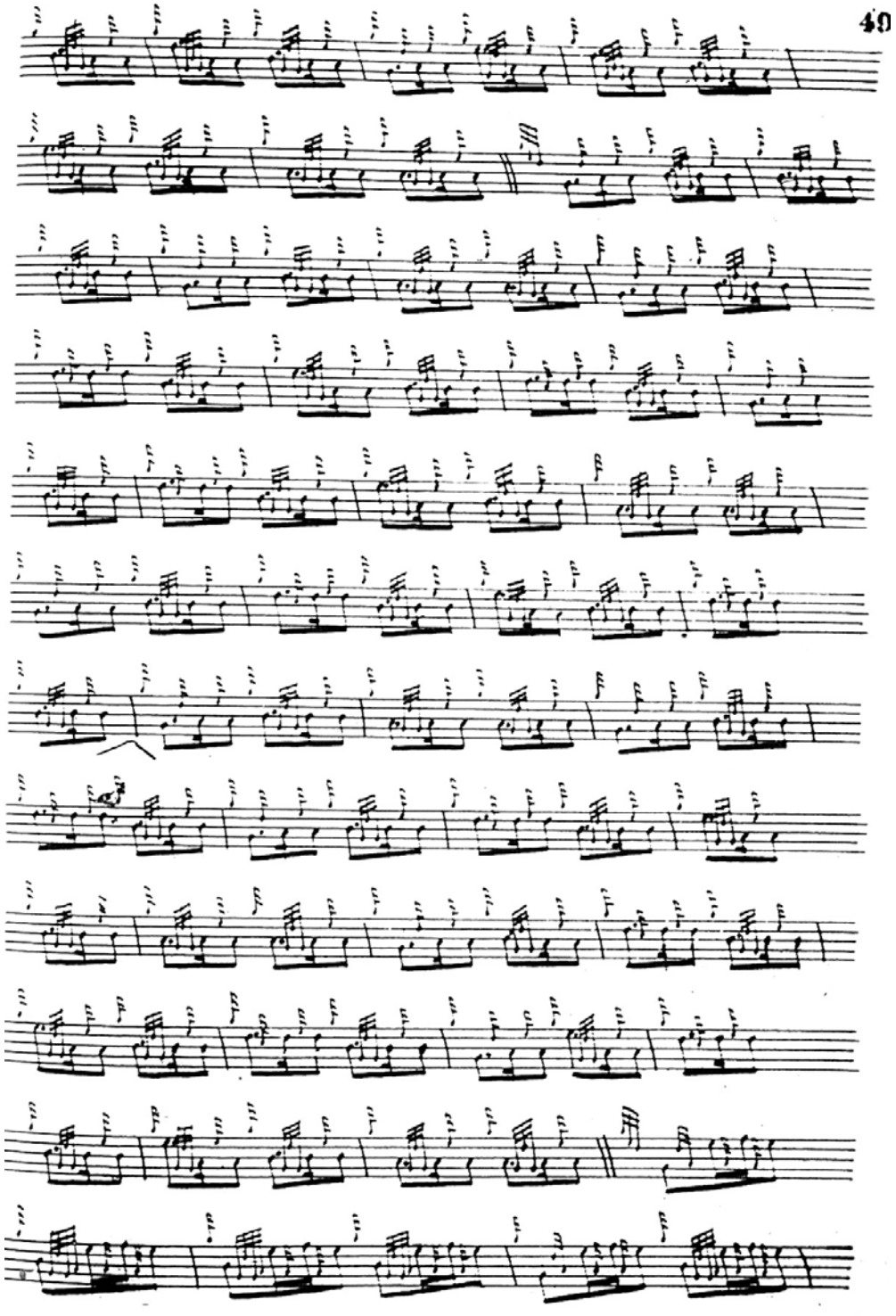

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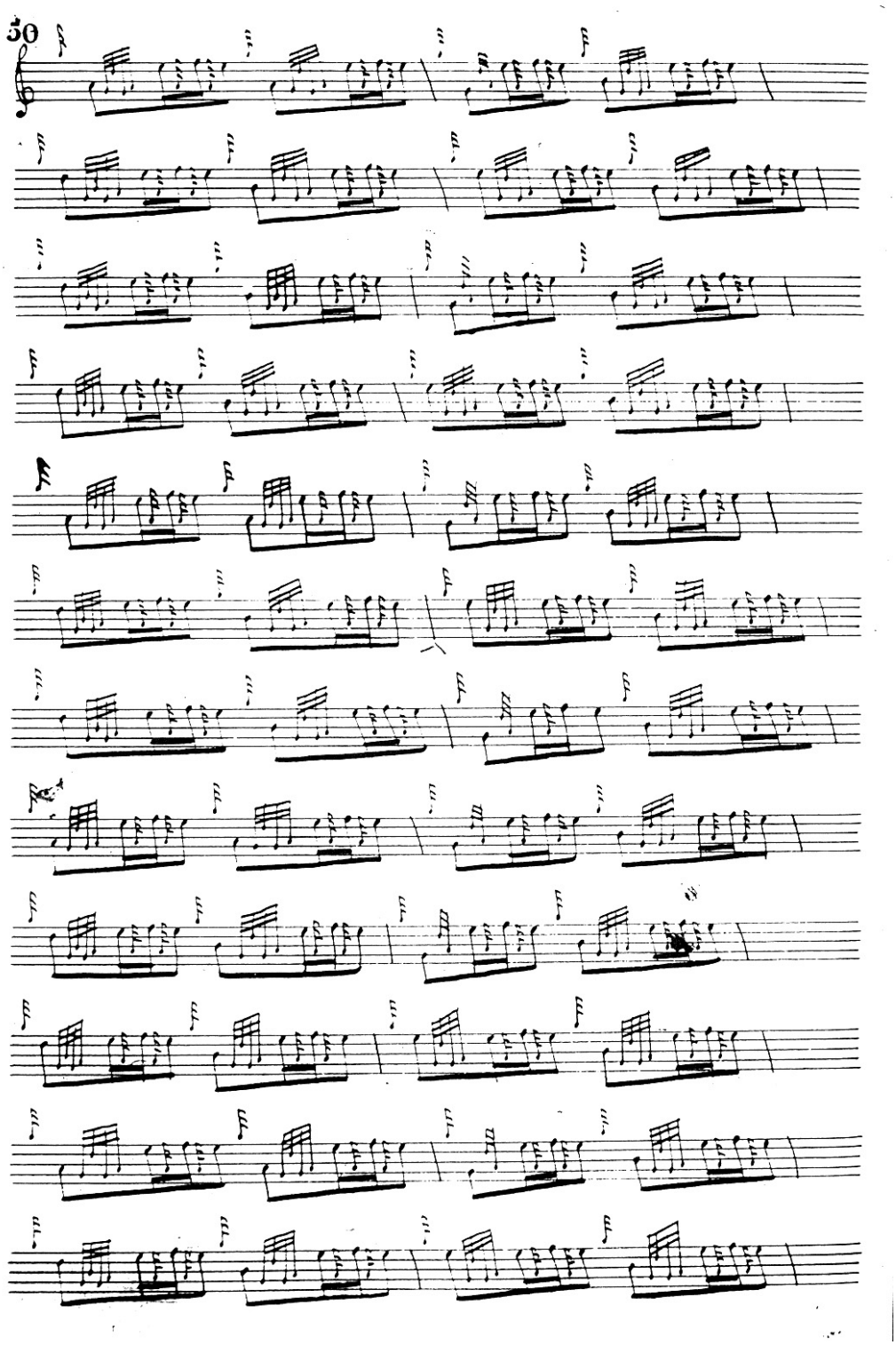

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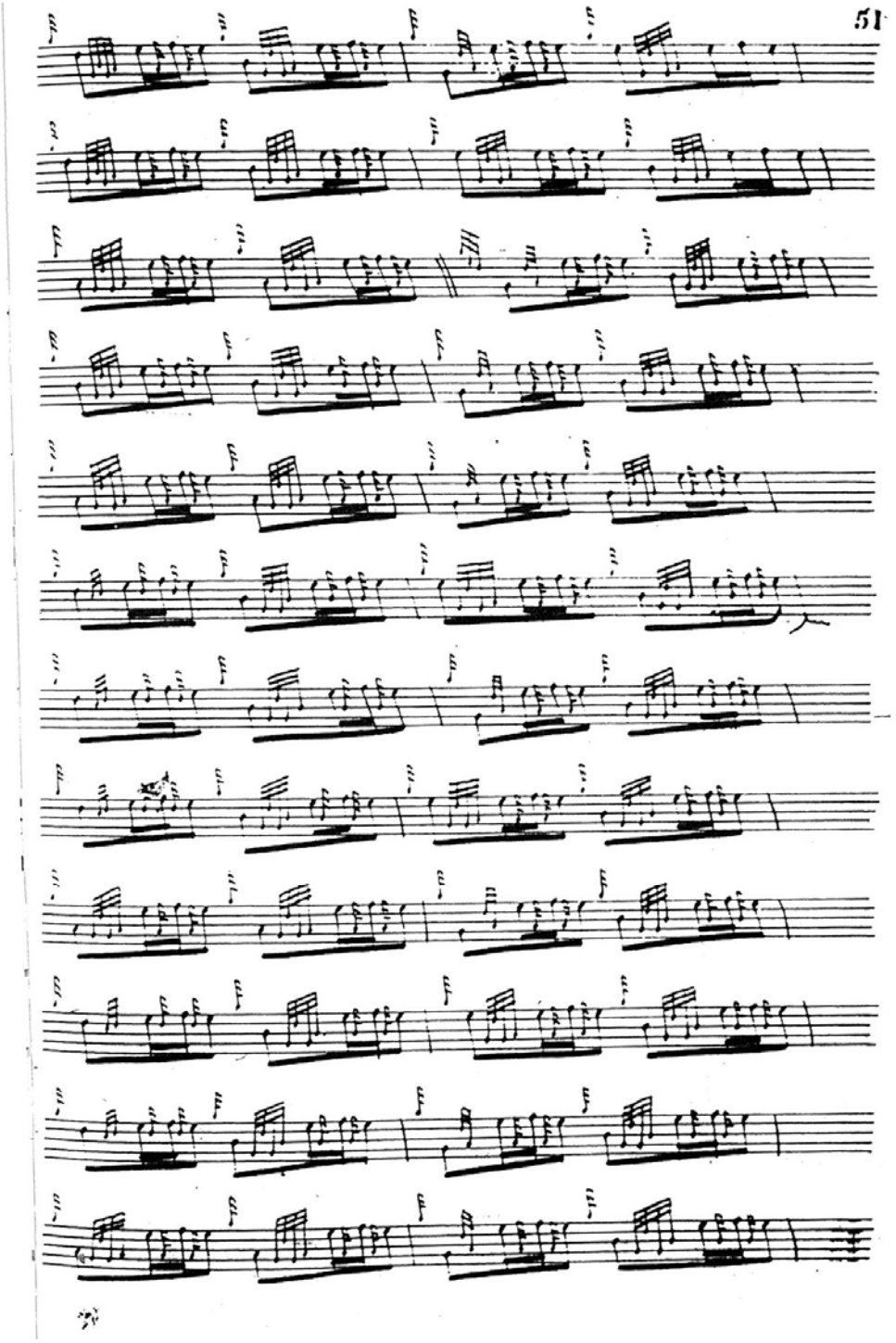

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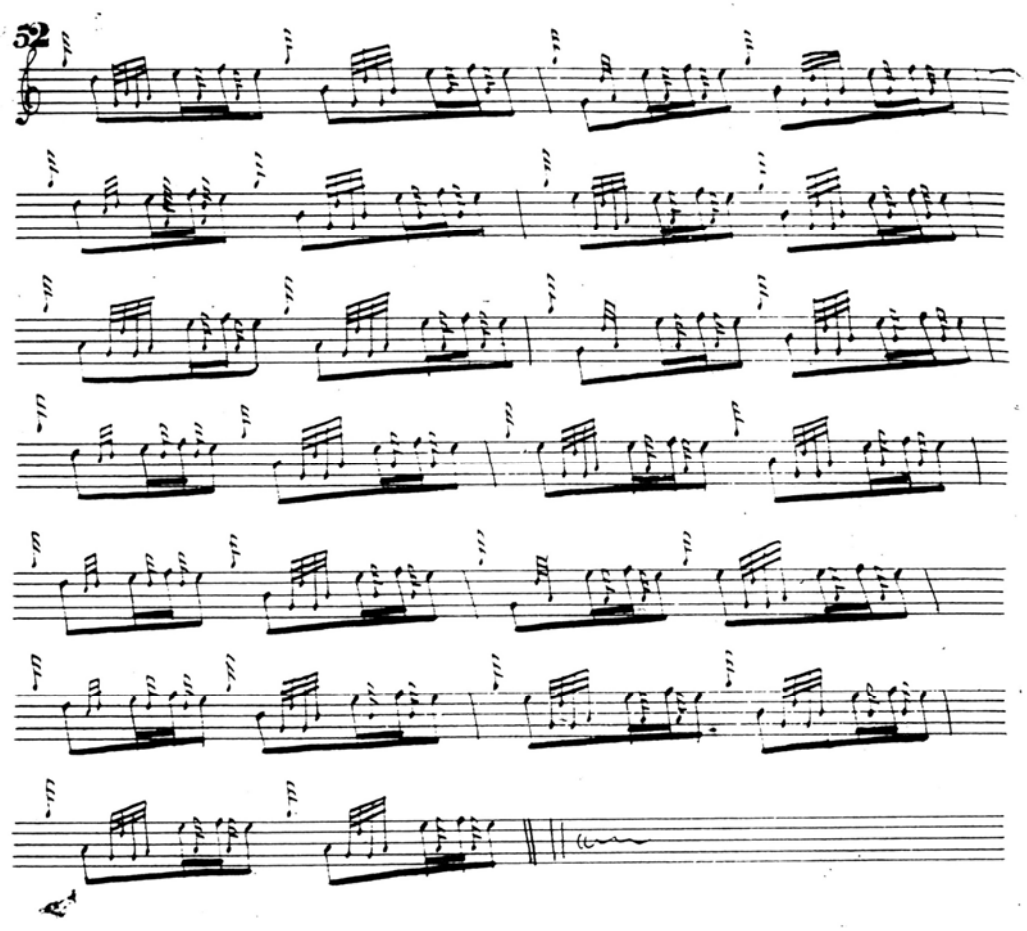
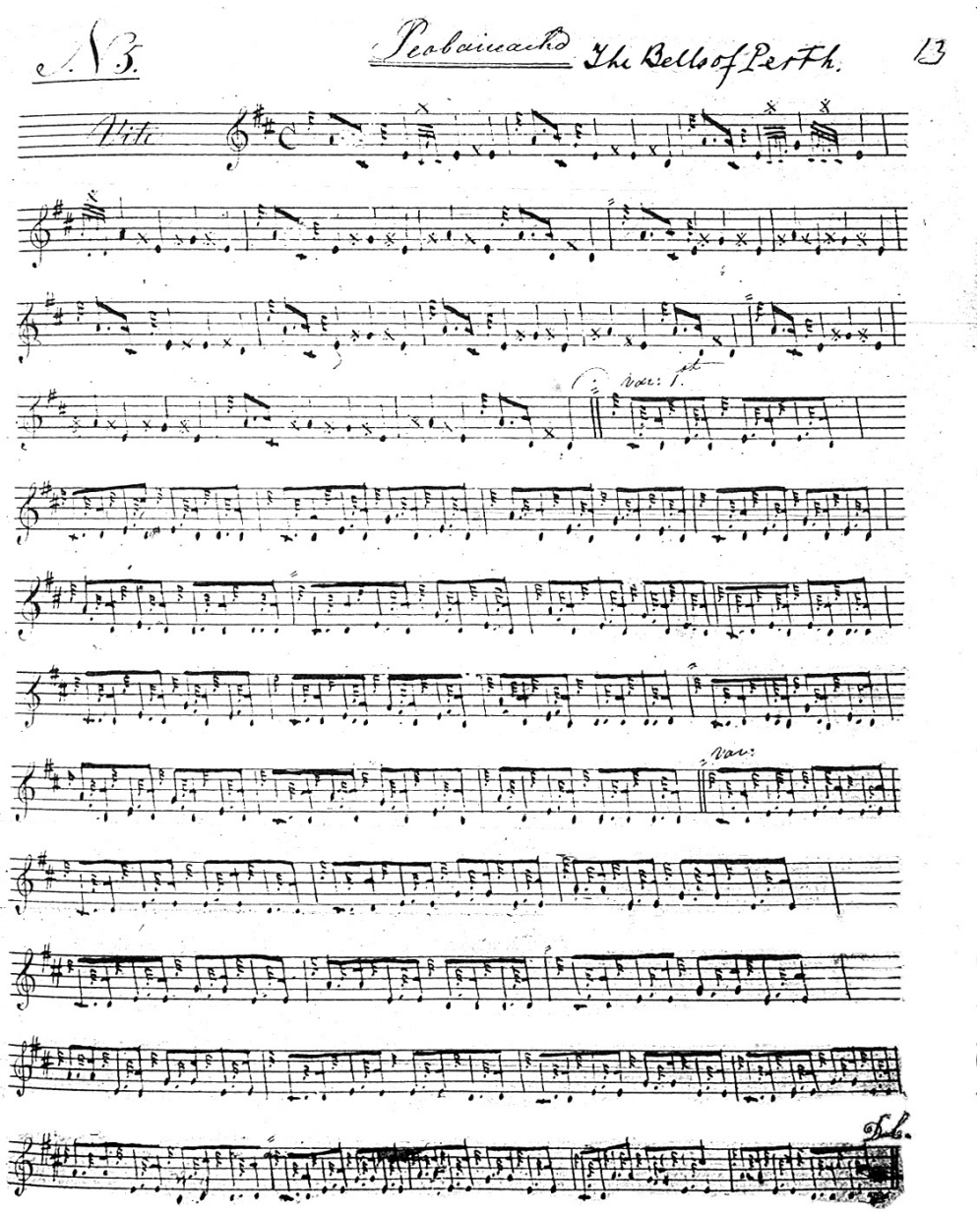


Here we see the tune in its fullest form, with the ground very square. There is a siubhal singling and doubling: pendulum movement singling and doubling, the latter given an interestingly 'down' pointing; taorluath singling and a mach, the a mach emphasising the first note of the group in Donald's usual style, including his typical open movement on D; the tune concludes with a crunluath duinte singling and a mach, with a parallel open movement on D here as well. As is normal in MacDonald's MS there is no indication of a repeat of the ground anywhere within the tune, or at the end.

MacArthur/MacGregor treat the tune as follows:



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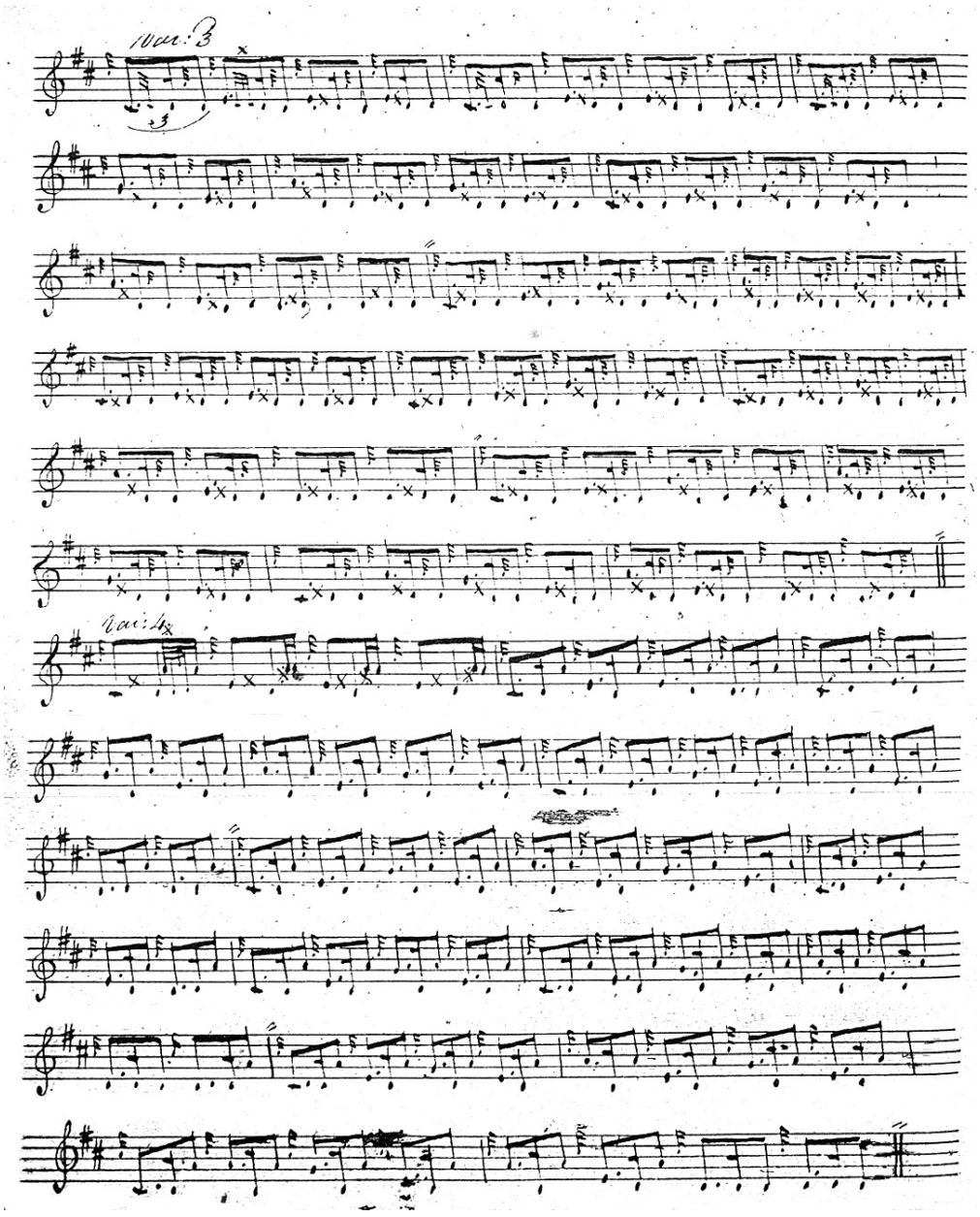

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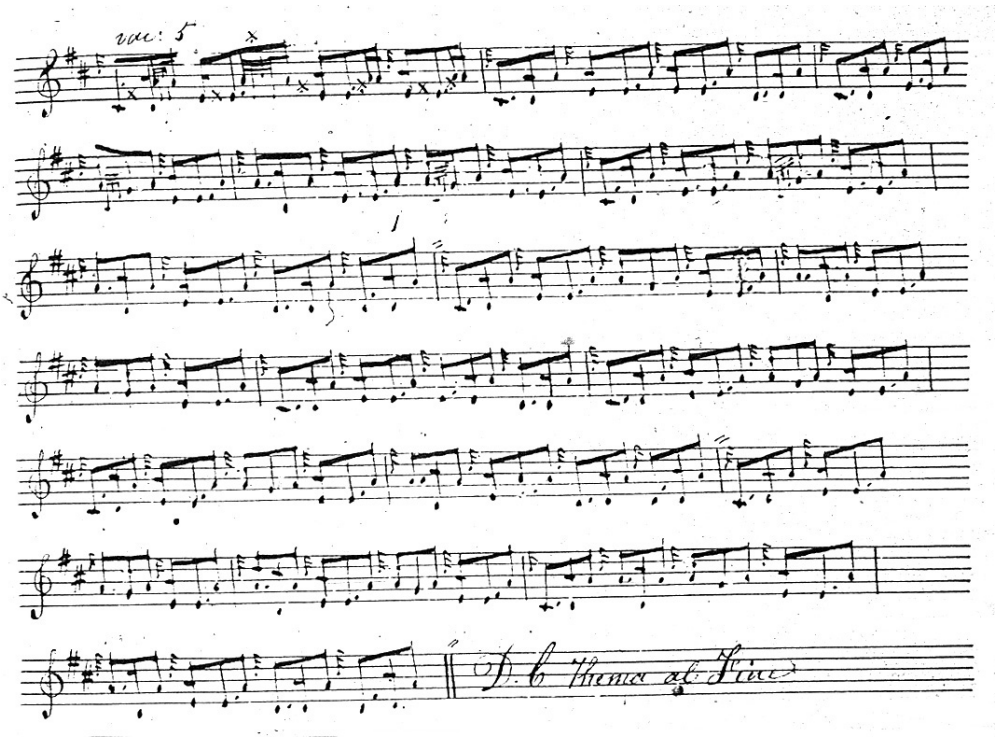


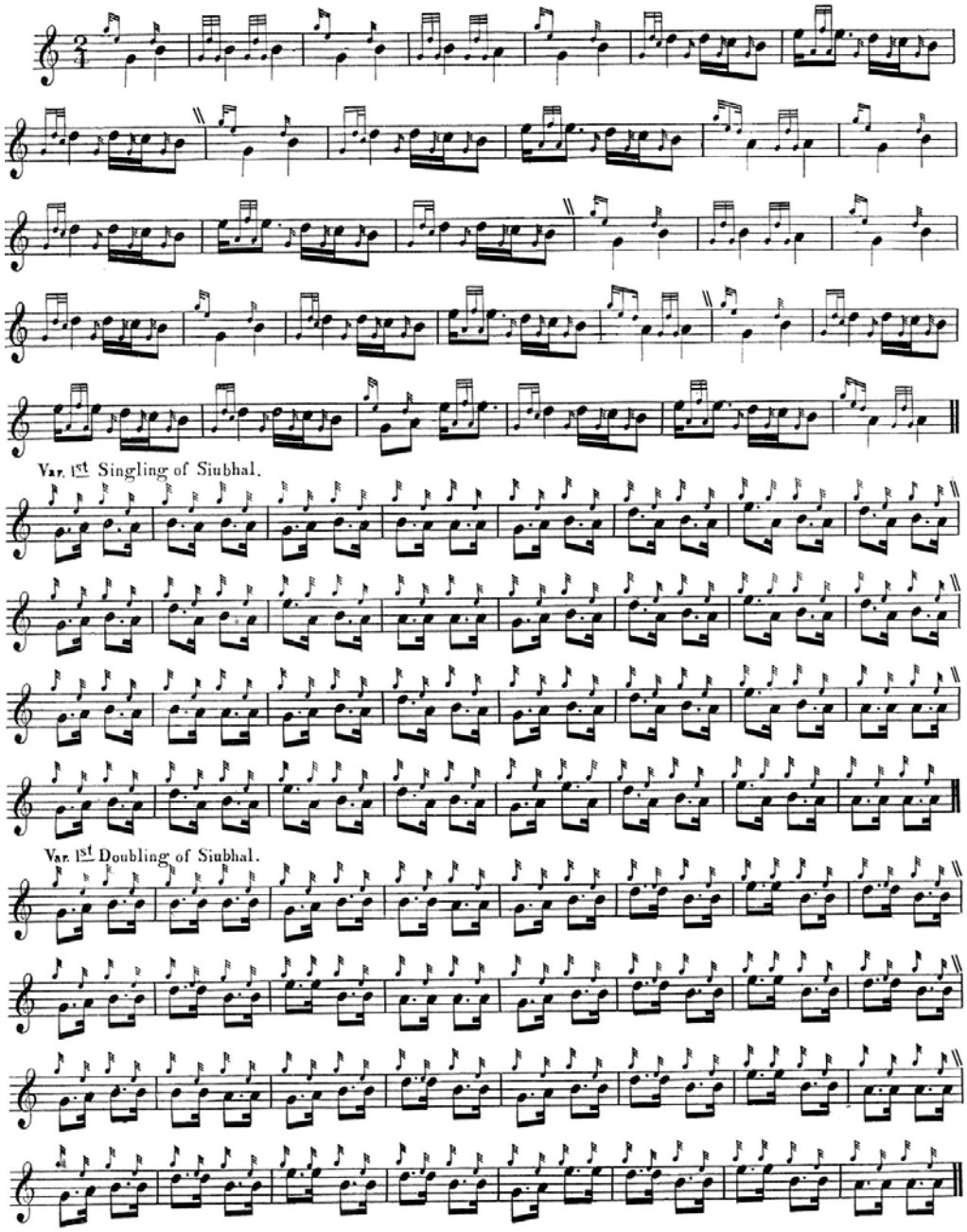
In terms of development the tune is on a more modest scale than MacDonald's, proceeding straight from the siubhal doubling to a taorluath singling, omitting the pendulum movement favoured by MacDonald and dropping the taorluath a mach. One can see the attractions of this given the potentially repetitive nature of the melody with its tightly pentatonic scale GABDE. The MacArthur/MacGregor ground is less square and boxy than MacDonald's, a dotted quaver/semi quaver pattern prevailing instead of strings of crotchets as in MacDonald, and it is directed to be repeated following the siubhal doubling, rather than after the taorluath variation.
It is interesting that in the crunluath variations, they cut the first note of the appropriate groups cutting the movements the other way round from MacDonald, and the reader will note the typical MacArthur movement on D which is actually played off an initial E quaver. The score ends with an instruction to repeat the ground.

Angus MacKay times his ground and siubhal variations similarly to the MacArthur/MacGregor manuscript which was his probable source for the tune. Angus includes the pendulum movement singling and doubling (the doubling being cut 'up' in contradistinction to the way MacDonald does it), and also the taorluath a mach, the first note of the a mach movements being 'cut' in Angus's usual style. He repeats the ground at the end of the taorluath and crunluath a mach movements. Interestingly he seems to follow MacDonald's style in the crunluath a mach movements, emphasising the initial note. Since his score does not depart very significantly from MacDonald and MacArthur, it is not reproduced here.

Donald MacPhee set the general style for later editors of this tune. He treats it as follows:

CLUIG PHEAIRT.

THE BELLS OF PERTH.



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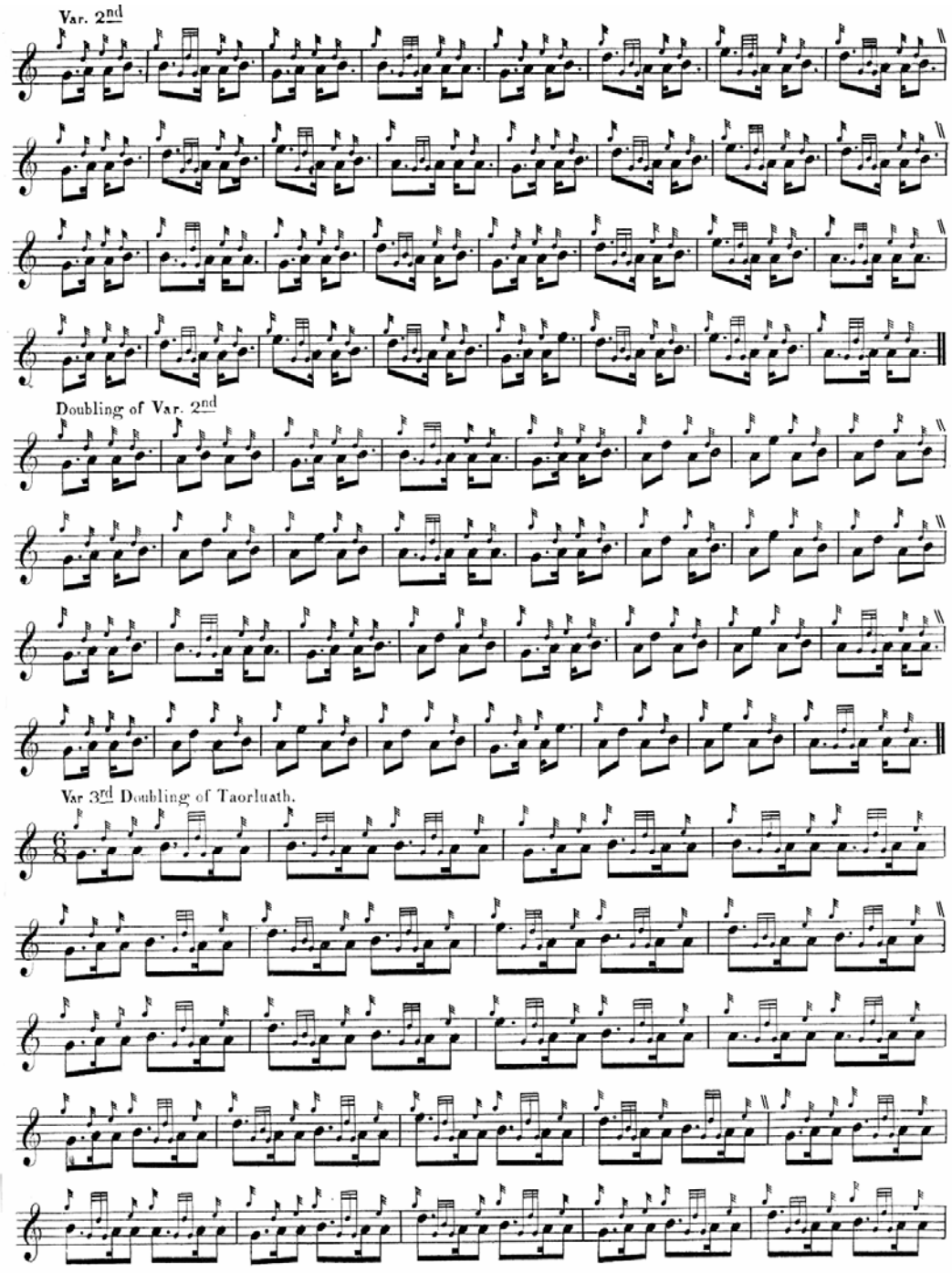

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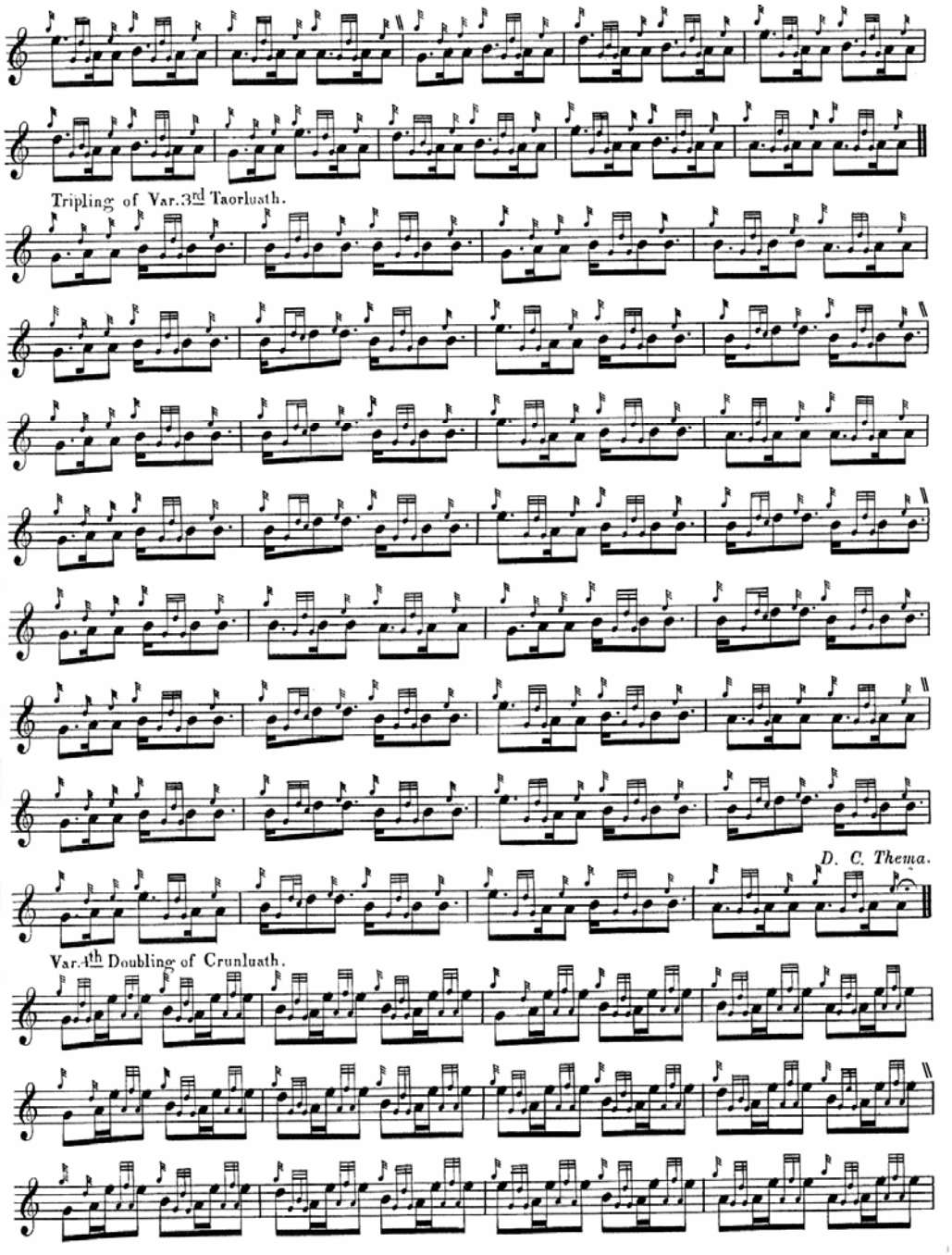

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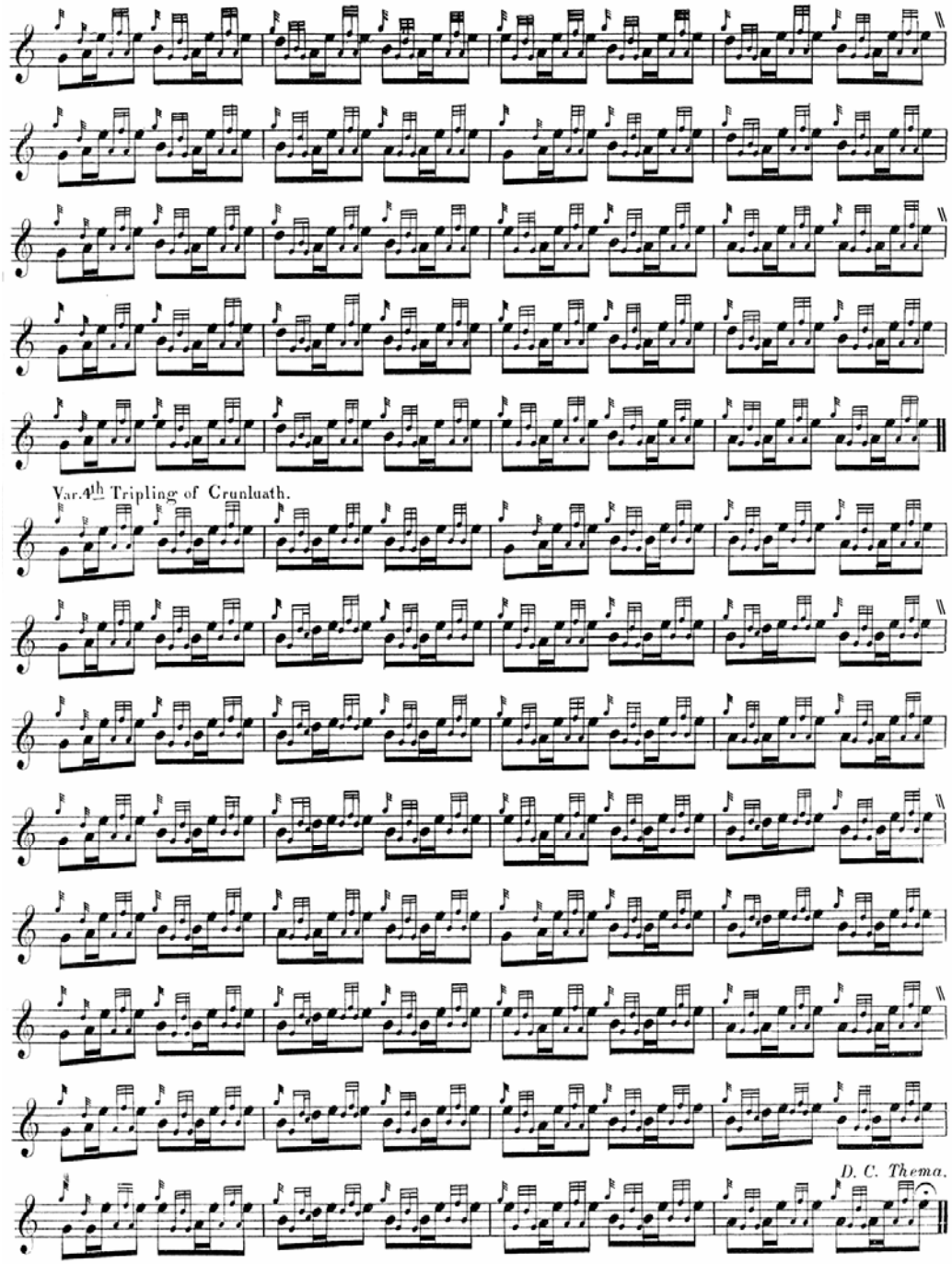


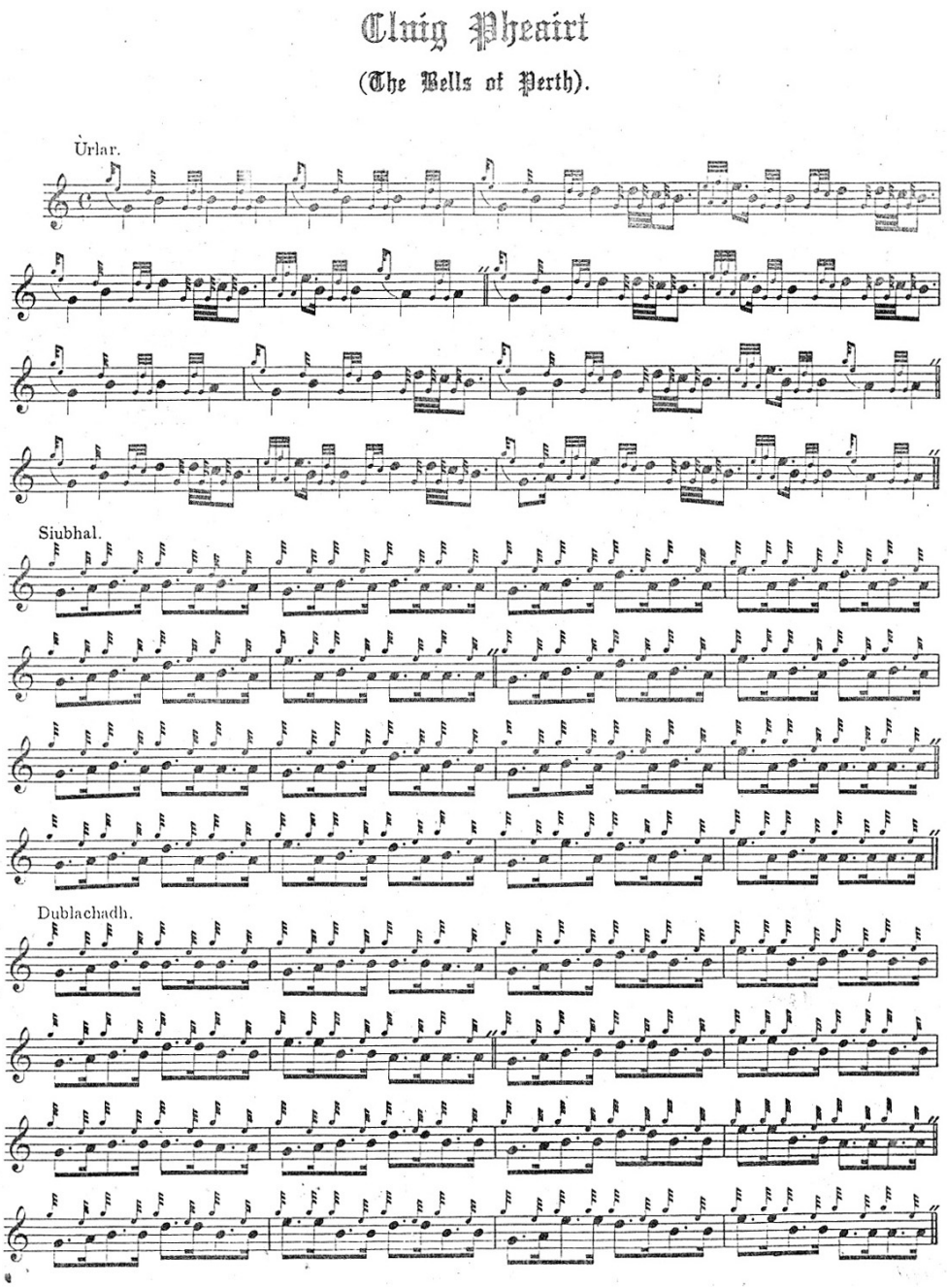
In terms of overall style, particularly his treatment of the ground and the general dimensions of the tune, MacPhee is very close to Donald MacDonald although his tone row in the variations has small but not very significant differences from MacDonald.

C. S. Thomason gives MacDonald, Angus MacKay and Donald MacKay (Angus's nephew) as his sources for the tune. He develops it in the same way as Donald MacDonald, i.e.

ground, siubhal singling and doubling, pendulum movement singling and doubling, taorluath and a mach, crunluath and a mach; he repeats the ground at the end of the taorluath and crunluath a mach movements. This is a neat setting very much in the modern manner, but it does not add anything very substantial to the existing stylistic possibilities so it is not reproduced here.

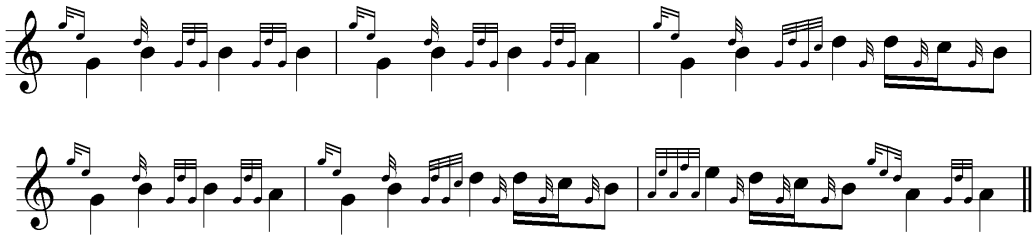
David Glen follows MacDonald's development of the tune, i.e. he includes the pendulum movement, otherwise his score is very close to Donald MacPhee's, and it is not reproduced here. "The Bells of Perth" is a very stable tune, the initial differences between MacDonald and MacArthur setting the parameters for all later editors.

Charles Bannatyne: this is the setting from the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series). Bannatyne based his score on the MacArthur MacGregor manuscript, but brings its practice into accord with the then contemporary ideas with regard to ornament, smoothing away the MacArthur's particularities of style in favour of the MacKay type approach typical amongst later 19th century editors. The ground shows an interesting interpretation of the characteristic contractions used by John MacGregor, reading the open cross as a grip on B, thus varying the perhaps monotonous succession of throws and *darodo* movements visible in most of the other scores:



and so on, in a style very similar to Donald MacPhee's.

G. F. Ross: takes a highly distinctive route through the ground, as follows, although otherwise he is very close to MacPhee:



and so on. Ross does not explain why he did this, simply noting in the "Preface" that "I would particularly recommend the version of 'The Bells of Perth' here given, a version not hitherto published, and one far more likely to be correct than those already before the public." He is known to have been in contact with Simon Fraser, but Fraser's own setting (B. J. MacLachlan Orme, ed., *The Piobaireachd of Simon Fraser with Canntaireachd* (privately printed, n.p, 1979, pp.184-6) seems to have been more or less standard with MacPhee.

Robert Meldrum:
adds nothing to the stylistic interpretation of the tune and is not reproduced here.

Commentary:

In his "Ceol Mor Legends," General C. S. Thomason simply says, "This air was composed by one of the Macintyres of Rannoch; who were pipers to the Menzies of that Ilk." f.116.

"Fionn" is a little more informative in his notes to David Glen's collection, drawing his information from the *New Statistical Account* and saying:

> This tune is probably an attempt to imitate the eight bells for which Perth has long been famous. The bells are connected with the Church of St. John the Baptist. The Magistrates made a "*visitatioune*" or inspection in the year 1652, and they state that the "Preaching Bell" was then one hundred and forty-seven years old, being cast in 1506. The "Common Bell" is dated "Anno Domini 1520," while the "Skelloche Little Bell" bears the date "A.D. 1403," and those who made this "*visitatioune*" state in their report "253 zeiris old this bell is." Reference is also made to the "Curfew Bell" and "The Seven Houre Bellis." The Highland mind reverts naturally to the famous bell of Scoune, near Perth, rendered historic by the Gaelic saying, which embodies the advice of that sage counsellor:–
>
> > "Comhairle clag Sgàin:
> > An rud nach buin duit na bean dà."
>
> Which may be rendered—
>
> > Counsel of the bell of Scone,
> > Touch not what is not thine own.
>
> Scone, it will be remembered, was the ancient seat of Scottish Royalty, and its bell was taken to represent the voice of Law and Justice. ("Historic, Biographic and Legendary Notes to the Tunes," p.11).

William Stewart of Ensay (*Piobaireachd Society Collection*, first series, ii, Preface, and Notes) says:

> The versions published herein of "The Bells of Perth" and "The Salute to Corrinessan" have been kindly presented to the Society by Dr. Charles Bannatyne, a well-known authority and writer on Piobaireachd, and the possessor of a large and valuable collection of MSS. From these Dr. Bannatyne has supplied many extracts in elucidation of most of the tunes published, and given much valuable help, for which the cordial thanks of the Society are tendered to him.
> The Piobaireachd Society has been formed solely for the purpose of reviving and encouraging the study and playing of our ancient Highland music, and the co-operation of all who can further its aims is welcomed, whether they are members or not.
> "The Bells of Perth" is edited by Dr. Bannatyne from his MS. of Angus MacArthur, one of the last of the hereditary pipers of the Macdonalds of the Isles…(Preface)

In his note to the tune itself, Ensay states

> …the version published of this, and the following Piobaireachd, were, with their copyright, presented to the Society by Dr. Charles Bannatyne, and they are given as edited by him. The methods of notation employed will be found to record the music as it is played with very great accuracy…" (Notes).

Writing to the *Oban Times*, Lt. John McLennan said of Bannatyne's setting that "the urlar of this grand tune is the best yet published" (14/07/06, p.3) although McLennan deplored that the pendulum movement had been dropped. Perhaps he did not know that in doing this, Bannatyne was simply following his source.

By the time the Piobaireachd Society's second series was launched in 1925, the tone towards Bannatyne—who was by that time dead– had shifted dramatically. The Society's editor, Archibald Campbell, dismissed Bannatyne's interpretation in a scathingly negative note (ii, p.62) as without "authority" and launched against him a thinly veiled accusation of having tampered with his source. Campbell repeated this charge more explicitly in a series of articles he wrote for *Piping Times* on "The History and Art of Angus MacKay" (Vol. 2. No.5, February 1950, pp.8-9, Vol. 2. No.6 1950, pp.8-10).

The strength of this hostility towards Charles Bannatyne can be seen in a letter Campbell wrote to J. P. Grant in 1919, in which he described Bannatyne's setting of "The Bells of Perth" as "infamous". (quoted in James Campbell, "The Piobaireachd Society 1919-1925," *Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference*, Vol. 22 1995, p.5)

Archibald Campbell made further accusations that Bannatyne had tampered with John MacKay's manuscript. The John McKay MS (NLS, Acc.9231) was bought from Bannatyne's estate after his death in 1925. It is a Folio volume docketed "Charles Bannatyne MG; CM (Glasg.) 1905". And stamped "The Property of The Piobaireachd Society."

Bannatyne had written to J. P. Grant of Rothiemurchus, 1 May 1920, stating that alterations and additions to the manuscript were probably those of Michael MacCarfrae and had been in the manuscript when he (Bannatyne) had got it.

But this was not enough for Archibald Campbell. The MacKay manuscript in the National Library of Scotland now carries a note attached to it by Campbell in which he accuses Bannatyne of forgery and deception, claiming that the daughter of Michael MacCarfrae, the piper from whom Bannatyne had bought the manuscript, had told Campbell that Bannatyne had concealed from her the valuable character of the documents he acquired from her. Campbell continues:

> In spite of what Dr Bannatyne says in his letter of 1st May 1920 to Col. Grant of Rothiemurchus, there is not the slightest doubt that the tampering in the MS was done by him, and his denial of the fact is barefaced, or could be called shameless. He was kind enough to lend me the book in 1910, and the ink of the interpolations was then quite fresh. Much of the piobaireachd music written by Dr. Bannatyne is in our hands, and there is not the slightest doubt that all the 'binds,' many of the grace-notes, and some of the bar strokes have been put in by him. That he has inserted names at the headings of tunes, is beyond doubt, and, having stooped to this vandalism, it was easy for him to go further, mutilate the music, and render the MS almost valueless. For this reason the MS, has not been put in the National Library, since it might mislead the unwary. Dr. Bannatyne was no player, and, though keen on piobaireachd, his knowledge of the music did not go very deep.

I have seen the manuscript concerned and found nothing to support Archibald Campbell's assertions. There are no additions to the music which appear to be in Bannatyne's hand, with which I am familiar from other documents. If the music text was added to, and it is not clear that it has been, the style of the penmanship suggests that whoever did it—and Michael MacCarfrae would seem one obvious candidate, and D. S. MacDonald another– it was not Charles Bannatyne. All that Bannatyne seems to have done was to jot down the titles at the top of each page, since these were identified by the compilers simply by a numbered or other code.

The most obvious interpretation of this is that Archibald Campbell strained the evidence in order to damage Bannatyne's then considerable reputation as a piobaireachd editor and collector. This is consistent with his malicious personal attacks upon other leading editors such as C. S. Thomason and G. F. Ross, also made after their deaths.

The assault on Bannatyne was continued by Archibald Campbell's son James, who wrote in 1995 that "in the case of at least two tunes (Bells of Perth and My King has Landed in Moidart) Bannatyne furnished the editor with settings which were devoid of authority." These charges were subsequently repeated. In 1997 for example Captain John MacLellan wrote that "The Piobaireachd Society was correct to put the manuscript into purdah, lest Bannatyne's alterations became part of our traditional heritage, because it just lacked authority." (*Piping Times*, vol. 49, no.8, May 1997, pp.36-19; vol. 49, no.9, June 1997, pp. 29-36).

Speaking at the 1999 Piobaireachd Society Conference on "The Enigma of Charles Bannatyne," Ian K. Murray repeated Archibald Campbell's charges:

> …Bannatyne…could be duplicitous in his dealings with others; and…he was so convinced of his insight into piobaireachd interpretation that he did not hesitate to amend an original

important manuscript. (*Proceedings of the Piobaireachd Society Conference* vol.26, 1999, pp.1-28)

Some of the papers used to compile this talk were apparently deposited at the College of Piping, from which comes the most recent, unwittingly revealing, episode in this saga. Under the heading "Archive Letter from Archibald Campbell throws new light on the Appoggiatura" in the *PipingTimes* for August 2004 (vol.56, no.11, pp.17-19) was the approving reprinting of a letter, dated July 1906, which was claimed to show Campbell's illuminating comments to Charles Bannatyne on this knotty point of piping interpretation. In reality the letter was *from* Charles Bannatyne *to* Archibald Campbell, not the other way about. Bannatyne's home address appeared at the top of the sheet and the letter was in his—not Archibald Campbell's–hand. The sentiments contained in this letter were received with reverential approval when they were assumed to be those of Archibald Campbell. It is difficult not to think that they would have been dismissed as "heretical" if the author had been correctly identified as the much maligned Charles Bannatyne.

When we consider Bannatyne's version of "The Bells of Perth" published in the *Piobaireachd Society Collection* (first series) in the light of its source, the MacArthur/MacGregor score, it seems entirely in accordance with the spirit of the original. Where Bannatyne has been forced to interpret (owing to minor ambiguities in the system of contractions used by John MacGregor), his reading seems uniformly scrupulous and intelligent. His only real departure from the original, and it seems a reasonable one in the light of the other scores for this tune, was to supply a taorluath doubling in a mach form which the MacArthur/MacGregor manuscript does not have.

In the published edition of *The MacArthur/MacGregor Manuscript of Piobaireachd* Bannatyne's reading was accepted by the editors Frans Buisman and Andrew Wright as substantially correct.

"The Bells of Perth" was frequently entered in their lists by competing pipers during the first half of the 19th century at the Highland Societies' competitions at Edinburgh, including by Angus MacKay in 1825 when he entered as a boy aged 13, and in 1838 by Peter Bruce.

* * *

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