The Great Highland Braves
and Its Music
by
John Grant
A PHRAE-MHÒIR AGUS A CÉIL
THE GREAT
HIGHLAND BAGPIPE AND ITS MUSIC

By

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Illustrations
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Mair Chúimhneachán
air Clann Mhic Eanain
maille xi
Clann Mhic Aodh is Mhic Connich
nr o chluiche
Sinn mar dhualachas Ul
an
1. Seann Chinn Mhor
le
an Oileanach
Iain Gruaidh.
Dedicated

To

The Memory of The MacEwans

Together with

The MacKays and MacKenzies

From whom

We have inherited the art

of

Ancient Piobaireachd

By

Their Pupil

Jain Grand.
Preface

Generally speaking, the preface of a book sets forth the purpose for which it has been written; therefore, the object with which I have prepared this volume is to record the methods by which the old masters created the Great Highland Bagpipe and have preserved it in its true and original form right down through the ages; presenting it to us, their descendants, in a unique form, both beautiful for the eye to behold and pleasing for the fingers to perform upon as we pipe its great music.

As I have had the pleasure of meeting the last genuine representative of the famous MacCrimmon School, and have also had the privilege of being taught to play by him in the same manner as the Boreraig pupils; I would also record here what I know of the actual traditional methods by which the Skye masters taught their apprentices.

This I do as my bounden duty “lest I forget,” and lest my children may forget, because we have now entered upon an era of change, which means decay, and seeks to degrade our National Instrument and its music that were once great and noble.

Every now and then we see letters appearing in the public press in which men who have lost all national patriotism and particular sentiment for the Great Highland Bagpipe urge the need for the production of a pipe that will give this note and the next in a different pitch, and an altered scale to suit what one may call an individual taste, while they forget what has already been achieved by the great pioneers of Bagpipe making, and cannot well be improved upon.

Serious inroads have also been made in piobaireachd which tends to destroy it. Taorluath and Crunluath, the crowning movements in a great art, have been changed, either willfully or unwittingly, thus robbing Ceòl Mòr of its intricate beauty, and by so doing the perpetrators of these wrongs have taken away from piobaireachd its most ingenious peculiarities as well as its most ancient grandeur.

I have the honour of linking the present with the past, in that the opening piobaireachd in this volume entitled "Her Majesty The Queen's Welcome to Holyrood Palace" was excepted from my hand.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my clansman Mr. John M. Grant, Edinburgh whose magic brush has brought this work into the closest touch with the mountain, the castle, the loch, and the glen.

John Grant

Edinburgh,
7th November, 1930
Introduction

The Great Highland Bagpipe is a Royal instrument, and has been for centuries past. Kings and Queens have not thought it derogatory to their high station to recognise the Scottish National Instrument as a thing which possesses special qualities as well as a peculiar charm.

Although the state records and accounts show entries for cash paid to “ane piper” who played upon “ane pipe” to the King in the olden days, yet the Highland Bagpipe was not actually introduced into the Royal Household until what we may call a recent date.

The Highland Bagpipe has had many ups and downs, and it reached its most acute crisis at the Rising of ‘45 when it was as much as forfeiting a man's life to be known to possess such a thing as a bagpipe, not to speak of playing upon it.

Immediately after the Battle of Culloden Prince Charlie had to flee to France, thus leaving the Highlands of Scotland in an uproar between peace and war. The English army patrolled the remotest parts of the Highlands and Western Islands, and for several generations Highlanders were actually deprived of the privilege of wearing their native garb or playing upon their National pipe.

By the close of the eighteenth century, however, Scotland had arrived at a period of its history which was more peaceful and prosperous, when the horrors of war were almost forgotten. Thus, the nineteenth century brought with it the dawn of better days, and Highlanders were ultimately permitted to wear the dress which they were once forbidden to don. With the restoration of the kilt came also the return of the Great Pipe, which was so much beloved by every Highlander, and the next thing which the Highland chiefs did was to bring back their pipers and encourage the revival of pipe playing, but more especially piobaireachd, the classical music of the pipe.

Every Chieftain of note had his piper long before the ‘45, for the Boreraig School was established centuries prior to that date, and the same School survived until 1822. But the power which the Chief exercised over his clan was broken, and he had to relinquish his command while many Chieftains discarded their pipers altogether.

The Highland Bagpipe was far too powerful an instrument to suppress altogether, for the soldiers in the Highland regiments neither march nor fight without it. Thus the Officers, who were in reality discarded Chieftains, transferred the piper from the clanship to the regular Army.

What ensued actually proved to be the salvation of the piper and his pipe, for both were eventually found on every battlefield throughout the world wherever the British Army fought, and the same piper led many a gallant soldier to victory, while to the mournful wail of the pipe many a hero closed his eyes in death.

The Highland pipers struggled on in civilian life with a very meagre following until about the year 1845 when Queen Victoria visited the Highlands of Scotland. This was a landmark in the history of piping, because the Queen added a piper to the Royal Household as a permanent official. Many of the Highland Lairds followed suit, and the piper was restored to his ancient dignity. Since then pipers have increased by leaps and bounds, and throughout the world today there are hundreds of thousands
who play upon the Great Highland Bagpipe.

The classical music of the pipe is also a Royal Art, as it has ever been. In the olden days it was customary to dedicate original compositions in piobaireachd to personages of the highest rank in the whole realm. Thus Kings, Queens and Princes have been pleased to accept original piobaireachd which have been dedicated to them by the humblest subjects in their kingdom. Indeed, there is one instance still on record that a piper who played before the King was permitted to kiss his hand, whereupon the piper composed a beautiful piobaireachd entitled “I got a kiss of the King's hand.” This piobaireachd, which possesses a very charming melody, is still preserved and is one of the gems in Ceòl Mòr.

But piping and pipe music were not always associated with Kings, Queens and Princes. The first piper was a humble peasant, and his pipe was the first musical instrument in the world. The Shepherd in the Highland glen first created his simple but tuneful pipe there, where he tended his flocks. That simple pipe is still simple in the real sense of simplicity, and the creation of the Highland Bagpipe has reached its most scientific stage of perfection.

Bagpipe making is the work of skilled men in the art, or rather their craft, and the present day pipe is a thing of beauty which is “a joy forever,” thanks to the Highlanders of other years who were its original creators and the pioneers of this ancient music, which has risen to the pinnacle of its fame.

All that remains to be done is for the generations of Highlanders who follow in time to come to cherish and preserve this peculiar instrument and its music as the creation of their forefathers, and to make every effort to hand them on unimpaired to their children's children as our forefathers have done to us, their descendants.

Let us never forget all that is enshrined in:- “A’ Phìoba Mhòr agus a Ceòl.”
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Fàilte a Morachd Ro-oirdheirc
Banrighinn
Mairi do Luchairt Holirud

Her Most Excellent Majesty
Queen Mary’s
Welcome To Holyrood Palace
Dedicated
To
Her Most Excellent Majesty
Queen Mary

In accordance with ancient
Scottish Custom,
By
Her humble and loyal subject,

Iain Grannd
Fàilte a Morachd Ro-oirdheire Banrighinn
Mairi do Luchairt Holirud

Her Most Excellent Majesty Queen Mary's Welcome To
Holyrood Palace
Cranloch - And take Doubling from Singing

D.C. Thema
Holyrood Palace  
17th July, 1911

Sir,

I have submitted to the Queen your letter, together with the tune in the form of a “Pibroch,” which you have been kind enough to send for Her Majesty’s acceptance.

The Queen commands me to thank you most warmly for your kind thought in sending her the gift, and to assure you that Her Majesty greatly appreciates the words of Welcome contained in the title, and the artistic manner in which the work has been designed and executed.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) E. W. Wallington

John Grant Esq.
Windsor Castle
Air ais an Ogail Mhic Ceannnein
Back To
The MacCrimmon School
Air ais gu Sgoil MhicCruimein

Back to the MacCrimmon School

\textit{Speed} bonny boat like a bird on the wing
Over the sea to Skye.

\textit{Traditional}

To one who has lived long beside the “Fairy Duns” imagination plays a great and dramatic part in everything Highland, and more especially concerning the pipe. Indeed, I have many a time wound my way “in the spirit” over mountain and through glen to the Isle of the imaginative West and approached the great MacCrimmon School with reverent awe.

At Boreraig

The date of the birth of the first MacCrimmon is altogether unknown. To put it in the words of the ancient Gaelic poet “Ossian,” this family of pipers belong “to the days of other years.” Thus, they have been cut off from written records by the mists of antiquity and mystery.

The MacCrimmons were found in Skye. They were Islanders, and Islanders are Highlanders, and Highlanders were the races who lived mid the lofty mountain solitudes. Many an occasion must have arisen on which the MacLeod pipers would have looked out upon the majestic “Cuchullins” whence came their creative inspiration.

“Great Pipers”

For the first time on record let me trace the “tree of piping” from its roots to its branches, or in other words, from antiquity to date.

“The MacCrimmons”

The first of the MacCrimmons of which we have any account was Dun-coloured John. He was succeeded by his son Donald Mòr. Donald Mòr was succeeded by his son Patrick Mòr. Patrick Mòr was succeeded by his son Patrick Òg. Patrick Òg had in all a family of twenty, of whom only four sons lived to the age of maturity:–Malcolm, John, Donald, and Farquhar.

Malcolm, the eldest son, succeeded his father as hereditary piper to MacLeod at Dunvegan.

Malcolm had two sons, John Dubh, and Donald Ruadh, and John Dubh succeeded his father, thus in turn becoming piper to Dunvegan.
“Last of the MacCrimmon Pipers”

John Dubh was the last of the hereditary pipers to MacLeod of Dunvegan, about the year 1795, and he died in the year 1822 at the extreme age of 91 years.

“The MacKays of Gairloch”

The MacKays of Gairloch were taught by the MacCrimmons at Boreraig. The first known MacKay was blind Roderick. Like the early MacCrimmons little is known of this blind Roderick, and he died in the year 1689 at an extreme old age.

Roderick MacKay left an only son named John Dall who was born at Gairloch about the year 1660. This son was also blind.

John Dall MacKay, the blind piper, was instructed by Patrick Òg MacCrimmon at Boreraig.

John Dall MacKay was succeeded by his son Angus, who was in turn succeeded by his son John.

“The MacKays of Raasay”

Roderick MacKay, the first of these, came to Raasay from the Reay country and was taught to play piobaireachd by his kinsman, Iain Dall MacKay of Gairloch.

Roderick died and left a son named John. John’s master, the Laird of Raasay, sent him to Boreraig to complete his education in piobaireachd playing.

John MacKay had four sons:–Donald, Roderick, Angus, and John, all of whom were pipers of note.

John MacKay, the father of the four pipers above-mentioned, had a great many pupils which included John Bàn MacKenzie, who was one of his finest.

“The MacKenzie”

John Bàn MacKenzie having got his tuition in piobaireachd from John MacKay, a pupil of the MacCrimmon school, ultimately became piper to the Marquis of Breadalbane.

John Bàn, a great performer of Ceòl Mòr, had also a considerable number of pupils, of whom his nephew Ronald MacKenzie was by far the best.

Ronald MacKenzie, by whose master hand and enthusiastic care I was instructed in the art of piobaireachd playing, was born at Fodderty, Ross-Shire, in the year 1842. At a very early age he was taught to play upon the pipes by his uncle John Bàn MacKenzie, and under his tuition Ronald soon made a deep impression on the mind of his tutor. John Bàn watched over his nephew with no small degree of filial pride, for he saw that Ronald was to make a mark, as time went on, in the piping world.
Eilean Donan Castle
“Ronald MacKenzie”

In those days piobaireachd was the thing in piping, and young MacKenzie began with Ceòl Mòr. His uncle was no lover of marches, strathspeys, and reels, any more than the MacCrimmons, for the lighter music was of no account in the Skye School.

A diligent pupil with a fine taste for piobaireachd, Ronald was well on his way as a master of the Highland pipe before he bade his teens farewell.

To put it in his own words, and what I always took them to be:—“He was born with a smile upon his face, and a chanter in his hand,” and with this inheritance he made his way in the world, for he was a piper “from the cradle to the grave.”

Ronald chose the Army as his profession, and he joined the 78th, now Seaforth Highlanders at Edinburgh Castle in the year 1860. In the real sense of the word Ronald could only play piobaireachd at this juncture of his career. If he played marches at all his repertoire of these tunes was very meagre, but MacKenzie made headway in marching tunes because they were the most useful for the Regiment on the march. He told me with his own lips, and I give it in his own words:—“when I joined the Army I could not play a single Strathspey and Reel.”

“These tunes,” said he, “were required in the hour of festivity. I got up one Strathspey and Reel, and I played these two tunes time and again for dances until I acquired more, so don’t be ashamed of your two or three sets of Strathspeys and Reels.”

“Pipe Major”

At the age of twenty years, Ronald was promoted Pipe Major of his Regiment. That was in 1862, and in 1863, the year following, he won the Highland Society of London’s Gold Medal for piobaireachd playing at Inverness.

At that time the Inverness Gathering was held in Bell’s Park, and Mrs. Davidson of Tulloch presented the prizes. Like her husband, this lady was passionately fond of the pipes, and she was so proud of the young Pipe Major’s success that she took from her breast a gold pin which had upon it the emblem of the thistle: a pearl for the bulb, and an amethyst for the tip. With this precious trinket she pinned the championship medal on Ronald’s breast with her own hand, at the same time congratulating him very warmly on attaining such a high place in the piping world while yet but a boy.

Ronald was then the proud possessor of a coveted award. He was impressed with the genuine “Hallmark” of a great Piobaireachd player. He always retained a proud memory of the kind act of Mrs. Davidson of Tulloch, for indeed he prized the pin as much as he did the medal.

Mrs. Davidson of Tulloch’s smile reminded, and the added gift reminded Ronald of a similar act of the gay Duchess of Gordon when she raised the Gordon Highlanders, saying “My canty young carl come pree my moo,” and sealed the bargain with a shilling. In those days the ladies of noble houses were great patriots and ardent lovers of their Highland customs, as is here well-proved by Mrs. Davidson’s kindly action.
“Champion of Champions”

This signal honour put metal into the young Pipe Major’s fingers, and as he had his right foot upon the ladder of fame he did not fail to climb to the very apex of his charmed art.

In the year 1873, ten years thereafter, Ronald won the prize set of bagpipes at Inverness, thus becoming Champion of Champions in the performance of piobaireachd. He was the idol of his regiment, being much thought of by both Officers and men, and up until his death his name was a household word in his old battalion.

His record of service between the Army, the Ross-Shire Militia and the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders was in all over forty years. This constitutes a military record of which anyone should be proud.

About the year 1895, Ronald was appointed piper to the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, and he took up duties at Gordon Castle, Fochabers, where he remained till his death.

At the Castle of Gordon the veteran Seaforth was piper in the real sense of the word. He did nothing but play the pipes, and lived in a beautiful house at the lakeside, which was within the policies, quite near to the Castle itself.

Ronald MacKenzie was a man of excellent demeanour, and always bore a very pleasant smile upon his face. He was very stately in appearance, well-built, and carried himself as becomes a piper, and had what pipers of that type call a “Princely carriage.” To have seen him play upon the great pipe round the Castle in the morning and in the stately rooms at night was a real treat. He wore the full Highland dress with all the ancient ornaments: Cross and waist belts, the dirk, skean dubh, powder horn with its long silver chain, and sporran of goat’s hair with silver mounts which bore the family crest of the house of Gordon, as well as his bonnet.

There was no movement of his body above the thighs when he played upon the pipes: with his head erect, he neither looked to the right nor left, no matter who was present. His fingers seemed to be moved by that magic motive power which was fanned by the breezes from the “Fairy Duns,” and watched over by the unseen “Fairy Queen” who was always said to wear by her side “a silver chanter” by which she could cast a “spell” over every great performer on the Great Highland bagpipe.

Although this great performer on the pipe had a long and illustrious military record and won all the coveted prizes of his time as a competitor, his greatness did not end there. He excelled in the art of imparting his own musical gifts to others.

“A Great Teacher”

Ronald MacKenzie acted as a genuine representative of the MacCrimmon school for a whole lifetime. He did not (in a sense) teach. He did more than attempt to teach, as most great Masters admit that to teach a gifted pupil music is well nigh impossible: but he imparted to his young apprentices the real enthusiasm and love for Highland music as he himself possessed it. Ronald came from the old School, and he retained its original practices all his life.
Kilchurn Castle
I have been present with other pipers (who are said to be great teachers) while they taught their pupils, and their method of teaching was practically all book tuition. They laid the book before their pupil and said, “Here is ‘The Glen is Mine’,” and “you play this.” The pupil struggled away in a half-hearted manner, while now and then the teacher played the part alone, and again and again the pupil tried to make the best of his task alone from written signs only. To the trained onlooker the result was obvious.

“The Old Masters Style”

The method above indicated was far from the “Old Masters Style.” When I interviewed Ronald MacKenzie first, as an intending pupil, I had in my possession “David Glen’s Tutor,” and in another pocket a practice chanter. I said that I wished to become a piper, and he asked me if I could whistle or chant to him any well-known pipe tune? My voice had been broken for several years, and as I was somewhat shy, I thought I would rather whistle than sing, so I whistled “The MacKenzie Highlanders March.” With a very pleasant tone of voice, the man who was afterwards to become my master said “Well done, boy.”

MacKenzie then asked if I had a practice chanter, to which I replied that I had and also a tutor, which I produced there and then. Ronald looked at both and then said, “The book, boy, is of very little use other than that it contains the chanter scale, if I am to be your tutor. I want to teach you to touch the chanter lightly, for instance, with your thumb or finger as the case may be, not strike your thumb or finger with the chanter as that book, and similar tutors, tell you to do. Tutors for the pipe are generally written by illiterate and meaningless men so far as ‘he who runs may read is concerned’. I want to tell you verbally what to do, so that what I tell you to do is what should be done that you may do it correctly and become a ‘piper’.”

Then Ronald took the chanter which I held in my hand, and by the look of his eye, I could see that it did not please him either. It certainly was not by any means a new chanter, nor was it altogether a masterpiece in the fine art of pipe making, but it appeared to my mind to be good enough to do a turn.

“Rebuked Again”

Here again I was rebuked, for the master piper said, “If you wish to become a piper, you must get a ‘chanter’.” And to illustrate what he meant, he took my chanter and played a tune upon it. Then he betook himself to a small table in his study, lifted his own chanter and played me another tune (the one I had already whistled). “Is there any comparison between the two instruments?” said he, whereupon, I admitted that there was no similarity of the one to the other. He then said “you must send to Peter Henderson, Glasgow for a ‘chanter’, and come back to me this day fortnight.”

“My First Lesson”

On the day and date arranged, I again appeared at Gordon Castle with my new chanter, which was “sweet” in tone, and comely in appearance (being made of black Ebony and pure white ivory), in accordance with the ancient traditional style. The instrument passed the test and was approved.
What followed was a very simple lesson, but it was a very effective one and I shall not forget it while I live. Ronald took the chanter and played first the scale in a very distinctly pleasing manner, and afterwards played my favourite “The MacKenzie Highlanders March.” He then said, “You may think that there is not much in the playing of the chanter scale, boy. There are many ways of playing the chanter scale, and I have heard them often played by beginners, but there is only one right way. The scale must be played with musical taste because it is the root of all that you shall afterwards play upon the pipes. If, as a beginner, you play a musical scale. You will, in time, play a musical tune, i.e., you will give time, rhythm, and expression to your music.”

This good advice went home to my heart, and several times we played the scale together, after which I was set free for my homeward journey, the proud possessor of my chanter and my first lesson.

“Marches, Strathspeys and Reels”

I had acquired a number of Marches, Strathspeys and Reels which I could play with a considerable degree of skill, and one evening when I returned to my master for further instructions, after being his pupil for eight or nine months, he was playing upon his pipes, and the tune happened to be a piobaireachd.

“The Earl of Seaforth’s Salute”

It was a beautiful piece of the classical music for the pipes, I was much impressed with the tune, as it had an attractive air. When Ronald finished playing he addressed me thus: “Good evening, boy”: a salutation which I returned with the remark that he had just played a most beautiful piece of music. “Do you like it, boy?” was his quick reply. “Yes!” I said that I did, whereupon he addressed me further, saying, “In the days of the MacCrimmons ancient piobaireachd was the only pipe music known, with the exception of the very few slow airs; probably piobaireachd themes without variations, but in recent years marches, strathspeys and reels have crept in.”

“The Cart before the Horse”

“Pupils for the pipes ‘put the cart before the horse’ nowadays. They play marches and such-like first, and then only a very few start to piobaireachd. When I began piping with my uncle John Bàn, piobaireachd was my first thing, and not until long after I had mastered many of them (and necessity compelled me) did I start the lighter music.”

“To Be a Piper”

“If you wish to be a piper,” continued my master, “you must play piobaireachd. No piper is considered a master of the instrument until he can play its classical music, so we will make a start tonight.” There and then, I began with that beautiful piece “The Earl of Seaforth’s Salute.”

“Unwritten Instructions”

I shall always remember the unwritten instructions which he imparted to his pupils, for MacKenzie said, “Never learn to play a piobaireachd that you don’t like. You will never make anything
of a tune that you dislike. Piobaireachd playing does not depend upon fingering alone. The tune must come from your heart and soul.”

“If a melody touches the tender chords of your own heart, you shall, when you play it with tender feeling, touch the same tender chords of the hearts of your listeners, and that is the true manner in which to impart piobaireachd.”

When selecting a piobaireachd for his pupils, Ronald MacKenzie always played it over first upon his pipes. “Hearing a tune played,” he used to say, “is the first step in recording in your mind its peculiar time and rhythm. That was the method adopted by the old Masters, and that is why they made so many fine players.”

Ronald always played note for note on the chanter with his pupils, and when I was sufficiently far advanced with a new piobaireachd he ceased to play along with me. As the MacCrimes did, he chanted the air in Gaelic syllables, while I played the tune upon the chanter alone.

“This,” said he, “is like teaching a child to walk. After it can use its feet we give it the end of a straw and lead it.” MacKenzie had a very sweet low voice which he modulated into perfect unison with every note upon the chanter, and it was a great treat to play to his voice accompaniment.

“Valuable Secret”

John Bàn MacKenzie imparted to his nephew many of the secrets and peculiar movements in piobaireachd which now appear to be lost, and some of the variations he played differently to that recorded in Angus MacKay’s book of piobaireachd.

“Glengarry’s Lament”

A very beautiful little tune, and John Bàn played the second part of the Siubhal or First variation slightly different to that given by Angus MacKay who gives C, A, C, A, whereas John Bàn played E, A, F, A.1 John Bàn’s style was rather fascinating, and indeed more enchanting to the ear of the listener than that quoted by MacKay.

Then in the Doubling of the same Variation of the same tune John Bàn graced double E’s as follows: the first E he graced with a high “g” grace note, and the second E with “f” grace note, and Ronald MacKenzie was very strict of this point. His own words were “If you played double E, boy, in any ordinary March with a “g” and “f” as grace notes, surely you would never think of degrading piobaireachd, the classical music of the pipe, by gracing both E’s in such variations with a high “g” grace

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1 Be that as it may, Grant retained the MacKay version in his only transcription of the tune in his “The Family Piper” (p. 18).
note on each of the E’s. You must always remember to play double E’s in these variations with a “g” first and then an “f” for grace notes.²

“The Desperate Battle”

In the close of the first bar of this tune the movement upon F is entirely wrong as given by some:– E F F melody. Play E plain, then sound plain F with an ordinary double grace note as found in a common March:–g f g on F.

(1) Ronald MacKenzie maintained that the old school played the movement in the classical or genuine piobaireachd form, as E plain followed by F plain, and a group of e g e grace notes on F melody.

(2) Sometimes the movement is also written E plain with a group of four grace notes: f e g e on F melody.

The fingering is the same in number (2) as in number (1), but number (1) if anything gives the best expression for the eye to see when written, and the ear to hear when played, as the F is given there as a short melody note, and comes into the time, whereas, the first “f” is given in number (2) as a grace note, which is not counted in the time.

“Throw on D”

MacKenzie was very particular in this movement on “D.” “Angus MacKay,” he said, “is too light in his writing of the D movement. He writes the ‘g d c’ group of grace notes on D which produces a false impression. To write the movement properly, the grace notes on D should be ‘g d g e’, and you will produce a far finer and more marked effect, when played upon the chanter. This is a rather mysterious movement and is very often found in piobaireachd. It’s purport is sorrow (or sadness) and is peculiar more particularly to the “Lament.” You cannot readily follow with the eye when the ear can detect in the formation of an intricate movement of the fingers such as this. The fingers are too quick for the eye.”

“Closed Note on C.”

“This also,” said my instructor,” is a very difficult movement to perform, and many do not play the grace notes ‘g d g’ at all, which appear before the C. They (the group of ‘g d g’ grace notes) must be played slowly to start with in order to be effective as a finished movement in the end, and care must be taken that you come to low ‘g’, raise and lower the ‘d’ grace note finger smartly and distinctly, on low ‘g’ before coming to an open C. Many pipers come to C before they have sounded the last low ‘g’ grace note, which is left out altogether. Piobaireachd is full of this movement, and you must be careful to get it correctly so as to master it once and for all. The same movement will be found upon B and low A.

²Grant adopted this particular idiosyncrasy in all of his piobaireachd transcriptions whenever E was doubled in a Suibhal Variation or its Doubling.
“Taorluath”

“The Taorluath is one of the crowning movements in piobaireachd,” said Ronald, “and it will take you a considerable time to play it with correct fingering and exact time. Take the movement on low A,” he said, “and let me analyze it for you on the chanter. Sound low A with a ‘g’ grace note on it. Come smartly to low ‘g’ as a grace note, then raise and lower smartly and clearly the ‘d’ grace note finger only, while you remain on low ‘g’, still a grace note. Come to low A melody note a second time, and finally grace low A melody note a third time with an ‘e’ grace note.”

“In other words,” continued MacKenzie, “Taorluath upon low A has three distinct melody notes to the complete movement:―A A A. The first A is graced with a ‘g’ grace note, the second A is graced with a group of ‘g d g’ grace notes, and the third A is graced with an ‘e’ grace note.”

“The A after the group of ‘g d g’ grace notes is a very short note, but you must remember, boy, that it is there all the same, and you must play very carefully the slow movement as I have shown you on the chanter, and have now described to you verbally. Then you will, like others, master it, with very careful persevering practice.”

“All the Taorluath movements on each initial note of the movement vary, but the fingering otherwise is exactly the same, and be careful to remember that the initial note in the movement in every case is a prolonged note.”

“Taorluath on D”

Ronald MacKenzie’s instructions on this particular movement as described by himself verbally were: “Angus MacKay writes Taorluath upon D in a rather clumsy manner. I play what he writes as will be seen from his book of piobaireachd, but my uncle John Bàn played Taorluath on D in the same way as on low A with the exception of the initial note thus: a ‘g’ note on D, a ‘g d g’ group of grace notes on the first A, and an ‘e’ grace note on the last A. This is by far the most effective performance of the Toarluth movement upon D, and it was the MacCrimmon style.”

“Taorluath Breabach”

“The Taorluath Breabach movement is performed in the same manner as the plain Taorluath with one note added to the movement:― A A A C, and the last note C is graced with a ‘d’ grace note.”

“Taorluath Fosgailte”

“The Taorluath Fosgailte is an open Taorluath, and it is written thus: A A A B. The first A is graced with a ‘g’ grace note, the second with a ‘d’ grace note, the third A with an ‘e’ grace notes, and the B is graced with a ‘d’ grace note.”
“Taorluath-a-Mach”

“The Taorluath-a-Mach is found only upon the notes B, C, and D, and the movements are written thus:–B B B, C C C, and B D D. The first note in the movement in each case is shorter. Let me describe the C and D movements. Grace the first C with a ‘g’ grace note, put a ‘g d g’ group of grace notes on the second C, and grace the last C with an ‘e’ grace note. The movement on D is somewhat different:–grace B with a ‘g’ grace note, put a ‘g d g e’ group (or throw) of grace notes on the first D, and grace the last D with an ‘e’ grace note.”

“Crunluath”

“The Crunluath,” said Ronald, “is the crowning movement in all the variations of the classical music of the pipes. It is peculiar to piobaireachd only, and cannot be reproduced upon any other musical instrument in the world. Let me play and describe to you the Crunluath movement on the A in the same way as I did in the Taorluath. Grace low A with a ‘g’ grace note. Come smartly to low ‘g’ as a grace note, raise and lower the ‘d’ grace note finger only, while you remain on low ‘g’, still a grace note. Then come smartly to low A. From low A you come to E melody. Then lower the ‘e’ finger, and come smartly to low ‘a’ as a grace note. Remain on low ‘a’ as a grace note, while you raise and lower smartly, the ‘f’ grace note finger only and come back to E smartly.”

“In other words, Crunluath on A has four melody notes:–A A E E, in a complete movement. Grace the first A with a ‘g’ grace note. Grace the second A with a group of ‘g d g’ grace notes. Come to E plain. Play an ‘a f a’ group of grace notes on the last E and the movement is then complete.”

“This is a rather complicated movement, boy, but as in the Taorluath, those long thin fingers of yours will, with careful practice, make an excellent Crunluath. No person can follow the manipulation of the fingers in this movement with the eye when played in proper time, because the fingers go so quickly. The Crunluath must be analyzed in a slow movement, in order to be able to see clearly how it is done.”

“Crunluath Breabach”

“The Crunluath Breabach movement is performed the same as the Crunluath, with two notes added to the movement, for example:– A A E E A C. The A after the second E is played plain and the C is graced with a ‘d’ grace note.”

“Crunluath Fosgailte”

“The Crunluath Fosgailte is an open Crunluath, written in melody notes thus:–A C E E. Grace the first A with a ‘g’ grace note. Grace the C with a ‘d’ grace note. Then play E plain, and grace the last capital E with a group of ‘c f e’ grace notes, but care must be taken to bring down the C and B fingers of the lower hand before sounding the last E.
“Mach, means “out,” and the Mach movement is only found on the notes B, C and D, with melody notes thus:–B B E E, C C E E, and B D E E. Let me describe C and D movements:–in this movement the first note in each group is the shortest. Then grace C with a ‘g’ grace note; grace the second C with a ‘g d g’ group of grace notes: come to E plain and grace the last E with a ‘c f e’ group of grace notes.”

“D is slightly different. Grace B with a ‘g’ grace note; Grace D with a ‘d g c’ group of grace notes (i.e. throw D); come to E plain and grace the last E with a group of ‘d f d’ grace notes.”

“Effect”

With continued practice one is able to play the Taorluath and Crunluath movements too fast, or to put it another way, to crowd the notes in these beautiful movements too closely upon each other, but Ronald MacKenzie never reached that stage. It was a real treat to hear him play Taorluath and Crunluath. He gave the intermediate notes slightly more time than present-day players of piobaireachd, which made the movements far more effective. The modern method of performing the Crunluath movement is inclined to be too fast, thus making it too sharp and abrupt, whereas, the old style was softer and more prolonged.

Ronald MacKenzie never lost his long, clear, and distinctly well-pronounced movements in Crunluath and Crunluath Breabach with his lifetime’s practice, for the chanter was never far from his hand. He always impressed upon the minds of his pupils the value of chanter practice, and often said, “It is on the practice chanter that the piobaireachd player is made, boy, and you must carry your chanter with you, if not your pipes, wherever you go. You can do much, for instance, in a weekend when you have leisure hours. If you have a quarter of an hour to spare at any odd time, fill in that time with the practice chanter (if it be handy) by playing over a piobaireachd, or part of one.”

“Piobaireachd Manuscripts”

I had many conversations with Ronald while we breathed at intervals during my lessons, and he was always out, where possible, for the proficient piper in all the branches of piping. He used to say “The MacCrimmons and many of the old pipers who followed them had no manuscripts, because those piobaireachd players never wrote down their tunes. We live in a very different age, and now that you understand music, you must begin your manuscript collection of piobaireachd. Every piper nowadays who wishes to equip himself should have his manuscript, and penmanship in this way is in itself a work of art. When you write down a piobaireachd you always have it for reference should you forget it (and many of them are long intricate tunes), and then others can play from it also.

Ronald MacKenzie did not ask his pupils to do what he had not done himself. He had a good knowledge of the staff notation and could write down a tune from memory without reference to a book of any kind and time the music correctly. Many a manuscript and book of music did I get from him to copy, and needless to say, I made good use of them. When Angus MacKay’s book of piobaireachd was
out of print, he (Ronald) gave me his volume, and I copied it from end to end in a month’s time or less, and had it bound in a neat volume.

“Sorting The Pipes”

This is another very important part of a piper’s education, and MacKenzie’s own words in this connection were: “No piper can play his pipes for a lifetime without their requiring some attention in one way or other. Your bag wears out and you require another one. Well then, I will show you how to tie in your own bag. Cut out the stocks from the old bag; wash them thoroughly with cold water. Dry then immediately, and when you get your new bag from the pipe maker, mark off the stock holes. When this is done, pierce the holes with a sharp knife, but be careful that you do not put the knife through the bag at the opposite side, for it would be completely spoiled if you did. Cut three holes in the bag for the drones, and one for the blowpipe stock, about the size of a penny. Then insert each stock, at the mouth of the bag, or chanter stock hole, putting in the mounted end of the stock first.”

“Replace one stock at a time, beginning with the big drone stock first. Tie the stocks in very tightly with a rosined thong, (which you can also make yourself by putting five or six strands of hemp together, and rub them well over with rosin). Put in the two small drone stocks, one after the other next, and secure them with another rosined thong each. Then put in the blowpipe stock, and finally the chanter stock. You must be careful to see that the seam of the bag is placed right into the small groove in the chanter stock, otherwise the wind will escape there, and the bag will be sure to leak.”

“Be sure to see that the big drone stock is put in on the right side of the bag, when it (the bag) is upright, and the large seam is downwards, otherwise the drones would be put in for playing the pipes on the wrong shoulder. The bagpipes must be played upon the left shoulder, and a piper who plays with his pipes on the right shoulder cannot play in a pipe band. This irregularity is not permitted in the army.”

“When the stocks are all tied in, put the blowpipe into its stock, and then insert a cork tightly into each of the drone stocks. Put a tablespoonful of pure black treacle into the bag at the chanter stock, and rub the bag well with both hands in order to distribute the treacle all over the interior of the bag. Finally, you will place another cork in the chanter stock, and inflate the bag. In all probability it will be perfectly airtight, and you can rig up the pipes, and go on your way rejoicing. If there does by any chance happen to be a leak in the bag anywhere, you will easily find out by filling the bag full of wind, squeeze it hard and listen at the stocks, and you will hear the wind hissing as it escapes. If you do find a leakage, retie in the defective stock more tightly, and your task is entirely accomplished.”

“Never leave fringes, i.e., pieces of hemp, hanging out at your drone stocks or tuning joints, as these careless habits make your pipes look slovenly.”

“The Blowpipe Valve”

“Your blowpipe valve is always a very important thing. See that it is always moist, as it ought to be if you play your pipes regularly, and allow the valve to hang down from the tab which attaches it to the blowpipe, because it is much easier closed in this position than if it be turned the directly opposite way. In the first instance, when you press your bag, the valve has only got too close, but if in the latter
position the valve falls down upon the stock inside and has to be blown upwards, it requires far more pressure of the arm to keep the valve closed when breathing; and, extra pressure on the bag either overblows the reeds or stops them from playing altogether.”

“Pipe Reeds”

“Always select fairly thin drone reeds. If they be new they will play with ease, but in time they get old like ourselves, and if you happen to be stranded in some out-of-the-way place in the Highlands with rough roads and few houses about you, you must learn how to doctor them up. As I have already said, new reeds require little adjustment, but in reviving old ones, you must take all the old hemp off them. Put new rosined hemp on the ends, also new bridles, and with a little careful maneuvering you will be able to get them to do a turn until you get new reeds.”

“Setting The Chanter Reed”

“In setting your chanter reed into the pipe chanter, see that the blade of the reed is at right angles with the chanter holes, as it gives, if anything, a clearer note in that position.”

“The drones should be put in their stocks with the tongues of the reeds turned upwards, as they take less moisture in this position. If the tongues of the reeds are turned downwards in the stocks, when the moisture gathers on them, it hangs about the tongues and creates a bubbling noise.”

“See that a house flannel cover is put on the bag below your outer cover, as it absorbs the moisture from the bag, and keeps the sleeve of your coat clean.”

“Have your ribbons neatly sewn on (not pinned, as pins tear the ribbons and make them look slovenly) as a pipe well-dressed, and the mounts, whatever they be, kept clean, as this all tends to please the eye. An instrument like the Great Highland Bagpipe, in its most elaborate form, is a thing of beauty, and ‘a thing of beauty is a joy forever’, as the old proverb says.”

“A Single Lesson”

In order that young pupils might have an insight into the duties of “The Laird’s Piper,” Ronald MacKenzie sometimes took his pupils to the Castle to see him play before the Duke and his guests. It was my privilege to get with him on one occasion. The piper’s room was situated at the East wing of the Castle, where Ronald changed from morning into full evening Highland dress.

On the night in question there were many guests at the Castle, and the piper’s room (not a small one) was full to overflowing. All the gamekeepers, salmon fishers and valets who love the pipes were to be found in the piper’s room while he dressed, because he played for about a quarter of an hour before going upstairs to play to the Duke and his guests after dinner.
Shortly after my entering the piper's room accompanied by the Duke's piper, he addressed me thus: "Now boy, you have here an audience of considerable magnitude in comparison with the size of my room, and when they clear a small space, you will give them a tune on my pipes while I dress." I felt somewhat away from home, and rather timid, but I had, in the interests of all and everything concerned, to obey orders. I took the Master's pipe and put it upon my shoulder, and at that stage of my training, tuned the pipe as well as I could. All that I feared at the close of my performance was a chastisement for my imperfect tuning.

"The Irritated Look"

I played two or three short Marches, and while I played I was quite certain that something irritated the Duke's piper, for as I marched to and fro, I observed that he dressed nervously quick. His fingers itched for something. At last I finished, and laid down the instrument upon the table.

The pipe was no sooner laid down then Ronald snatched it up half dressed, and addressed me again before the audience. "Now boy, I am going to show you, as near as I can imitate, the exact way that you played." He blew up the pipes, and if I was bad, he was a subject for a full-page portrait in Punch—to see my imitation.

The piper's head was as far in front of him as a Giraffe's, and behind, he donned a "Grecian Bend" (worth bending). Indeed, it was so prominent that an averagely-built person might have had a comfortable seat upon it. In this ridiculous position, he played the very same tunes as I did, and while he played, the audience was in fits of laughter. Indeed, the deer stalker and the head salmon fisher laughed 'till the tears ran down her cheeks like a deluge of rain in a thunderstorm.

"Embarrassment"

Embarrassment was not in it? I could have sunk to the floor had it been possible. My instructor stopped playing and laid the pipes upon the table. There was no twitch to be seen on his face. It was as calm as the mountain loch in the summer sunshine. Again he said, "Now boy, that was as near as you played as I could reproduce it. Never mind the gentlemen. You take the pipes again and play like this next time." He took up the pipes a second time, and played one tune. His deportment was perfect. I did play again, and this was the one and only lesson which I got, or required, in the art of deportment.

"The Pipe Band"

As well as being piper to the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, at this time Ronald MacKenzie was Pipe Major of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, and I was admitted a member of his band. I got from him all the usual training which a piper received in a military pipe band, and the band played the regiment out and in as occasion required, going under canvas once a year for training.
Duntroon Castle
“The Laird’s Piper”

The only part of a piper’s education which I then lacked was to become “The Laird’s Piper,” and Ronald MacKenzie, having a call for such a person in an establishment in Perthshire, he offered me the position. I had often heard the old saying that “it was a poor estate that could not keep the Laird and the piper from working,” so I took the post as piper at “Abercairny,” near Crieff, following in the footsteps of a greater piper—Donald MacKay, brother to Angus MacKay, who was piper to Queen Victoria. I remained there for a period of five years, and performed the same duties as I saw my Instructor, Ronald MacKenzie do at Gordon Castle. There I spent the very happiest days of my life. I wore the kilt the whole time, and played the great pipe every day except on Sunday, when I went to the “Auld Kirk,” and sat in the Laird’s “ain” pew.

“Back to School at Gordon Castle”

While I was piper to Abercairny, my master, who was passionately fond of the pipes and piobaireachd, set me back on two occasions to the Castle of Gordon for further instructions in piobaireachd playing, because Abercairny House is the one and only mansion in Scotland that was built especially for the “Piper.” It has a great corridor, and a spacious dining room with double swinging doors which were always opened by a servant for the piper, and closed behind him.

“A Strict Disciplinarian”

Ronald MacKenzie was a very strict disciplinarian. He permitted no irregularities either at private tuition or on duty. He never played heavy four-parted marches in his band. The marches which he selected were choice two- and three-parted pieces suitable for band work leaving the heavy four-parted tunes for test pieces and individual piping or exhibition performances.

“Individual Piping”

Although MacKenzie had a Pipe Band all his lifetime, he favoured individual piping, and he trained his best pupils to be good players individually. He maintained that the individual piper was the most ancient form of piping. Pipe Bands came into force for military purposes hundreds of years after the piper played alone, simply because the Highland Regiment marched more spiritedly to the piper’s music in the time of war, and danced merrily to their Strathspeys and Reels in the festive hour of peace.

MacKenzie completed the education of all his pupils from beginning to end. He did not take other men’s pupils, nor did he begin pupils to be handed over to others to complete their tuition. If he had any half-taught pipers he never counted on them as being his pupils, nor had he any pleasure or interest in them. Whenever he saw that he had pupils of merit, he watched over their progressive growth, as a botanist does with a rare plant of exquisite beauty, and pupils who were keen on the highest form of tuition could not help feeling that this man of piping fame was indeed a great master.

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3 Actually, Grant was piper to Abercairny from the autumn of 1899 to early 1903.
“The Piper’s Farewell”

This was the last occasion on which I met Ronald MacKenzie. Though he was far ben the pathway of life, at heart he was aye young and boyish. He gained the hearts of his pupils first, and that done he could make them play anything. I never saw his face clouded, nor did ever I see him angry. Ronald was very even-tempered, and had always a kind word of encouragement to offer to his young aspirants whatever the occasion might be.

“The End”

In 1916, at the advanced age of 74 years, all that was mortal of this great piper returned to the dust whence it came, and the grave closed upon one of the finest piobaireachd players and teachers who has lived since the days of the MacCrimmons, for indeed Pipe Major Ronald MacKenzie was the last genuine representative of the great MacCrimmon school. Under his able guidance I served my seven long years of apprenticeship and piping, and to him I owe a never-to-be-forgotten debt of gratitude for all that I know in the art.

“John Bàn MacKenzie”

John Bàn Mackenzie, the greatest piper of his day, was born near Dingwall about the year 1789. John Bàn was born a piper, and he lived and died a “Piper.” He could genuinely claim to be a pupil of the MacCrimmon School at Boreraig through his teacher John MacKay, who was piper to MacLeod of Raasay (MacKay being actually educated in the art of Piobaireachd playing at Dunvegan in the Isle of Skye).

“Am Piobaire Bàn”

Better known in the Gaelic tongue as, or rather, by the above appellation, Am Piobaire Bàn made a mark in the esteem of many Highland Lairds and entered the lists through his honorable and dignified profession to win the heart and hand of a young lady of rank and breeding.

John Bàn worked hard with his nimble fingers. The art of piobaireachd playing came to him as an heritage, or as a birthmark, for he was marked out by nature herself to be a “Piper.”

He held the rank of piper to several noblemen and gentlemen, and was highly esteemed by them all, because apart altogether from being a “Piper,” John Bàn outstripped all the young men of his time for his fine features, his height with proportionate build, in addition to his good manners and princely appearance.

As far back as the 28th day of May 1778, the Highland Society of London was constituted, consisting of noblemen and gentlemen of Highland birth. And the object of the society was to foster and keep alive the language, the dress, the music and the ancient customs of the Highlands of Scotland.
The disastrous results of the rebellion of '45 almost dealt a death blow to the great Highland bagpipe together with the art of piobaireachd playing; so, in order to repair the breach caused to piping between '45 and 1778, the Highland Society of London instituted an annually-recognised competition for piobaireachd playing in Scotland.

“The Falkirk Tryst”

The newly-formed society’s first competition took place at the “Falkirk Tryst” about the year 1780. This constituted a new era in the art of piobaireachd playing. The MacCrimmons never lowered their dignity by entering into competition with any other pipers, and their school was then broken up. It had then become necessary in order to qualify as a performer of ancient piobaireachd, and to become a master of the art, for pipers of note to gain a place in the Highland Society of London’s new contest.

When John Bàn Mackenzie came to mature age he followed the then custom and entered the lists. Unlike Sir Walter Raleigh, John Bàn neither “feared to climb,” nor “to fall,” but he summed up the cards in his hand (so to speak) and played low.

In the year 1821 we find “Am Piobaire Bàn” taking the third-place amongst the greatest pipers of his day. We must remember that John Bàn was going to climb the ladder of fame in his profession slowly, for in the year 1822 he was awarded the second prize. In the following year our hero came out with the red flag flying, for the judges awarded him the first prize.

“Champion Piper”

John Bàn was now Champion piobaireachd player, and in the year 1832 a more signal honour fell to his already illustrious list. The then triennial competition in piobaireachd took place in the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, and John Bàn was unanimously called upon by the Stewards to play the opening “Salute,” which he did with a master hand, and then the competition for the day was commenced.

“Champion of Champions”

The President and Stewards of the Highland Society of London decided to offer a gold medal for a new competition which was open only to previous winners of the Highland Society of London’s first medal, as there were then a goodly number of Champions who are classed out.

This new medal was for Champion piobaireachd players only to determine a new status for the best of these performers. This honour carried with it the highest title of that day. In July 1835 John Bàn Mackenzie carried off the coveted prize when he reached the very pinnacle of his fame: “Champion of Champions.”

“Piper to Breadalbane”

John Bàn was ultimately appointed Piper to the Marquis of Breadalbane at Taymouth Castle, Perthshire, and in the festive Hall at Taymouth John Bàn played many a stirring tune, while the Marquis
with his distinguished guests listened to the music that in days gone by added a peculiar charm to many
an animated scene on which the curtain has long since fallen.

Around the turreted walls of the Castle of Taymouth, John Bàn also piped cheerily while “The
Great Red Dawn” ushered in the morning. The cock’s “shrill clarion” was followed by “Hye Johnnie
Cope Are Ye Waken Yet,” and to that warning the inhabitants of the Castle bestirred themselves for
the day.

John Bàn was stately and tall with a fine expression upon his face. Whatever he piped (whether
it was a Theme of war, peace, or a tune of love), be the notes soft and mellow, full of joy or sorrow, or
stern and wild, the piper to Breadalbane betrayed not the emotions of his heart through his outward
appearance, for his countenance was always calm and serene. There was one thing only in the world that
he loved. He loved it dearly too, and that was piping. John Bàn would do nothing but pipe, and piping
was his chief profession.

“Your Lordship’s Piper”

The Marquis of Breadalbane was as proud of John Bàn as John Bàn was of himself, and when
the Laird was in a good mood he sometimes teased John. One day they were both out in a boat fishing,
and Breadalbane said to John, “Take this oar for a little, John,” to which John replied, “I cannot, my
Lord.” Again the Laird said, “Carry my fishing basket, John,” and again John’s quick reply was, “I
cannot my Lord; it would spoil my fingers for the pipes.” Lord Breadalbane then said, “But other men
play upon the pipes, and work also, John.” “Yes! My Lord,” said John, “they do, and they are but
labourers, but I am your Lordship’s ‘Piper.’” John Bàn, then, did not say one thing and think another;
assume one character in one part of the drama of life and act another; he carried out his principles to
the letter in thought, word and deed.

“Piper To The Queen”

In or about the year 1843 Queen Victoria visited Taymouth Castle, and her Majesty was so
delighted with the playing of the Highland bagpipe she had heard there that she decided before
departing from the Castle that a piper would be added to the “Royal” establishment.

Shortly after the Queen left the Castle of Taymouth she wrote to the Marquis of Breadalbane
expressing her desire to adopt the Highland bagpipes in the Royal Household, and asked the Marquis
to endeavour to procure for her a piper like John Bàn Mackenzie. Lord Breadalbane communicative the
Queen’s desire to John Bàn, saying that “Her Majesty the Queen is desirous of adding to her Royal
establishment a piper, and wishes to get one like yourself.” John Bàn, in his usual dignified manner,
replied, “I am sorry, my Lord, such a piper is not to be found.” The Laird and his piper looked at each
other in a peculiar state of embarrassment, and at the moment no further conversation on the matter
took place.

Breadalbane communicated to her Majesty as best he could that a piper such as John Bàn
Mackenzie could not be found. In a further communication the Queen stated frankly that she was
desirous of making John Bàn himself the “Royal Piper.”
Tarbert Castle, Loch Fyne
“A Point Blank Refusal”

The Marquis of Breadalbane knew John Bàn too well, and puzzled his brains very much as to the best way to communicate to him the Queen’s desire. So one day he broached the subject saying “John, Her Majesty the Queen wishes you to become Piper to the Royal Household.” Like the wily stag, John Bàn sniffed the air and immediately replied without the least concern, “If your Lordship is tired of my services then I will go, but I do not wish a better master than yourself.”

John Bàn would not go, and it was with the utmost difficulty that Breadalbane could communicate John Bàn’s decision to the Queen. However, it had to be done, and as an alternative, Her Majesty then asked if John’s son would be allowed to become her Piper, to which John Bàn replied, “He is much too young,” although by that time the son was grown to manhood and an excellent piper.

“Bagpipe and Reed Maker”

John Bàn had more than one profession to his credit. As well as being a great piper he was a bagpipe maker of no mean order. Like piping itself, bagpipe making came to him as a gift from nature, and to this day John Bàn’s chanters have not been beaten. There are now only a very few of his chanters left. They were very deep and rich in tone, and good authority says that one of the finest bagpipe makers in Scotland worked upon his chanter as a basis of the one which they now put on the market. I have heard two of John Bàn’s chanters: one with Ronald MacKenzie himself, and another belongs to a very intimate friend of mine across the Border. John Bàn could make the lathe go, and was obliged to no man for his pipes. Reeds were with him a specialty, and not only did he make them for his own use, but he supplied pipers far and near who had come to know of his secret craft.

“Fight with a Stag”

On one occasion John Bàn visited Drummond Castle with his master. The Highland clans have long e’er then lived at peace with one another, and now the heads of two great houses met at the one board. Even when the wine was red peace prevailed, and Breadalbane enjoyed that peace. But not so with John Bàn: His Lordship’s Piper.

One day John Bàn was returning to Drummond Castle from Crieff, and on his way, at a green grassy spot he espied a deer. This animal was upon his native heath, but Breadalbane’s piper was an alien foe or trespasser so far as the deer was concerned.

“The Desperate Battle”

Seeing that the clan feuds had long before then ceased, what would hinder the Earl of Ancaster’s stag to declare war upon the Marquis of Breadalbane’s piper, even without warning? John Bàn accepted the challenge, and in an instant the stag tossed his head in the air as a taunt on the proud piper, then put his head to the ground to dispatch his enemy with his “Royal” antlers. But John Bàn was no weakling: he closed upon his opponent and secured his horns by which he threw the animal on his side.
“A Fierce Struggle”

There was the Mark of Royalty about the Stag, for on his antlers he donned that “Hall Mark” of dignity. The crown or three points were formed at their extremities. But John Bàn was not void of princely power, and with the authority of his own strength he fought like a lion.

A terrible struggle ensued. At one point the stag made headway; at another John Bàn scored and not until both were very much exhausted did the contest end in victory for “His Lordship’s Piper.”

The stag was a noble animal, but we are assured that man is a noble animal also, and it was the strength of his single arm that stood John Bàn in good stead with the assistance of his only companion and weapon as we have it in the poet’s own words:

“He laid the antlered monarch low
And killed out right his Royal foe,
The brawny arm was strong and true
That held his jeweled Skean Dubh.”

The piper paid for his victory, for John Bàn never really got over such a fearful and unexpected struggle, and had he not been a very powerfully built man he most certainly would have been carried to the Castle a corpse.

But John Bàn was a hero, and had still another qualification to go on besides those already mentioned.

“A Love Romance”

John Bàn’s wife was a lady of noble birth and good breeding, and he won her heart and hand under romantic circumstances. The Chief of the Clan Mackenzie was the Earl of Seaforth, and Mackenzie of Applecross was a cadet of that family.

Applecross had a beautiful daughter who loved everything Highland. If her forefathers preserved and cherished things Celtic such as their manners and customs, Miss Mackenzie was a staunch follower in their footsteps and carried out the same desires to preserve those peculiar marks of antiquity which had lived down through the dark ages.

Indeed, she carried her fancies a little further than her father cared to sanction, and in doing so she preserved that which was most dear to her—the name of Mackenzie, for she would have no one but one of her own clansman for a husband.

“The Love Letter”

It so happened that on a particular occasion Miss Mackenzie of Applecross paid a visit to some friends near to Taymouth Castle. At that time there lived at the Castle of Breadalbane a young gentleman who was paying Miss Mackenzie some attentions, and in communicating with his supposed
sweetheart, he made Breadalbane’s piper a stepping stone to success in his wooing. He wrote a letter one day to Miss Mackenzie and thought that he was able to confide in a clansman of the same name who would carry his love message to its destination in perfect safety. John Bàn Mackenzie was too proud to carry his master’s fishing basket, but as it suited his purpose on this occasion, he condescended to carry the letter to Miss Mackenzie with which he was entrusted. As it is “folly to be wise” so is it “bliss to be ignorant,” because sometimes ones wisdom of action only proves one’s shortcomings when the actual results are revealed.

Dressed in full Highland garb, John Bàn arrived at his destination, and was ushered into the presence of Miss Mackenzie. There was an uncanny greeting passed between them (for in the good old Scot’s phrase they were ‘ere then “lad and lass”) as hand met hand, for their eyes must have communicated to each other an unspoken language. There was a plot in the air, and it had now ripened into “love.” Love lingers long in many cases, but the love which some time prior to this meeting had crept into their hearts the young couple could not allow to linger any longer. At last, as in a dream or an afterthought, John Bàn produced his packet, and that the drama might be completed under natural circumstances, the piper seated himself to await an answer. Miss Mackenzie opened the letter with a trembling hand, and as she read her face became rather clouded and sullen.

“The Flush of Love”

A deep flush took possession of both their faces. Their eyes flashed with love, the great passion of their inmost hearts, and they both sat spellbound. With a quick eye John Bàn observed the changes which took place in Miss Mackenzie’s complexion and took the liberty of saying, “Something in the letter not pleasing you, my Lady?” At this remark Miss Mackenzie looked up at John Bàn with beautiful eyes, and said, “Ah! John, had it been from you it would have been different.” John Bàn’s heart leapt wildly within his breast, for the rapture of love brought to his mind the old inspiring proverb “Faint heart never won fair lady,” and from that very moment the scene was changed.

Miss Mackenzie and John Bàn were no strangers to each other. They must have met before, for Applecross was John Bàn’s native heath as well as his fair lady’s. There was for all that, a great and prohibitive barrier between them. The lady was highborn, but John Bàn could add no such claim to his qualifications as a prospective suitor. Nevertheless, he was Breadalbane’s piper, and by mutual agreement all barriers were broken down.

“Secretly Married”

Secret arrangements were made, and one evening in the darkness John Bàn, with his fair prize, left her abode, taking such garments with them as were really necessary for their personal comforts. They took flight, and that same evening they were married man and wife in the butt end of a shepherd’s house where a minister was performing a marriage ceremony. When Lord Breadalbane heard of the romantic union he built for them a very nice house, where they live together in perfect happiness.

While John Bàn lived a long and illustrious life in his profession, in the end old age crept on, when he intimated to his master that he wished to return to his native country to die. Breadalbane made every endeavour to persuade him to remain at Taymouth where he would be comfortably and well looked after till the end, but John would go thence. He died at a great age, and was laid to rest in the
quiet churchyard with his fathers, and truly his equal has never been found as a piobaireachd player. Around that little mound the zephyrs moan and the little nymphs pipe to the Western winds their notes of peace, where this great piper lies sleeping; while we cherish in our hearts the memory of one of the finest piobaireachd players who ever laid a finger upon the pipe.

“Angus MacKay”

Angus MacKay was born at Kylekin, Skye in the year 1812, and was a contemporary of John Bàn Mackenzie. Angus came of a famous piping race, almost equal to the MacCrimmons. His father was John MacKay, piper to Malcolm MacLeod, a brother of Raasay’s, and Roderick MacKay his grandfather, who came from the Reay country as piper to the Laird of Raasay. Roderick MacKay was taught by his clansman, Am Piobaire Dall of Gairloch, who was actually a pupil of the great MacCrimmon school at Boreraig.

But we must not forget the fact that Angus MacKay’s father, John, was sent to the MacCrimmon College in the Isle of Skye by his master Malcolm MacLeod, the brother of Raasay, who was himself an excellent piper.

Under a master like his father, young Angus (one of four sons who were all pipers) was a piper almost from the day that he could hold the chanter. This is proved by the records of the Highland Society of London where it is stated that in the year 1826 he came into the prize list amongst the greatest piobaireachd players at the early age of fourteen years.

At the contest of 1835 Angus carried off the first prize (The prize pipe), and thus took his place amongst the pipers of fame for the second time. As already mentioned, Angus had other three brothers who were all pipers:—Donald, piper to Glengarry; Roderick, piper to Abercairny; and John, piper to Lord Guyo dys, while Angus himself was then piper to Davidson of Tulloch. From this record it can be seen that piping ran in the blood of his family. They inherited the art from their fathers and kinsman, the blind piper of Gairloch.

“Queen’s Piper”

Angus MacKay was appointed piper to Her late Majesty Queen Victoria, and was the first performer upon the great pipe to hold that position, which carried with it the highest honour that could be conferred upon him.

“The Saviour of Piobaireachd”

But Angus’s mind did not lie altogether on performance. He was “the” greatest recorder and collector of piobaireachd that ever lived, and had it not been for him the finest of our classical music for the pipe would have been lost in oblivion. Out of three hundred piobaireachdan, or thereby which we have had handed down to us, Angus MacKay preserved of that number over two hundred and fifty.
“A Priceless Work”

The more we think of it the more valuable does his work become when we realize how many weary hours he spent in this gigantic pioneer task; and of how many miles he must have traversed in the Highlands and Islands while he was engaged in collecting piobaireachd. The busy haunts of men had no charm for him. He plowed alone the lonely furrow; and his life ebbed out e’er he had time to look back upon his great work.

This great man of piobaireachd and piping fame had few to help him at his beloved task, or cheer him on his way, for the staff notation was then a mystery to (one may say) all pipers except himself alone.

“The Piper’s Bible”

In 1838, a memorable year in the history of Ceòl Mòr, Angus MacKay published a volume containing some sixty or more piobaireachdan. That Volume was, and still is known as the “Piper’s Bible.” It has gone through several editions, though somewhat slow of sale. The volume has been several times out-of-print, and at intervals a copy reached a record price of from five to ten pounds, although the original price was only one guinea. The book is again out-of-print, and many piobaireachd lovers are already clamouring for its reproduction.

“Piobaireachd Manuscripts”

Those who know what Manuscript Piobaireachd Writing is will have some idea of the task which Angus MacKay undertook and also completed. He wrote hundreds of pages of music, and had to do so under great difficulties. The tunes were not merely copied. They were noted from the playing of various pipers, for the first time, and on the whole they were well done.

As performers upon the Piob Mhòr and lovers of piobaireachd we are to take off our bonnets, and with bended heads reverence and thank this great Highlander for our priceless inheritance, which, but for him, we never would have possessed.

It is surprising to think of how he procured his intimate knowledge of the theory of the art of music, for every tune is well written (when we exclude what he called unavoidable discrepancies). A piper like Angus MacKay has never been, nor will he ever die in our hearts.

Fondly his memory clings to us while we scan the golden pages of his illustrious work, and the notes which he preserved shall re-echo in our ears as we play them—Themes which made his life’s blood warm with their majestic beauty, while like the great MacCrimmon “He shall no more return” to us, nor can we communicate to him our deepest gratitude for the revered musical emblems which he has left behind him to live while there is a pipe left with a piper to sound the piobaireachd.
The Old Bridge Grantown
“The End”

The end came to our beloved companion in the art of piping with tragic suddenness. He was overcome by death at an immature age, leaving behind all that was dear to him, and it lies with us who have been privileged to taste of his good things to guard jealously his work in the main; keep it from change or decay; and prevent it from losing its brilliance in form and accent as we re-write or pipe the charmed airs into which he imparted his own soul as he fixed them in “The Great Ceòl Mòr of the Celt.”

“Gairloch’s Blind Piper”

John Dall Mackay (Am Pìobaire Dall) was better known as “Gairloch’s Blind Piper.” He was born at Gairloch, Ross-Shire about the year 1670, being blind from birth.

Iain Dall was “Dux” of the MacCrimmon school at Boreraig, before he was long at Dunvegan. This aroused no small degree of jealousy amongst the rest of the MacCrimmon pupils. Jealousy was no new disease amongst pipers before or since the Jacobite Rising of 1745.

“MacCrimmon and the Ark”

Ever since MacCrimmon was taken from Boreraig to play the animals into the “Ark,” jealousy existed. The great piper, it is related, had to play the pipes in order to keep the animals marching until the Ark rested. There was no room to spare in that “Sma boatie,” but there was sufficient space for its inhabitants to march round and round it in double file, male and female.

Tradition says that as the great MacCrimmon had to play in a corner where the roof was low, he took the three drones off his pipes, and in his hurry to get out first, he left the drones “i’ the boatie,” which accounts for the pipe being played with a blowpipe, bag and chanter only, until about a hundred and fifty years ago, when the pipe was restored to its full blast of triple drones.

It is further related that there was no female piper to the MacCrimmon in the Ark, and that is why a woman was debarred for all time from playing upon the Great pipe. Although a daughter of a MacCrimmon indulged in “a blaw,” it was done in secret, in terror of the MacCrimmons wrath, and the vengeance of that favoured supernatural creature, “The Fairy Queen.”

“Pipers’ Conspiracy”

There was a rock near the College at Boreraig where MacCrimmon’s pupils used to repair for practice, and one day Iain Dall played there upon his pipe.

It is related that the other pupils met in council and conspired together with the intention of taking this poor man’s life.

A man was counted but little or nothing in those days, for the Chieftain’s piper had often seen a good man dangling in the breeze as a tassel to the tyrant’s rope, so MacKay’s fellow pupils decided that he would not be much missed. They came suddenly upon him and threw him over the rock, thinking that he would fall into the sea, and the fact that MacKay was blind would hide their crime.
Iain Dall went down the great abyss, but the Guardian Angels (The Fairies) must have preserved him, for he got to the bottom without a scratch or bruise. He alighted upon a rock and came to the top again none the worse for his unpleasant experience.

“A Young Composer”

MacCrimmon was followed up very closely by the Blind Piper, who was very anxious to hear his master play when he was alone. The Boreraig Master only allowed one pupil in his study at a time, and when MacCrimmon played or practiced himself, the door of his abode was made fast.

Iain Dall got behind the door one day and listened, for although he was blind he was by no means deaf. MacKay soon realized that the MacCrimmon was in the throes of a new piobaireachd. The Master got the first two parts but failed to complete his Theme. He gave the battle up, and just then Iain Dall struck up his pipe outside the door and completed the MacCrimmon Theme.

“The Half-Finished Piobaireachd”

MacCrimmon, with great delight, opened the door, for he recognised the performer by his fine fingering and exclaimed, “The tune is yours MacKay, for you have finished it.” “Not so,” said Iain Dall. “I have only played a few notes on my pipe while my fingers itched to get at such a fine Urlar.” It became a compromise, and the tune was called “The Half-Finished Piobaireachd.” This aroused further animosity amongst the pupils at Boreraig, MacKay being raised by the MacCrimmon himself to the elevated position of a “Creator of Piobaireachd,” as well as his best performer of the Great Music.

“MacDonald of the Isles’ Piper”

Many Highland Lairds and Chiefs of clans had their pipers in those days, and no one was considered fit to occupy the high and exalted position of piper to the Chieftain of the clan unless he had been trained at the Boreraig College of piping.

MacDonald of the Isles sent a young pupil to Dunvegan for a seven-years term of tuition with the MacCrimmon. When the statutory period was completed, Patrick Og MacCrimmon in person went to the stronghold of MacDonald with his pupil for the Laird’s approval.

Iain Dall MacKay was in residence with MacDonald at the time, and advantage was taken of this opportunity to have MacKay’s opinion of the young piper’s ability.

MacDonald advised the “Blind Piper” of what he had done, and as the young pupil had just returned from Dunvegan, Mackay’s decision as to his merit was asked. “Indeed,” said MacKay, “if he takes great care, he will excel in the art of piobaireachd playing.”
The Fairy Flag
“A Second Pupil”

“But,” said MacDonald, “I sent two men to Boreraig so that I might retain the best of the two.” “Let him play also,” said MacKay. The second piper played, and the audience awaited the Blind Piper’s decision. When the tune was finished MacKay raised himself in his chair and waited until MacDonald spoke.

“Patrick Òg MacCrimmon”

“What do you think of the second piper, MacKay?” asked MacDonald. “Indeed Sir!” replied MacKay. “No one need try me in that manner, for though I have lost the eyes of my human body, I have not lost the eyes of my understanding, and if all the pipers in Scotland were present, I would not find it a difficult task to distinguish the last player from them all.” “You surprise me, MacKay,” said MacDonald, “and who is he?” “Who but Patrick Òg MacCrimmon,” replied MacKay promptly, and as the blind man turned to where Patrick Òg was sitting he said “It was quite needless, my good Sir, to think that you could deceive me in that way, for you could not but know that I would recognise your performance amongst a thousand.”

“The Last Gairloch Piper”

Although Iain Dall MacKay, the Blind Piper, was one of the most wonderful piobaireachd players of his time and he was the last of the Gairloch Pipers, what was defective in his vision was made up in his ear, because it was very sensitive, and nothing escaped it. While in his early youth, his piping ability almost cost him his life, yet it was piping that kept him alive, having no other means of gaining a livelihood.

Like many more pipers he wended his way from the cradle to the grave playing the pipes all the time, and during his 98 years of life, the hours, as well as the mountain solitudes, were gladdened by his tuneful pipe, so that at last he was laid to sleep in his father’s grave in the little clachen of Gairloch.

But Iain Dall had not departed this life until he had lit a new spark which grew in magnitude (so to speak) in the person of Angus MacKay and his family, and probably it was there that the blind piper’s lustre shown in its best and brightest gradients. Should an analogy be permitted, Iain Dall was the casket, and Angus MacKay was the precious gem in the art of Ancient Piobaireachd.

“The MacCrimmons”

This peculiar family has come under the pen of several people from time to time, and they had been dealt with in a more or less casual way, but the musical genius and their methods of teaching their pupils have altogether been left alone.

No piper’s library is complete unless he has in it a minute record of the qualifications of the MacCrimmons; nor is any piper a master of the Art of piobaireachd playing unless he has been taught to play Ceòl Mòr in the genuine MacCrimmon fashion.
There is still to the fore much valuable material to work upon, and the traditional fame of the great School at Boreraig will never die while their charter is registered in the mists of antiquity, dating as far back as the dim and distant ages prior to the Christian Era.

“Early Records”

Historical facts are proved by the recording of events by accredited writers who lived in the time in which they happened. It has already been stated in our journals by the enthusiastic antiquarian that the Highland Bagpipe was found in the Highlands of Scotland under full swing by Aristides Quintillianus who visited Scotland in the year 100 A.D. But I have found in my ceaseless task of research work in this direction from the Ancient Records that Aristides Quintillianus was born in the year 130 B.C.

This revelation throws us back about three centuries, which would prove that the Highland Pipe belonged to the ancients who inhabited the Highlands of Scotland B.C.

The MacCrimmons or the creators of pipe and piobaireachd must have gone as far back as the year 130 B.C. If Quintillianus found the pipe in the Highlands of Scotland at such an early date as, say, the year 80 B.C., a hundred years is as a day in comparison with the creation and perfection of a musical instrument and piobaireachd, its music.

“MacCrimmon Origin”

Hereditary pipers (except in very rare cases) have never borne the same name as the Chieftain of the clan to which they were attached. Campbell of Breadalbane had a MacKenzie piper, Seaforth had a MacRae, Menzies had a MacIntyre, Raasay had a MacKay, and MacLeod of MacLeod, Dunvegan had the MacCrimmon.

Whether the Dunvegan pipers bore the name of MacCrimmon for all time it is very difficult to say, but without doubt the MacCrimmons must have been linked up with a great race of pipers for hundreds of years before we have any written records.

Highland historians were too full of things Highland to mention everything that took place in their lonely mountain habitations. The pipe was so common to the Highlanders of Scotland that the date of its creation there was overlooked for centuries, and now it is hopeless to look for or trace it in the decades of ups and downs which had passed and gone unheeded.

“The Fathers’ of Piobaireachd”

The MacCrimmons are known far and wide as the “Fathers of Piobaireachd,” and have lived in the Island of Skye for hundreds of years, unmolested in their greatness as creators and performers of Ancient Piobaireachd. They were the masters, and made the law of their own art unto themselves. The one generation taught the other, and they were natives of Skye.

Only in one instance it is stated that a MacCrimmon was sent away for instruction, in which case he went to Ireland, but we must not forget the fact that whatever the piper’s name in Ireland was, he went there from Scotland, so that he was not an Irish piper, as some would infer. We have proof of this.
MacCrimmon of that period was no fool, and he was too well educated and dignified to benefit much from his term of instruction under a man who was less skilled than himself.

Skye has produced some of the bravest and most fearless men that the world has ever seen, as will be found in that valuable work “The Brave Sons of Skye.” Surely, then, Skye could also bring forth its pipers in the MacCrimmons who have shed lustre over the whole piping world from the very earliest times.

“The First MacCrimmon”

Were it possible to x-ray the mists of antiquity, or could the Cuchullins speak, we would be supplied with the exact date of the birth of the first MacCrimmon. But as we cannot sit down and dwell with the impossible, we must be up and doing with what we have. Let us then deal with the material at our disposal.

The first MacCrimmon that we hear of was Eain Odhar, or Dun-coloured John. He was followed by Donald Mòr, who in turn was followed by Patrick Mòr, and Patrick Òg. There was also Donald Bàn, John who was piper to Seaforth, and Malcolm, piper at Boreraig. John MacCrimmon was the last hereditary piper to MacLeod at Dunvegan, and he died in the year 1822.

“Hereditary Pipers”

The post of piper to MacLeod of Dunvegan was a hereditary one, and the MacCrimmons held rent-free as part of their emoluments a considerable amount of land, the yearly rent or value of which was over £100. The piper’s Farm was known as Boreraig, and the MacCrimmons established their school, or College there, and they taught their young pupils as well as supplying music to the MacLeod of MacLeod, in accordance with ancient custom.

“Dun-Coloured John”

Very little is known of Dun-Coloured John, but his fame as a performer of piobaireachd must have been very great, because from him emanated all the succeeding line of pipers who supplied the Halls of Dunvegan with pipe music.

“Donald Mòr”

Donald Mòr was a brilliant student under his father Eain Odhar, and the MacLeod was so pleased with him that he sent him to Ireland for instructions, to the man who went there from Scotland. Donald Mòr went there for instructions, but for all intents and purposes it should have been to give instead of receive further tuition, for he was not long in Ireland when his father’s tuition shown to some advantage.

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4Available on CD-Rom at Amazon.com.
Donald picked up every tune on the spot, as he heard it played; could tell it again and repeat it; and in a few days, memorized all the pieces in a most marvelous manner. This very promising piper returned to his native soil at Dunvegan, and if he was a better piper when he returned, it was all done by his own hand in continual practice, combined with what he had already acquired from his father in conjunction with the art of love with which he cherished the art of piobaireachd playing.

Donald Mòr was also a composer of Piobaireachd, and in turn took his place as Hereditary piper to MacLeod at the Castle at Dunvegan, Skye.

“Patrick Mòr”

Patrick Mòr was a very diligent composer of piobaireachd, and his compositions are of the highest standard. He had eight sons, who it is related accompanied their father one Sunday to church, and before the end of the year seven of them were buried in the churchyard of Kilmuir. Patrick Mòr was stricken with grief and broken-hearted. Indeed, he was grieved to the very heart, and his grief found vent in that most touching and beautiful “Lament”—“Cumha na Cloinne” (The Children’s Lament).

“Patrick Òg”

Patrick Òg was a piper of fame, and left many fine pupils behind him, as well as compositions of the finest pipe. He taught John MacKay, Gairloch’s Blind Piper, who was known as John Dall, and when he heard of Patrick Òg’s death, he composed a beautiful “Lament” entitled “Patrick Òg MacCrimmon’s Lament” which shall perpetuate his memory and link this great MacCrimmon’s name with the “Ceòl Mòr of the Celt” for all time. Patrick Òg and John Dall MacKay were connected by ties which were more than ordinary master and pupil.

John Dall saw Patrick Òg in a manner that the ordinary person could not, even though the former was blind. The Blind Piper knew no other piobaireachd player in the whole world who could hold a candle to Patrick Òg when MacKay could pick Patrick Òg’s performance out of a “thousand pipers.”

“Donald Bàn”

Donald Bàn was the most unfortunate of all the MacCrimmon pipers, for he died on the field of battle at “The Rout of Moy” in 1746. He was no coward, although the circumstances connected with his death was a misfortune. MacLeod of Dunvegan took the field for King George, but although the family piper followed his master, yet in his inward heart MacCrimmon’s kind and loyal sympathy favoured the Prince more than his lawful King.

In the heat of battle the valiant piper stood by his chieftain at whose side he was shot dead in the act of playing the brave clansmen of Dunvegan to victory.
“Cha till MacCruimein”

Strange to say Donald Bàn was the only piper known to have composed his own “Lament” in his own lifetime. Prior to leaving Dunvegan he struck up the piobaireachd “MacCrimmon Will Never Return.”

Donald Bàn had a strange feeling in his mind that he would not return to his beloved Halls of Dunvegan, as he expressed his thoughts to his sweetheart through his pipe in the above-named “Lament.”

To make his sorrow complete and record it for all time, this sweetheart composed a beautiful poem to commemorate the untimely death of beloved Donald Bàn, which is sung to this day as the piobaireachd is played.

Donald Bàn fulfilled all the functions of piper at Dunvegan while he was there in the flesh, but his premature death was the means of drawing his duties to a close earlier than might have otherwise been; nevertheless, he was one of MacLeod’s best piobaireachd players, and a composer of merit.

“John MacCrimmon”

Eain went far afield to seek fame as a piper, as we find him piper to the Earl of Seaforth. He was the son of Patrick Òg and he inherited his piping powers from his father. As a performer he was in the front rank of his day, and he was a composer of equal merit with his forefathers. John possessed that power of creation in piobaireachd which is only found in a few.

“The Glen Is Mine”

One day Eain was going through Glen Sheil with Seaforth, and he played “S’Leam Fein An Gleann” above indicated, which paid Seaforth the great complement of hearing his piper say to him through his emphatic notes that “The Glen” was Seaforth’s. The tune is a simple one, but in his simplicity Eain enshrines its greatness. It is one of the finest examples of a perfectly constructed piobaireachd extant.

“Malcolm MacCruimein”

Malcolm, an unusual name for a MacCrimmon, was the first son of Patrick Òg and a brother to John already dealt with. He succeeded his father as hereditary piper to MacLeod, and as master of the school at Boreraig. Malcolm, bearing a fine Highland name, was said to be very tall and well-built. He was of a very quiet nature, but a fine player of piobaireachd. Unlike many of his predecessors, he loved to play the pipes more than any other thing, which his will could make his hands perform. He could teach with skillful care, and spent most of his time in playing the compositions of his forefathers. He died and left two sons named John Dubh, and Donald Ruadh.
“John MacCrimmon”

John Dubh, son of Malcolm, was the last of this celebrated race of pipers. He was not a performer like the best of his name, but that was not his fault. Nature does not always bestow gifts with a lavish hand unceasingly, and for that reason all greatness comes to an end sometime or other as it did in this instance.

John could play piobaireachd, his beloved music, at all events, and about 1796 he left his ancient habitation. John Dubh lived the remainder of his life in his native Isle in the quietude of retirement, and as he sat under the Cuchullins while the sun shone brightly upon his feeble frame, he ran over the notes of the “Great Music” upon his staff, which helped his limbs along to the end of the road—a long life of 91 years.

That he died in the year 1822 we are sure, thus bringing to a close the longest line of pipers who ever lived. We know a great deal about this extraordinary race of piobaireachd creators and performers, but if one day we may luckily unearth material which will expose the real origin of the MacCrimmons there would be sufficient material to complete the storehouse of their achievements which stands beside us barely a quarter full.

“The Creators of Piobaireachd”

If we have reason to believe that the MacCrimmons were the original creators of piobaireachd, let us consider for one moment how far back into the unknown this would take us as regards the computation of time.

First of all, they had to find an instrument, and make it perfect. Then they had to create a scale to regulate their compositions, and make it perfect, and finally they had to cultivate their piobaireachd.

All this must have taken hundreds of years in the accomplishment of such a gigantic task, which actually took place long before we have any record of how it was done.

The whole process was completely finished at Skye where we now begin to know of the masters of Boreraig, which would be somewhere about 1500 or 1600 A.D.

“Dunvegan”

Like an oasis in the desert, Dunvegan is a green spot in the Island of the Mist, where the traveler can sit down, rest a while, and enter into intercourse with those uncanny creatures who dwell in the secret recesses of the neighborhood. If perchance the traveler be a piper with a keen imaginative ear he will hear the plaintiff pipe of the great MacCrimmon sounding his piobaireachd on the old Castle ramparts while the angry billows break upon the rocks below.

But who is he who would dare to play upon the pipe on that spot unless he has been initiated into the “Master’s Secrets” and play the Taorluath as he played it, and perform the crunluath as he made it; for within Dunvegan’s precincts the MacLeod was used to performances in piobaireachd of the very highest order.
Edinburgh Castle
Dunvegan is a most wonderful edifice. In the days of old it stood as a sentinel upon the seashore, and watched o’er hill and dale for the stranger who, lurking about, might seek to invade it. The Castle has its lofty battlements on which the MacCrimmon used to play under the gathering clouds of night as he sent forth his notes of warning to his master, while the beacon shed its light on all who came within reach of it for miles around.

There is the Festive Hall where the Chieftain entertained his friends to the finest of Highland hospitality. The tuneful pipe of the MacCrimmon is still there, and it only requires his magic hand to touch it again; to make the air vibrate with genuine Gaelic music. The most wonderful thing of all is the old “Fairy Flag,” which is enshrined in a MacCrimmon piobaireachd named after it: the “Fairy Flag,” and this flag has been known to appear suddenly flying at full length upon the Castle battlements when anything extraordinary was going to happen to the MacLeod or any of his family. This flag is still preserved at Dunvegan Castle, where it can be seen to this day.

Every stone of the house of Dunvegan could tell a tale; every room could supply an exhaustive chapter of events that would make one’s hair stand on end and his blood grow cold or become overheated as the tide of events rose and fell when the power of the Chieftain over his clan was unlimited. Indeed, a single volume could not contain the history of the home of the MacLeod’s who have lived in a long and continuous line from time immemorial.

“In the MacCrimmon School”

The MacCrimmon School was at Boreraig a few miles from Dunvegan Castle. The building must have been a considerable size for those days of hundreds of years ago. There was the part of the house where the family lived, the part where the pupils were put up, and there was also the single room in which MacCrimmon taught his pupils.

MacCrimmon always taught his pupils one by one, personally, and this was a rule most strictly adhered to by the Master, although it is related that in cases of great emergency his daughter could superintend the School for a short period. This daughter used to steal out quietly to the place or rock called “The Piper’s Study,” and their indulge in a tune on a favourite set of her father’s pipes.

When each pupil had his period of supervision and instructions from MacCrimmon, he had to retire to another apartment in winter, and in summer to a ledge on a rock near the seashore in order to practices tunes.

Every pupil got the same attention. There was no differentiation in the one from the other; and not only were the pupils instructed in the performance of piobaireachd, but also in its composition.

The period required to make a piper altogether was that he should listen to good piobaireachd playing for seven years, with a seven years apprenticeship, and seven years practice; with the additional pedigree of seven generations before him. But strange to say, the MacCrimmons were the only race of pipers who could boast of such a record. Nevertheless, many very fine pipers were turned out of the Boreraig School in the seven years apprenticeship, and some of them, as has already been indicated, could compose piobaireachd within that period.
If we have anything of an imaginative mind, let us go back to the seventeenth century, and pay a visit to the Boreraig School of Piping. We stand on the threshold of MacCrimmon’s door and knock gently, and happily gain admission to the secret chamber.

Let us now turn on a modern searchlight: see MacCrimmon to the inmost core, and endeavour to gain possession of his secrets. The apartment being well-lighted, everything came under the eye in minute detail.

But what came we out to see? True, MacCrimmon was there, and his pupil also. An oil “crusie” with its dim light hung upon the wall of a simple four-sided chamber of somewhat small dimensions. A bright peat fire was going upon the hearth and there was a keen odor of peat reek in the atmosphere. There were no pictures of any kind to adorn the walls, but upon the rafters overhead lay some dried fish and a store of cheese which were intended to provide the winter’s store. Neither was there any bookshelf containing its volumes of music, for such material was useless to the great MacCrimmon who never thought it necessary to prepare a manuscript.

A simple wooden chair sat at either side of a low fireplace, and a plain deal table stood at one side of the chamber below a small window. MacCrimmon himself was in the act of instructing his pupil. MacCrimmon was a man of medium height, well-built, well clad in homespuns of the MacLeod tartan, and his body appeared to be well nourished. There was a pleasant expression upon his face, but he was giving nothing away.

His pupil was tall and powerfully built, but he had the misfortune of being blonde. They held in their hands a chanter each, but while strangers were present they were silent. The Master’s pipe lay upon the simple table, but it offered no note of welcome nor disapproval of its uninvited visitors.

That was all that was to be seen even under the powerful rays of a dazzling light. In reality there was nothing in this room that “moth and rust could corrupt, or thieves break through and steal,” and yet there were stored there matters of priceless value:—“The genuine secrets of the great MacCrimmon School.”

But should MacCrimmon have been so minded as to offer voluntarily to his visitors the instruments at his disposal they would have been of no use to them, for the stranger could not play them with the same agility and sweetness of charm as MacCrimmon did, so for the moment let us extinguish our light and quit the chamber.

“The MacCrimmon Method of Teaching”

If perchance we return to that most wonderful room at the master’s invitation in the cool of the late Autumn evening with the bright peat fire bidding us welcome, and the ancient “Crusie” throwing out its sombre light, what happens?

There we stand face to face with the great Patrick Òg MacCrimmon in person and Iain Dall MacKay his pupil at their work. They sit by the fire opposite each other, and the pupil is accompanied
by the Master playing note for note of a beautiful old-time MacCrimmon piobaireachd which has never seen paper. It was a study worthy of the chisel of Michelangelo himself. The expression on their faces was thus:–the pupil was eager to catch the expression of each note. While the eye was sightless, the ear made good its defect, for no note however intricate escaped Iain Dall’s doubly sensitive ear.

But the Master’s face was beaming with delight as he imparted to his pupil that ancient classic in his art which, apart from the music, told its peculiar and wonderful tale. Iain Dall was the apple of the Master’s eye, and he withheld nothing from him.

They played the Urlar several times over together, and finally Patrick Òg ceased to play. He then chanted his verbal syllables in unison with his pupil’s chanter as a guide to the finishing stages of the pupil’s completely memorising the groundwork. The same took place with the intricate variations, and finally MacCrimmon played the entire tune upon his great pipe. Thus, the pupil had transferred to him the same expression, the same fingering, and the same art of putting his heart and soul into his performance as MacCrimmon himself had.

“The Taorluath and Crunluath”

Special attention was paid by the master to the “Taorluath” and Crunluath” variations. The MacCrimmon imparted them to MacKay in a very slow movement, bringing out every turn with clear and distinct regularity. The Taorluath variation had its three syllables, and the Crunluath its five syllables to each movement. There the great old world drama closed, and we saw the mainland, bidding adieu to the two most wonderful piobaireachd players which the old world, or the new, has ever seen.

“The MacCrimmon Secrets”

The MacCrimmons kept their secrets well, for no pupil every carried away upon parchment any piece of music for the pipe.

True, they chanted their music in a verbal syllabic method which was known as “Canntaireachd,” but they knew no notation, nor did they recognise “Canntaireachd” as such. They knew better than to attempt to write down their piobaireachd, even if they could or felt inclined to do so, as it would only have been carried away and abused, most probably by cunning imposters.
“False Notation”

Other men who came along after the MacCrimmons, and who did not understand their music, have written down piobaireachd in a spurious syllabic form. Indeed, more is being made of them than even the Masters of Boreraig or Angus MacKay, who was the first piper to preserve piobaireachd in Staff Notation, or a notation of any kind, so that we might know that “Great Music” today. But these spurious attempts are futile when it has been proved by nonexistence that the MacCrimmons never wrote or used a notation of any kind for the purpose of recording piobaireachd.

The syllables which the Masters of the Boreraig school chanted, and were known as “Canntaireachd,” were only intended to be a guide for their pupils to enable them to memorise long piobaireachdan. The music came from the pipe first-hand, and that alone. When Boreraig was at its best, the preservation and transmission of ancient piobaireachd did not depend upon written signs, but from the hand of the MacCrimmon and his tuneful pipe.

“Greatest Composers of Piobaireachd”

The MacCrimmons were the greatest composers of as well as the greatest teachers and finest performers. They composed in all, so far as we have them preserved, about thirty piobaireachdan with their names attached to them as composers, and there are also over two hundred authorless tunes, many of which could be safely assigned to the MacCrimmon’s name.

The ease with which they composed piobaireachd was surprising, and their style could not be mistaken by the expert piobaireachd scholar. If Iain Dall MacKay could tell the playing of Patrick Òg amongst a thousand pipers, the expert piobaireachd scholar could have little difficult in telling a MacCrimmon tune amongst that of a thousand composers. Many of their compositions were dedicated to their patrons, the Chieftains of the clan MacLeod, at Dunvegan, Skye.

The MacCrimmon compositions are full of musical culture and charm. Each bar is ingeniously worked into the one which follows it. Their phrasing is most perfect in its form, while their rhythmic exactness is a masterpiece in this very peculiar class of classical music. The construction of each tune is clearly defined. The “Salute” is of a cheerful nature; the “Lament” is doleful; the “Gathering” has its hurried notes; the “Warning” has its grave accent; while the “Battle Tune’s” predominate notes are victory or death.

“Unmistakable In Form”

No one who knows piobaireachd would mistake the “Gathering” for the “Lament,” or “The Battle Tune” for the “Salute.” There are notes or movements peculiar to the “Lament” alone, and should not be found in the “Gathering,” and the “Gathering” movements should not be found in any other species of tunes but itself. The MacCrimmon piobaireachd with a “Taorluath” and Crunluath-a-mach had no “Fosgailte” or “Breabach” movements, and where the latter movements occurred in a piobaireachd it had no “mach.” The laws which govern ancient Piobaireachd, like many others of our ancient customs of the Highlanders, were unwritten, but they are nevertheless there and strictly adhered to.
“Musical Charm”

“Music hath Charms,” in all its forms, but much more so in this peculiar classical music of the Great Highland pipe in so far as the Highlander himself is concerned. If to be a stranger to this pipe is “a gaiety lost,” then the piper who does not know the music of the MacCrimmons, or has never been initiated into the secrets of that realm of music which possesses the sweetest charm of all Celtic melodies, has missed much that is particularly grand.

“Musical Genius”

It is no exaggeration nor individually-fancied expression to say that piobaireachd possesses a deep well of refreshing inspiration and musical genius as it is discoursed upon the Great Pipe of today. To play one or two of the MacCrimmon of a night gives the performer newness of life, and dispels from his mind the blight of sorrow, the ravages of time, and bids dull care be gone, for the charm of piping warms the blood, and inspires the heart to live in that lofty region where music dwells untainted by the materialism of the modern age.

“A Memorial”

It behooves us then, to inscribe this record of achievement as a memorial to a great piping race, and those who have handed down their compositions to us. The MacCrimmons created an art of which they may well have been proud, and the MacKays and MacKenzies had passed it on to us pure and un tarnished as it left Boreraig.

While they have all done their duty to piobaireachd, and have long since gone to rest, let us be up and doing, so that by our efforts we may stem the tide that makes rude inroads on our heritage and seeks to destroy it.

“Ups and Downs”

Every great Art has its ups and downs: its decades of successes and failures, and ancient piobaireachd is now passing through its most trying season, but still it shall live and weather the storm.

“The Ruins of Ancient Glory”

Alas! Boreraig is in ruins, but we still linger by that hollow spot whence came the art of piobaireachd it is ancient glory, and those of us who play upon the Great Highland Bagpipe will always

“Cruimhnich Ceòl MhicCruimein”

The happy memories of the past and the fond visions of the days of other years—they haunt the mind and reawaken the musical genius of the soul while the eye looks wistfully

“Air ais gu Sgoil MhicCruimein.”
The Spey at Aberlour
Am Port Leathach

The Half Finished Piobaireachd
Am Port Leathach

The Half Finished Piobaireachd

Uillar

Variation First

Double of Variation First

Tamlusadh Breiteach
Composed by,

Patrick Òg MacCrimmon,
and
John Dall MacKay

Boreraig, Skye, Date Unknown
Historical Note
on
The Half Finished Piobaireachd

This piobaireachd is so called from its having been the joint composition of Patrick Òg MacCrimmon and John Dall MacKay. Patrick intended to visit MacDonald of Clanranald, then in the Island of Uist, and was desirous of procuring a piobaireachd suitable to the occasion and complementary to the Lady MacDonald, for which purpose he retired to his private apartment. He there commenced the Urlar or Ground work, two parts of which he repeated many times without being able to please himself exactly with another, when MacKay, who had placed himself to listen unobserved at the door, struck up a measure so well adapted to those which his master had been playing, that opening the door with delight, MacCrimmon exclaimed, “Ah! You have done it, and the tune shall be called, ‘Am Port Leathach’.”
Castle Campbell
Oh, Isle of the Mist long since have I left thee,
But my spirit still haunts Dunvegan’s great walls.
So sweetly I’ve piped in the day at its dawning;
While late in the evenings I’ve gladdened its halls.

MacCrimmon

When a pleasure becomes a duty, it is no more a pleasure. In other words, piping was a pleasure long, long before it became a duty. That is to say, the first of pipers piped for their own pleasurable amusement, when primitive man had no other musical instrument. That the early music of the pipes was crude is an undisputed fact, but even in its earliest stages it possessed charms which enchanted the soul. In our time we find the Highland Chieftain who had attached to his household a piper who had duties allotted to him, for which he bound himself to an employer, and in due season received his wages. The piper to the Chieftain was a bound servant who had to obey, and being so he had to pipe to the Chieftain and to him only.

“Nature’s Music”

When we go to the Highlands, more especially in summer and climb the very highest mountains, there we are face-to-face with nature itself. Nature has its musicians who pipe and sing nature’s praises and those musicians receive no mercenary remuneration. Take for instance the lark: it pipes its beautiful notes from morning to evening and it receives no reward. This tiny bird is protected and fed by nature, and it pays back mother nature with its charming melodies. After the lark has had its meal, it soars away up into the skies to repay its benefactor for all its blessings, and while it pipes its sacrifice of praise, primitive man extols the laverock for its pretty song. Thus, the lark taught man in his infancy how to find pleasure for himself and bestow a portion of that pleasure upon his fellow creatures.

“The First Piper”

But how did the first piper in the Highlands of Scotland first get his pipe? Was it not from nature? Yes! The pipe is a pastoral instrument. It was the shepherd who first created the pipe. Had he not got as much ingenuity in his head as the Greek, the Egyptian, or the Roman? I am quite satisfied from what I have traced in the history of the Highland bagpipe and its music that he had, and even more. The shepherds who lived in the Highlands of Scotland were endowed with the greatest of gifts. In the Spring of the year, after the little lambs were born and reached the age of four or five weeks, there was much time in the shepherd’s daily routine which hung heavily upon his hands. Many things can produce sounds which would suggest to him a method by which he could ultimately invent a pipe. The wind whistling through a crevice in his hut upon the mountainside, or the soft Western breeze blowing through the fallen reed by the loch side. By lifting the broken reed, which was hollow...
from one end to the other, the shepherd had only to make holes in its side, and insert another musical reed in one end of the tube, and there he had primitive notes from a primitive pipe. The Elderberry tree adapted itself very much to primitive pipe making, for the shepherd had only to push out the soft matter from the inside of the piece of branch, and there again he had a pipe in its first stages. Knots form upon the Elderberry canes about a foot apart, and if the piece of cane is cut just above these knots one can get a piece of cane a foot in length before it comes to another knot. At the end of the cane, then, there will be a knot, and at the other end a through hole. All that had to be done in the first days of piping was to fit a playing reed into the end of the cane with its knot, and make holes in the side of the cane which would form a simple pipe. Then again, as time passed, science was applied to labour, and the pipe took a more perfect shape, until it became a recognised musical instrument.

“The Piper”

The piper got his name from being able to play upon the pipe. As the shepherd piped his companions called him a piper, and thus from the earliest times the performer upon the pipe was looked upon as a “man o’ pairts,” or music has always been recognised as a fine art. In fact, the pipe is still looked upon as the first musical instrument, whence came the organ itself.

For centuries, then, piping was a pleasure to the piper, just the same as singing was to the lark. In the far back days the piper played for the sake of piping, purely and simply, but his piping soon became part of his daily life. The sheep and even the birds of the air lingered about the shepherd while he performed upon his pipe of peace. Then the Highlanders from far and near gathered round the piper, and danced away the hours merrily to the magic notes of the pipes.

“A Powerful Instrument”

By this means the pipe soon became a very powerful instrument. Its music had also a powerful effect upon the emotions of the Highland heart, because it could rejoice with those who rejoiced and mourn with those who mourned. In the hour of festivity the music of the pipe could make Highlanders both old and young, male and female, dance lightheartedly, either upon the green turf in the summer, or in the great halls of the castle in winter. In the hour of sorrow, the sad notes of the “Lament” tapped the fount of tears and was a solace to the hearts of the bereaved while they wended their way through the gline with the funeral cortège to pay the last respects to their own loved ones.

“The Highland Clans”

At a very early date in the annals of Highland history the Highlanders of Scotland banded themselves together into tribes or clans. Over these tribes of long ago, or clans, as they were ultimately known, was placed a leader who was recognised as their chieftain. The chieftain was practically speaking, a despot in his own territory. He could hang a man as a farmer would shoot a crow, and he could declare war upon a neighbouring clan at will, even without warning.

This chieftain was a person of very keen intellect as well as being endowed with great courage. He knew his clansmen’s habits and their nature as well as they did themselves, and the time came when he singled out the pipe as an instrument that would not only serve him in peace, but in war also. Therefore, the chieftain of the clan attached the piper to his retinue and gave him a respected place
there. The piper was no more a pastoral shepherd, but a member of the household of his chief. Although he was in a higher rank as a piper than an hired man who tended the flocks, yet the piper ceased to pipe to his fellow clansmen for pleasure and became a duty-bound follower of his chieftain. The piping which gave the shepherd pleasure when he tended his flocks ceased to be a pleasure altogether and at last became a duty which he had to perform at his chieftain’s will or decree.

“A Solo Instrument”

The pipe is purely a solo instrument. It is in this form that one can hear it at its best. Pipe bands are a modern idea and have only come into use for military purposes. A pipe band is certainly a necessity in a Highland regiment, both in peace and war. To the music of the pipes the Highlanders march lightly, and no other music can equal that of the pipe as regards its power to rouse the martial spirit of the soldier. The drum is required in a pipe band as a time regulator, but the drum forms no part of pipe music, and certainly drums do not enhance pipe music.

“The Castle of the Chief”

Leaving out the army altogether, the piper is in his native element at the castle. From time immemorial the Highland piper has piped in and around the castle of the chieftain of his clan. It is in this connection that the music of the pipe is cherished in its highest form as an art which portrays the great dramas of Highland life.

From ancient records we read that “ane pyper playit on ane pype” to the King, and an entry appears in the exchequer's accounts as being fees paid to the casual piper who had piped for a short time in the Royal Palace, but at that time the piper formed no part of the Royal retinue.

Piping is now a Royal art, and has been altogether for about an hundred years, when Queen Victoria was the first crowned head to adopt a piper. Piobaireachd, the classical music of the Highland pipe was a Royal art long before the pipe was permanently adopted by the late Queen as can be seen from the titles of Royal Piobaireachd handed down to us by the great pioneers of Ceòl Mór.

“An Ancient Custom”

Some three or four hundred years ago a piper was a man of no mean standing. He was admired by his master, who even gave him a servant or gillie to carry his pipe, and see that it came to no harm when it was not in use. The chieftain’s piper was a thoroughly trained musician, and his duties were entirely confined to piping alone.

The good old days are now gone when the piper was employed at the residence of the Highland laird or chieftain, because Scottish land owners have been ruined by taxation and the import of foreign produce, together with the fact that a piper is too expensive to keep up to do nothing else but play the pipes. His Majesty the King is about the only person who now keeps a piper, and the pipes can still be heard at Balmoral Castle when the Royal family are in residence there.
Corgarff Castle
"The Piper's Duties"

When the chieftain had power over his clan the piper had to go to the field of battle, and this is proved in the case of Donald Ban MacCrimmon when he followed his chieftain, the Laird of Dunvegan in '45, and fell mortally wounded at the Rout of Moy in that year. Donald Ban, however, was the last piper to fall in action while in the service of a Highland Chieftain. Since then better days have dawned, and the power of the clans has been broken altogether.

Between the years 1760 and 1899, a few short years, the piper held his last respected office. During that period quite a number of gentlemen employed pipers.

The piper's duties consisted mainly of two important performances per day. In the early morning, about eight or nine o'clock, the laird's piper played around the castle, while the laird and his guests dressed for breakfast. In the summer and winter alike, the piper played three times round the castle every morning except Sunday. He had to abide by the exact number of rounds for often the laird kept count, and when the piper miscalculated either way, over or under, he was instantly checked by the laird after the breakfast was over. Some pipers piped inside in stormy weather, but when I was "the laird's piper" myself I piped in the New Year's morning outside amongst frost and snow.

During the day the piper had no set duties, but he piped as required, although it was very seldom that his master call upon him to do duty in the forenoon or afternoon, except on some special occasions. Usually when the piper had no other duties to perform, he spent his spare time in practising new tunes and revising any old ones which he had to some extent neglected.

The piper has much to do in order to make himself efficient in his art. Piobaireachd, the classical music of the pipe, is by no means short tunes, and as they have to be memorised it takes a long time to commit twenty or thirty pieces to memory. Thus, where the piper is of an enthusiastic nature he has much with which to fill in his time.

"The Composition of Pipe Music"

The laird's piper was expected to be capable of composing original tunes, and the MacCrimmons taught their pupils while at Boreraig to create original compositions as well as to play ancient piobaireachd. There are many outstanding events in the daily happenings at the Castle of a Highland chieftain which the talented piper could record in his Ceòl Mòr by composing original tunes to commemorate an event such as the birth of an heir or the marriage of a son or a daughter of his master. A Lament is a very sad tune, and one does not wish specially to compose a sad piece, but when death came to the master, in the olden days, the piper composed a Lament for the chieftain when he died. The special Lament was in some instances played by the family piper as he preceded his master's body down the glen to its last resting place. When visitors left the castle very often the piper composed a "Farewell" which bade them adieu, and this tune also expressed regret at their departure.

"The Evening's Duties"

The principle duty which the piper prepared himself for was piping in the late evening after dinner. About 9:00 p.m. while the ladies and gentlemen partook of desert, the piper, in full dress played
to the company. In a house or castle where provision is made for the pipes, the piper strikes up his pipes in a recess off a long corridor or gallery, and enters the dining room. He plays three times round the dining room table, and the piper must be careful to see that he marches round the table in the orthodox manner, i.e., to march round with the sun, bearing in mind that he plays only three times round the table. He must not play more than three times round the table nor less, just the same as piping around the castle in the morning. While the piper plays round the table he plays a March, and after he leaves the dining room he returns to the corridor, where he plays a complete piobaireachd, and finishes the evening’s performance with a Strathspey and Reel.

“Piper’s Repertoire”

The piper’s repertoire must of necessity be an extensive one, because he is expected at least to give a whole month’s performances without repeating the same tune. It is not to be wondered at that a piper expects to do nothing else because much work is entailed in preparing and memorising so many different pieces. In most cases the piper is left to select his own tunes for the days programmes, but in the event of his master asking for special tunes for special occasions, the piper must be prepared to play those pieces which his master calls for. The master pays the piper, and he has a right to call for the tune, hence the origin of the old proverb “The man who pays the piper calls the tune.”

“A Dignified Duty and a Sacred Instrument”

The piper performs a dignified duty, and his pipe was a sacred instrument. Sacred, because it combined in a harmony all that was dear to the Highland heart, for the music of the ancient pipe reconstructed the scenes of old and rehearsed the great dramas of everyday life in the Highlands of Scotland.

“Ancient Carvings”

It is surprising to find that we have intelligent men who look upon the ancient carvings of a pig playing upon the bagpipe with any degree of dignified respect.\(^5\)

Such engravings can only be looked upon and regarded as the essence of sarcastic frivolity by men of intellectual genius.

Even in the twentieth century it seems pitiful to think that time and again as people visit an ancient cathedral or abbey (people who would appear to have an offhand interest in the Highland bagpipe) they continue to bring up the old carvings as examples of ancient popularity, with apparent delight.

\(^5\)A pig playing a bagpipe is a common motif in artwork of the late Middle Ages. See http://ferrebeekeeper.wordpress.com/2011/01/05/gothic-pig-playing-bagpipes/. 
Such carvings were the work of some vulgar monks who apparently hated the pipe, and the Pope himself applauded the engraver.

Let anyone put the pig into the Monastery pulpit, and one would hear a very different story.

Those monkish engravers may have been better skilled in carving a pig than engraving an angel, for instance where there would have been genius and beauty, but it is certainly no complement to the pipe of any nation to see a pig play upon it.

One can associate the pig with a frying pan to some advantage, but to have such an unclean animal performing upon such a sacred instrument as the Highland bagpipe is nothing short of sacrilege.

The pipe is an instrument second to none in the world for its peculiar charm. The Highland piper, when he is arrayed in full dress, commands the attention of men and women of whatever cast. There is no pipe to compare with the Great Highland bagpipe, and the educated piper receives a warm reception by all classes of people the world over. In the first days of piping the playing of pipe music was to the piper a pleasure. His music lighten his labour; it made love a sweeter passion, and it raised his drooping spirits when no other thing in the wide world could cheer him. There was the middle age of piping when it became a duty, and to a great extent the pleasure ceased. Then the Highland chieftain compelled the piper to pipe when and where it pleased his fickle tastes, and on occasion the piper looked upon his beloved instrument even with bitter dislike.

Again, however, piping is returning to its first and natural condition. It is a case of history repeating itself. I have piped myself as a pleasure, and I have piped as a duty, but again I am proud to say that I pipe again for pleasure, and purely for the love of the art, which never loses its savor.

On many occasions I have been called upon to pipe to gatherings both large and small, and if that be called a duty, then I have had great pleasure in it, for we all owe a duty to one another as we march along the road of life. The Highland bagpipe with its music creates joy in the hearts of those who are Highland. It has done so since the earliest of times, and the music of the pipe still retains its peculiar charm.

The piper owes the first great duty to himself, and if he pipes to touch the tender chords of his own heart, and causes them to vibrate with ecstasy, he will cause his audience to share his pleasure, and they shall enjoy the music which has prompted men to perform deeds that have won our empire.
Duart Castle
The Piper’s Dress

Oblivion is the custodian of many a secret, because those secrets have been consigned to oblivion in the very earliest ages. This grim custodian clings to its possessions with a tenacity which surpasses the most cunning wiles of man in his futile endeavour to recover that which he has lost. Oblivion is the abyss into which the history of the origin of our picturesque Highland dress has fallen, and until now no one has been able to rescue from the mists of antiquity the genuine form of the first kilt which was worn by our forefathers, or the secret of the making of their tartan.

As our bagpipe is erroneously supposed to have come from the far East, tartan is described by some as nothing other than “Joseph’s coat of many colours.” Be that as it may to the Sassenach or the uninterested, but as Highlanders who are proud of our native dress we think and believe otherwise.

“Warm to the Tartan”

Although Sir Walter Scott was in reality no Highlander in the actual sense of the word, how many people the wide world over have read and reread, quoted and requoted the following words which came from his great Scottish heart?

“The heart of MacCailean More will be as cold as death can make it when it does not warm to the tartan.”

Tartan was invented long before we have any authentic record of its creation. The appearance of the tartan in its many colours proves that our earliest ancestors had an eye to beauty. They did not like the humdrum hodden grey, and the black and white of the shepherd’s tartan was too tame for them. A thing of beauty was to them hundreds of years ago what it is to us, their descendants, now “a joy forever,” and they gloried in their tartan. They lived and died in it, and many a yard of the same tartan has been steeped in the blood of the brave. Many a Highland laddie courted his fair sweetheart while they were both attired in the tartan, and when the cauld Januar’ win’ blew, the hero of the mountain sang sweetly:

Come under my plaidie, the nicht’s gan tae fa’.
Come in frae the cauld blast, the drift an’ the sna’.
Come under my plaidie, come sit doon beside me.
Believe me, dear lassie, there’s room in’t for twa.”

as he protected his jewel from the approaching storm.

“Native Dyes”

But long before the process of wrapping up sweethearts in the tartan took place, the tartan had to be found. There was plenty of wool in the Highlands, but it could only be got in natural colours of black and white. These two colours formed what is still known as “Shepherd Tartan.”
There was no clash in this prosaic tartan. It was void of colour. The Highlander even of old did not look smart in it either at Kirk or Market. And when the youthful heilan’ man went to visit his sweetheart in the black and white tartan, she complained to him, saying that it looked odd, and made him sad and dull-looking. It was the colour of a dress more after that which would be worn by an old woman when she crooned the “Coronach.”

Soon the Highlander made a search for colour’s with which to die his beloved tartan. He had not to go far afield to find natural herbs for which he could extract a number of the fastest of dyes, such as Alder Tree Bark, for Black; Blice Berry with alum, for Blue; Litchen for Yellowish Brown; White Litchen, for Crimson; Willow Bark, for Flesh colour; Broom, for Green; Dandelion, for Magenta; Bramble, for Orange; Sundew, for Purple; Rock Litchen, for Red; Limestone Litchen, for Scarlet; Wild Cress, for Violet; and Bog Myrtle, for Yellow. The making of tartan was not only a case of the putting together of colour’s in strikes. What is and always has been known as tartan was the designing of its check, or sett in an artistic manner.

Dyes extracted from the plants which the Highlander found at his own door proved to be fast in colour, and were unfadeable. Each clan fixed the pattern and colours of its own tartan, and when a clan had finally settled the design of his tartan, that tartan with its particular setting became a patent or copyright to the clan concerned only, by unwritten law. There was very little fear of one clan using another’s tartan, for very few of the clans had a particular liking for each other. More or less the one clan looked upon the tartan of another with disdain. No clan ever made a claim to a special number of colours in its tartan. A beautiful tartan did not depend upon a great number of colours; so much as even three or four colours well set.

**The Kilt**

As I have already indicated, oblivion is the custodian of all information regarding the origin of the Highland dress, so that there is little use of our endeavouring to cull from this silent connoisseur any inkling of what form the first kilt really took.

We read various expressions of opinion, and hear many tales about the form of the kilt in its infancy, but those of us who wear it, and know something more about it than that which we have read or listen to, do not pay so much attention to theory as practice.

It is stated by some that a piece of tartan was folded into pleats upon the ground and that the Highlander then lay down upon it, and gathered it round his body with a belt which fixed it to his waist. But, I can hardly conceive that at any period of his existence the ingenious Highlander would resort to such an ill shaken-up method of adorning his body with a dress of any kind.

The primitive state of wrapping cloth round the body or loins must have long since passed away, and by the time that the Highlander got the length of producing a beautiful cloth in the shape of tartan, the dress that he prepared that material for must have assumed a more definite shape than mere “swaddling clothes,” or a simple wrapper.
“One Piece Dress”

There seems to be fairly good authority from records which we do possess that the Highland costume was at first a one-piece dress, but even that form was soon found to be cumbersome, and the doublet or coat was separated from the actual kilt. There is no doubt that the kilt as we wear it now cannot be beaten for convenience, comfort and elegance. It is simple to put on, comfortable to wear, and if its colour be bright red it always takes the admirers eye, whose heart warms immediately to the tartan.

“Ashamed of Trews”

When Highlanders were compelled by act of Parliament, for a time, to discard the kilt, this is something like what they said to one another—I quote their own word:

“Though compelled to wear breeches as our dress, hateful to us is the fashion by which our legs are now constrained; heretofore we moved boldly and erect with our belted plaids. Alas! We are now disgraced. Since we have appeared in this detested garb we can scarcely recognise each other at feast or fair. I have seen the day I would answer the man with contempt who should tell me that I even should ever wear so unmanly a costume—so foreign to my kindred. Now our heads are thatched with dingy hats and our backs with clumsy cossacks. Our smartness and our picturesque appearance are gone. Alas! How unfit is our new dress for ascending mountains, and coming down from the heights we blush in it when in the presence of the fair.”

To say the least of it, the state of affairs regarding the Highland dress was deplorable after the Rising of ’45, and if the Highlander erred in following Prince Charlie he had to pay the penalty. His dress was taken from him, as was also his Skean Dhu and Dirk. These ornaments, along with his kilt, the Highlander cherished because there was no dress like the kilt to him, and the Dirk was very handy, too, for when occasion required he made a queer puncture in the “bread basket” of his enemy. Indeed an old Highlander himself once remarked, “At the pattle of Culloden she got a nasty rent just pelow her puffy petts with a black Dirk, an’ she was nefer ta’ same person after that.”

“The Dress of Kings”

Since the Rising of ’45 better days have dawned and the Highlander has been restored to the freedom of wearing his native dress, which is not only worn by the humble Highlander and his chieftain, but by Kings and princes of the royal blood. From far back times kings have not thought it derogatory to their high station in life to don the kilt.

“Queen Victoria”

Queen Victoria loved the tartan, and although the Stuart tartan was hers by right, yet her late Majesty had a special tartan design for herself which she called the “Victoria Tartan.” King Edward loved the kilt, and his Majesty King George wears it together with the heir apparent to the British Crown.
“The Piper’s Dress”

There is no prettier dress the wide world over than the piper’s dress. The piper is privileged whether in private life or otherwise to wear a dress which becomes a King.

It is the dress combined with the weird skirl o’ the pipes that makes the piper a particular musician. He wears a peculiar dress, plays a peculiar music, and in many cases speaks a peculiar language.

Let us detail the piper’s instruments and his dress. If his pipes be of the best they will be “Peter Henderson’s, Glasgow,” for he has made their creation a fine art. They can be dressed in Royal Stuart tartan, with silken cords and tassels, while the royal ribband flutters playfully in the gentle breeze as the stirring notes of the “Gathering of the Clans” float hurriedly down the glen, and far over the hilltops.

“The Kilt”

The kilt is the principal part of the Highland dress, for without it there would be no Highland piper. If a piper bears a clan name he will get a kilt of his own clan tartan, but there is no law to prevent him from adopting any tartan which he may make his choice. According to ancient custom, a Highlander of the name of MacKenzie would naturally wear the MacKenzie tartan, but he has also the right to wear, if he so chooses, the Royal Stuart tartan as well. In the olden days every Highlander had conferred upon him the privilege of wearing Prince Charlie’s tartan as well as his own. The same applies to the piper at the present day, only that his Majesty the King reserves for himself the sole right to wear the Royal Stuart tartan on special occasions. No gentleman is permitted to attend court attired in Royal Stuart tartan even if his name be Stuart. In the case of a piper whose name is White, and his mother’s name was MacPherson, he would in accordance with ancient custom wear the tartan applicable to his mother’s name, that is to say, if he did not wish to adopt the Royal Stuart tartan.

“How To Put On The Kilt”

A Highlander who is in the habit of wearing the kilt regularly can put it on in the dark. He does not go through the performance of going down upon his knees to see whether his kilt touches the ground or not. The kilt is fitted for the wearer’s waist and when it is strapped there it remains at the proper height and it neither moves up nor down.

“Howe and Garter Knots”

Kilt hose for full dress are made in colours to suit the tartan of which the wearer’s kilt is made. The hose should be put on so as to come over the ball of the calf of each leg, and be tied with a wollen garter, to which is attached a garter knot. The garter knots should be the same colour as the hose and kilt.
Inverlochy Castle
“Brogues”

Brogues are worn instead of shoes with the kilt in full dress. They are made of very fine leather artistically perforated, and fastened across the instep with a leather strap and small buckle. A silver buckle is also worn on each brogue. The buckles are “aze” generally plain, or chased in an elaborate runic design.

“Skean Dhu”

The Skean Dhu is worn on the right leg. It is placed sufficiently far down the leg between it and the hose as to show about three inches of its top. The Skean Dhu is a “Black Knife,” and it must be black in accordance with ancient custom. The Skean Dhu is a very beautiful ornament, and in the olden days it was used for a variety of purposes such as self-defense and skinnng the deer after stalking, but now it is purely and simply a Highland dress ornament round which is intertwined the cherished memories of the past. The handle is made of carbon black ebony with silver mounts and in the top is fixed a cairngorm stone. The blade is made of steel and the scabbard is a leather sheath with silver mounts.

“The Sporran Mollach”

The Sporran for the Highland dress will be found in many designs, but the one which is favoured generally for full dress is made of white goatskin, superbly mounted in silver at the top, and as a rule bears three tassels all mounted in silver. The sporran is attached to the body with a silver chain and short strap fastening at the back.

“The Kilt Pin”

A kilt pin is used for fastening the upper apron of the kilt to the lower one. Several designs are in use, but the plain old fashioned wire safety pin is the most favoured. It should be put onto the right corner of the upper kilt apron point downwards in order to prevent accidents.

“Doublet and Vest”

A kilt doublet and vest are generally made of black cloth or velvet, but sometimes they are made of velvet tartan. The style which is most commonly adhered to is the “Prince Charlie” with silver buttons upon the lapels. It is a very ancient saying that the Highlander wore as many silver buttons upon his coat as would pay his burial if necessary. The buttons may be plain or bear a crest.

“The Cross Belt”

The Cross belt is worn over the right shoulder and is made of the finest leather. It is elaborately mounted with silver in runic design, generally. At the lower end of the cross belt is a stud hole for fastening on the claymore, but the piper has long since ceased to wear this weapon. But of old he exclaimed, “Oh, that I had three hands, two for the pipes and one for the sword.”
“The Waist Belt”

The waist belt is also made of fine leather with a beautiful silver buckle for fastening it. The belt keeps the piper together and is of assistance to him while piping because he blows against it.

“The Dirk”

The Dirk is worn on the waist belt on the right side. It is still kept in accordance with unwritten law so far as design is concerned. The handle is made of black ebony artistically carved. Its top is mounted with silver in which is set a large cairngorm stone which sparkles in the sunshine or under the night light. The blade is made of steel, and the scabbard is leather mounted with silver. In the scabbard is inset a small knife and fork which are also cairngorm bejeweled. The Dirk was used in self-defense up to the ‘45, but since then it has truly been an ornament.

“The Plaid and Brooch”

The plaid is made of the same tartan as the kilt itself. It is found in two forms: the belted, and long plaid. The plaid is kept upon the left shoulder by an elaborate brooch made of silver and cairngorm, while sometimes a plain circular pattern with pin is worn. Most commonly one sees the cairngorm design in use.

“The Powder Horn”

The Powder Horn is the most uncommon and most beautiful of all Highland ornaments for the Highland dress. It is made of horn pressed into a flat design beautifully mounted in silver with cairngorms inset at each end. It is suspended from the left shoulder by a long silver chain. It was used in olden times for hunting the deer. It contained the powder which was used for shooting, but now it is a most cherished ornament.

“The Cairngorm”

The Scottish Cairngorm is a coveted stone, and a good stone is very expensive. There is no other stone that can equal the cairngorm for adorning the ornaments of the Highland dress. If a piper is a lover of the “Scottish Diamond,” he could have three cairngorms in his dirk, one in his Skean Dhu, one in his shoulder brooch, and two in his Powder Horn.

“The Bonnet”

The last but not least interesting part of the Highland dress is the “Piper’s Bonnet.” It may take one of two forms: the Balmoral, or the Glengarry. The Balmoral bonnet is the older of the two, but it does not suit every face. A piper with a broad face would wear a Balmoral, while a piper with a long, thin shaped head should wear the Glengarry.
“The Bonnet Crest”

In the piper’s bonnet is worn a badge of silver called a crest, i.e., the crest of the Chieftain of his clan. The crest is placed on a rosette on the left side of the bonnet, and it should denote to which clan the wearer belongs.

“The Piper’s Duties and His Dress”

It is surprising when one thinks how much is entailed in the piper’s duties and his dress, and it is only when detailed that they are seen in their magnitude.

“Music Instrument and Ornaments”

Just think for one moment what the piper has in his possession: hundreds of tunes by memory, his instruments of practice and perfection with all their intricacies, the various portions of his dress and his magnificent ornaments.

“Their Charms”

How much is intertwined in all these? It is not the pipe, be it ever so elaborate that the genuine piper glories in, nor does he puff himself up with empty vanity when he is dressed in all his array of jewels. In themselves they mean nothing. It is the historic glamour and the glorious traditions with which they are associated which appeal most to the patriotic piper.

To the Highlander there is nothing in the world which possesses half the charm which is to be found in

“Abair is Eideadh a’ Phiobraire”
Sleam Fein an Gleann
The Glen Is Mine
'Sleam Fein an Gleann

The Glen Is Mine

[Musical notation image]

[Lochnagar Press watermark]
D.C. Thema

Composed By,

John MacCrimmon

Brachan Castle,
Date Unknown
Historical Note

on

The Glen Is Mine

This is the composition of the Iain MacPhadruig MhicCruimein, John, son of Patrick MacCrimmon who was a piper of celebrity.

He was in the Earl of Seaforth’s establishment, and on one occasion going through Glen Sheil with his Lordship, he played for the first time this beautiful piece of music, as if the Earl should say through the emphatic notes of the great musician:--

“‘Sleam fein an Gleann,
‘Sleam fein an Gleann.”
Ceòl Aotrom

The March, Strathspey & Reel

He screwed his pipes an ‘gar’t them skirl,
Till roof an’ rafters a’ did dirl.

Burns

Ceòl Mòr is in contradistinction to Ceòl Aotrom. There is no comparison between them. When I began my evening's piping by playing piobaireachd, the classical music of the pipes, which is better known in the Gaelic tongue as Ceòl Mòr, I can see no charm in Ceòl Aotrom, or the March, Strathspey and Reel.

Ceòl Mòr is pregnant with the charms of the mist and the mountain. It is the most ancient form of pipe music, while Ceòl Aotrom is modern, and is too much of the “wag at the wa’” type of composition.

The March, Strathspey and Reel are of comparatively modern origin. In the ancient times piobaireachd players use them for preludes of tuning, and exercises for young pupils.

With a change of the times and the effect of the Risings of '15 and '45 (to play piobaireachd then was illegal by act of Parliament), the lighter type of pipe tunes crept in. Now the piper becomes a March, Strathspey and Reel player first, and many pipers never rise to Ceòl Mòr at all.

Nevertheless, this type of pipe music has its advantages, too. In the time of peace and war the Highland Regiments find the ordinary marching tunes of great assistance in the long and weary route marches. The foot of the soldier rises lightly to the “skirl o’ the pipes,” and the beat of the drum as we find in Scottish song--

“There’s the March of the Cameron men.”

There are some very fine old marches which are still played by the best of pipers such as: the 71st Highlanders March, the 74th’s Farewell to Edinburgh, the 79th’s Farewell to Gibraltar, Bonnie Ann, The Barren Rocks of Aden, The Stirlingshire Militia, and The Highland Wedding. These have all stood the test of time and will always live on on account of their fine style.

The Slow March is very effective when played with feeling, and a few very nice pieces are:–The Flowers of the Forest, My Home, Lochaber No More, My Faithful Fair One, and the Black Watch Slow March, which was a great favourite of Queen Victoria’s.
There are so many other Marches that they are too numerous to mention here, and the piper who is well-versed in this type of tunes will have no difficulty in selecting favourites for himself from the Marches which appear in printed collections.

Adam Glen

![Musical notation](image)

Adam Glen is the name of a short March which is very old. I reproduce it here because there is an interesting history to it in verse and prose:

Pawkie Adam Glen⁶ piper o’ the clachan
When he stoited ben sairly was he pechan
Spak a wi’ but tint his win’, hirklet doon
    an’ lost it syne.
Blew his beak an’ lichtit’s een
An whistlt a forfoughten:

But his coughin’ dune, cheerie kith the body
Crackit like a gun, an’ leugh tae Auntie Madie
Cried my callans name the spring, jinglin’
    John or onything
For weel I’d like tae see the fling
O’ilka lass an’ laddie.

Blythe the dancers flew usquebae was plenty
Blythe piper grew the ‘shakin’ hans wi ninety
Seven times his bridal vow, ruthless fate
    had broken thro!
Wha wad thecht his comin’ noo
Was for oor maiden Auntie.

She had ne’er been socht, cheerie hope aye fadin’
Dowie is the thocht, tae live am’ dee a maiden
How it comes we canna ken, wanters aye maun

---

wait their ain
Madge is hecht tae Adam Glen
An’ sune we’ll ha’ a weddin’.

Adam Glen, author of the air to which the above verses were written, was long a favourite in every farmers ha’, village and fair in the west of Angus-shire. He was an excellent performer upon the Great Highland Bagpipe; a faithful reciter of our ancient ballads, and in every way an eccentric character.

In the memorable year of Mar’s rebellion, Adam joined the battalion of his country on its march to Sheriffmuir and

“When Angus an’ Fifemen ran for their life man”

he remained behind winding his war-like instrument in the front and the fire of the enemy, and fell on the field of battle, 13th November, 1715 in the ninetieth year of his age. Only a few months before his death he married his eighth wife, a maiden lady of forty-five, on which circumstances the song is found. When rallied on the number of his wives he replied in his own peculiar way “ae kist comin’ in’s worth twa gan oot.”

“The Strathspey and Reel”

The strathspey and reel are entirely intended for dancing, and there are a great number of fine tunes in this class:—The Piper’s Bonnet, and The Sheep Wife; Blair Drummond and Cabar Feidh; Lady Louden, and Duntoon together with many others which will also be found in printed collections, and these are faithfully practised by ardent pipers all over the world.

There are also a good number of Jigs, Hornpipes, and Waltzes:—The Herring Wife Jig, Jack Tar Hornpipe, and Buy a Broom Waltz; all of which are intended for dancing.

It is wonderful [i.e., to be wondered at] when one thinks of how great ideals die as the lighter type of pipe music takes the place of piobaireachd, the classical music of the pipe, which was once a great and noble art. But to the genuine Highlander who is imbued with Celtic fervour and loves his country with its ancient customs, the great music will always hold the “Fort,” so to speak, and find a warm place in his heart.

The lighter music, or Ceòl Aotrom, cannot quench the aspirations of the piobaireachd lover, or exclude from his mind the thoughts of the days that have long since departed. The great music cannot be compared with the dying embers of a forgotten art. It is still the celestial fire, which in the days of other years led our fathers to perform deeds of valour and win glorious victories, which gilds the illustrious pages of the history of their earliest existence.

But if it be the “parting of the ways,” the separating of pipers who are and have been inspired by high ideals, and those who are content to practise that which is commonplace, the first will always cherish and practise his ancient and peculiar art, while the latter will remain content with the performance of the mere preludes of

“Ceòl Aotrom”
A' Phìob mhór agus a Ceòl

O'shiel nan laoch nach do theich riamh ronmh nàmhaid, an leig sinne, a ta nar sliochd dhìubh air dìchuímhnr’ an ceòl sin, a thug fa chomhair bhur n’inntin ri uchd a chath ‘s an tir chein, òirdheirceas beanntan bhur duchais? An leig sinn a dhith an seann innelleachd, na chèile seanachas, iomradh; gloir; fulangais; aoibhneas; brùn; cuimhn’ agus dòchas ar n-athraichean gràdhach? An do dh’fhàs ar làithean cho diblidh? An do mhùch saoghaltachd ar n-ur-iarratus, agus an do dhubh e mach cliù na làithean a thriall? Tha spiorad beanntan a cheò ‘gar gluasad gu nìthibh is àirde, agus a nochdadh dhuinn nach bi sinn neo-dhileas dhuim fèin, no dearmad: ach mu’n dileab is leinn mar dhualachas.

Iain Grannd

[The Bagpipe and Its Music

Since the warriors died away that never fled from an enemy, will we, who are their descendants, let that music fall into neglect that kept your minds, in the face of battle in distant lands, on the splendour of your native mountains? Will we neglect that ancient instrument that was the companion of the history, fame, glory, suffering, joy, sorrow, memory and hope of our beloved forefathers? Have our times become so feeble? Has worldliness smothered our original nature, and has it obliterated the glory of past days? The spirit of the mountains of mist is inspiring us to higher things and showing us not to be unfaithful to ourselves or forgetful of that legacy which is ours by birth right.]

7A Special “Thank You” to Meg Bateman, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Skye, for spelling corrections and translation of the Gaelic.
This is to Certify, that the work entitled "The Great Highland Bagpipe, and its Music" of which I, John Grant, am the Author, was written by my hand on this and the one hundred and fifty preceding pages of Whatman's hand made parchment, and given under my hand and seal at Edinburgh this seventh day of November, in the year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and thirty before these Witnesses: Francis James Grant, Lord Lyon King of Arms, the Register House, Edinburgh, and John Graham Jameson, B.A., L.L.B., residing at 2 Langar Street, Edinburgh.

John Grant

Witness.

John Graham Jameson Witness.

Swear before me at Edinburgh this seventh day of November, 1930, having also read the work in Manuscript.

J. Macaulay Smith, Esq.
J.P. for Banffshire.