

## I.

NOTES ON THE ANCIENT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF SCOTLAND.  
WITH ILLUSTRATIVE DRAWINGS. BY MR ROBERT GLEN. COM-  
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I intend, with the kind permission of the Society, to give a short account of some ancient Musical Instruments, including some of those mentioned in the "Houlate," a Manuscript Poem of the 15th century. As considerable doubts exist as to other names of instruments of music there mentioned, owing to change of nomenclature, I shall not refer to them. This is the passage I allude to :--

" All thus our lady thai lovit with lyking and list  
Menstralis and Musicians mo than I mene may,  
The Psaltry, the Sitholis, the soft Sytharist,  
The Croude, and the Monycordis, the Gythirnis gay,  
The Rote and the Recordour, the Ributhe, the Rist,  
The Trumpe, and the Talburn, the Tympane, but tray  
The Liltpype and the Lute, the Fydill in fist,  
The Dulset and Dulsacordis, the Schalme of Assay,  
The anyable Organis vsit full oft  
Clarionis lowde knellis,  
Portativis and Bellis  
Cymbaclauis in the cellis  
That soundis so soft."

*Houlate*, Stanza 59, fol. 224, vi.

*Horns*.—I shall begin with horns, which are presumably the most primitive, as they are to be found in an all but ready-made state almost everywhere. Bamboos, conch shells, human bones, the tusk of the elephant, and the horns of various animals, can all be turned, with trifling assistance from art, into trumpets ; and history confirms what might have been conjectured, for the trumpet has been in universal use from the remotest ages of which we have any record. The trumpet was a sacred instrument with the Jews ; but that peculiar people are not peculiar in that respect.

In China the Buddhist priests use conch shells in their religious services. Amongst some of the aboriginal tribes of America, the trumpet was believed to possess mysterious and magical powers. Some tribes near the Orinoco have an instrument called the *Botuto*, on which they imagine the Great Spirit himself occasionally performs. It is held in deep veneration. Fruit and strong drink are placed beside it, and it is blown under the palm trees to make them prolific. Women are not permitted to see this marvellous instrument, and if one chances by ill-luck to catch a glance of it, she is put to death without mercy. The *Botuto* is made of baked clay, is commonly from 3 to 4 feet long, has two or three bulb-like expansions on the tube, and the sound is said to be terrific. The Indians on the Rio Branco, a tributary of the Rio Negro, in South America, have a mysterious trumpet called the *Juruparis*, or devil, which is much revered. It is kept concealed in the bed of a stream, deep in the forest, and no one dare drink of, or bathe in, the sanctified water. As in the case of the *Botuto* it is death for any woman to see the *Juruparis*. The Mexicans used conch trumpets in their religious ceremonies. The wizards in certain parts of Africa (according to Capt. Speke) have trumpets, made of the small horns of the antelope and gazelle, suspended from their necks, that they may be ready on the shortest notice to give a blast to attract or drive away the rain clouds according to the wishes of their customers.

But none of the supernatural powers attributed to the trumpet in ages and countries the widest apart, are more wonderful and unaccountable than a property which the instrument actually exhibits. One would imagine *a priori* that, by shaping the lips and modulating the breath, any scale could be produced within the compass of the instrument; but such is not the fact. It has a mysterious disposition and will of its own, and will only yield four notes in the octave; and if the breath is increased the sound leaps from concord to discord, and disdains the intermediate gradations. It is equally extraordinary that there should be a correspondence between the notes of the trumpet and the vibrations of a string. Various plans have been adopted to overcome this stubborn imperfection of the trumpet.

The horn was used by the Scots to transmit signals of war, and sometimes to delude the foe. Barbour mentions that—"When the Scottis folk were about to decamp, they blew their horns and made fires bright and braid, to make their 'auld enemies' believe they were to maintain their position." Froissart complains of the uproar that occurred in the Scottish camp from the blowing of horns on the night before the battle of Otterburn in 1388. Probably many of the horns used then and long afterwards were those of cattle. Angels blowing cows' horns are to be seen on tombstones erected during the 17th century in Pencaitland churchyard, East Lothian, which seems to show that instruments of that primitive sort were more familiar to the people then than metallic trumpets. Only one ancient bronze trumpet has been found in Scotland, namely, the Caprington Horn, which was discovered in 1640, although large numbers have been found in the peat bogs of Ireland. The only musical instrument referred to by Barbour is the horn, and from his description we see that distinguishing calls could be blown upon it. James of Douglas and Sir Robert Boyd recognised the Bruce from his blast on the horn. Cochrane, the favourite of James III., had a hunting horn mounted with gold, and having a precious stone set in the middle, hanging round his neck by a chain of gold, when he was seized at Lauder. In 1503 James IV. had six trumpeters in his service, all clothed in red and yellow. In the 17th century the city of Edinburgh had one or more trumpeters.

*Bag-pipes.*—Nature, when she bestowed upon man the faculty of looking "before and after," seems, as though in the spirit of contradiction, to have taken every pains to baffle the curiosity she had implanted in him, and to have made it next to impossible for him to acquire full and accurate information concerning anything. We thirst for knowledge, but we are mocked on all sides by a mirage. Words float down to us upon the current of time, but they have lost their meaning, and are like empty bottles from which the spirit has evaporated. Employed originally in a specific sense, they have subsequently come to be used in a generic sense, and thus have lost their primary significance.

But for this, amongst other reasons, one might have been able to trace the history of the bag-pipe up to Tubal Cain, as well as to a remote period in our own annals. The scriptural word *Nevel* has been a bone of contention to the learned—some thinking that it meant a bag-pipe, others that a lute was the true interpretation. The word *chorus*, an instrument mentioned by St Jerome as belonging to the ancient synagogue, has also put the learned at variance. That the bag-pipe was known to the Romans is proved by a coin of Nero, on which the instrument is represented. That emperor is said to have been himself a performer on the bag-pipe, for the worst of men have some redeeming point in their characters.

The bag-pipe, although it is now regarded as the national instrument of Scotland, or the Highland portion of it, was at one time popular in all parts of Europe. Figures—angelic, human, diabolical, and bestial—playing on the bag-pipes are to be seen sculptured on ancient churches in England as well as in Scotland. A bag-piper is also represented cut in marble in the cathedral of Upsal, in Sweden. In a woodcut of the “Nativity,” by Albrecht Durer, one of the shepherds is playing on a bag-pipe; and in a grotesque cut by that great artist, the devil is represented as performing on the same instrument, which is made to resemble the head of Luther. There is, moreover, another engraving by Durer, of date 1514, of a bag-piper, whose instrument is similar to the Scottish bag-pipe of the present day.

The bag-pipe seems to have been a favourite instrument with the English. Chaucer’s miller played upon it.

“A bag-pipe well could he blowe and sowne.”

New College, Oxford, received from William of Wykeham, in 1403, a beautiful silver-gilt Crozier, set with precious stones, having an angel playing the bag-pipe among other figures embellishing it. Grotesque bag-pipes are carved on the stalls of Henry VII.’s Chapel, at Westminster, and at Beverley, in Yorkshire. In the fine old song written in the

reign of James I., we are told the old English gentleman had a good old custom when Christmas was come—

“To call in his old neighbours with bag-pipe and drum.”

Shakespeare makes several allusions to it. He talks of “the drone of a Lincolnshire bag-pipe;” and of the strange fellows who “laugh like parrots at a bag-piper.” He also mentions those unhappily constituted individuals, who—

“When the bag-pipe sings i’ the nose  
Cannot contain their urine,”

very probably the reason that many people express a dislike to the instrument at the present day.

At what period the bag-pipe was introduced into Scotland it is impossible to say. A piper is carved on Melrose Abbey, which was founded in 1136; but the carving is of later date than the edifice. It is notable that Barbour makes no reference to the bag-pipes, but negative evidence is of no great value. Taylor, the water poet, is also silent on the subject, although he was in the Highlands, and wrote an account of his trip, when the bag-pipe was in all its glory there. Shakespeare makes no allusion to tobacco, although one would have supposed that its recent introduction would have excited his notice.

In 1362, as we see from the Exchequer Rolls, a payment of 40s. was made to the king’s pipers.

James I. of Scotland, who was assassinated in 1436, refers to the bag-pipe in his “Pebelis to the Play”—

“The bag pype blew and they outhrew  
Out of the townis untald,  
Lord, sic ane schout was thame amang  
Quhen their were owre the wald.”

And again—

“With that Will Swane come sueitand out,  
Ane meikle miller man,  
Gif I sall dance have done, lat se  
Blaw up the bag-pyp than.”

Dunbar grumbles that the city minstrels of Edinburgh can only play two tunes, viz.—“The Day Daws” and “Into June,”—the former, now called “Scots Wha Hae,” being still a favourite air on the bag-pipe.

Burns mentions that it was a universal tradition in his time, that Bruce’s army at Bannockburn was led to “Hey tutti taite,” another name for that air; but Joseph Ritson, in his notes, says horns are the only instruments mentioned by Barbour, and that it could not be played on them. He also states that there was no probability that Bruce had a single piper, an inference which must now be of little value, since it has been discovered that Bruce’s son had pipers.

John Knox, in his “History of the Reformation,” says that the image of St Giles having been cast into the North Loch, another was borrowed from the Greyfriars for a procession in honour of his anniversary, led by the Queen Regent, and accompanied by bag-pipers and other musicians. This was in 1556.

Bag-pipers seem to have been persecuted with especial severity after the Reformation. In 1570 three pipers in St Andrews were admonished to keep the Sabbath holy, then to attend sermon, and on Wednesday; also, to abstain from playing on the streets after supper or during the night. The Privy Council at Stirling had a complaint of various outrages committed at Neilson by William Stewart, who *inter alia* brought “into the Kirk yard tua or three pypires, and thereby drew a grit nowmer of people to dans befor the Kirk dur in tyme of prayeris, he being always the ring-leadar himself.” In the year 1591 and 1593 George Bennet, piper in the Water of Leith, and James Brakenrig, engaged to abstain from playing on the bag-pipe on Sunday. In 1595 and 1596 Thomas Cairns, piper in the same village, was rebuked for playing and dancing on Sunday. William Aikin in Braid also pledged himself “never to prophane the Sabbath day in playing with the pipes.” James Clark in 1624 was fined 20s. “for having an pyper into his house in tyme of sermon upoun the Lord his Sabbath.” The bag-pipes were looked upon as the favourite instrument of the fiend himself; and some unhappy women, burned for sorcery at Borrowstounness in the year 1679, were accused of

meeting Satan and other witches "at the Croce of Murestane, above Kinneil, where they all danced, and the devil acted as piper." The same personage, in the shape of a dog—a "towsy tyke, black, grim, and large"—also performed at a dance on the Pentland Hills. The belief that the bag-pipes are somehow connected with impiety is not yet altogether extinct, especially in some Highland parishes. In a letter which appeared recently in the "Scotsman," it was said that "a few officious individuals have set themselves up to be the judges of what is right and wrong in Highland parishes, and the exercise of their powers is becoming such that a young man learning to play the bag-pipes lays himself open to exclusion from church privileges."

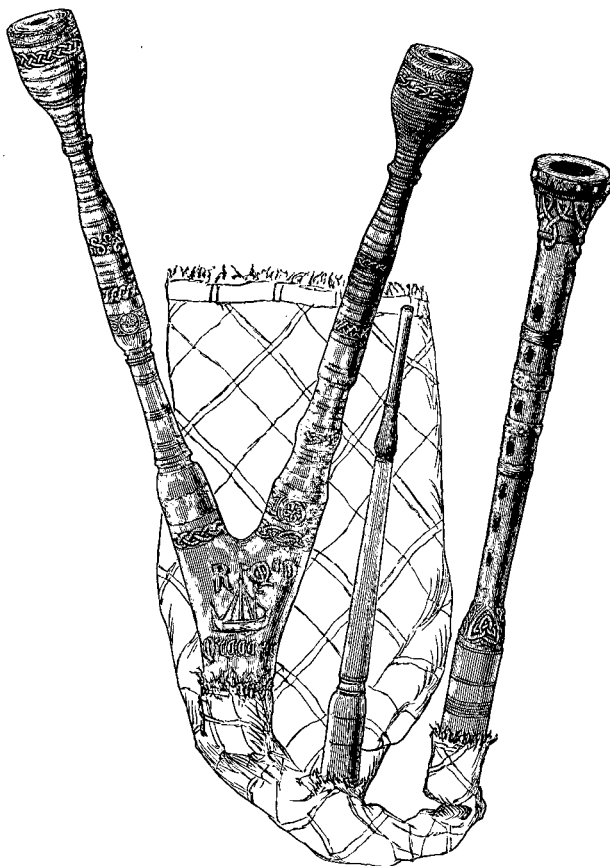
Pipers formed part of the municipal institutions of every large and many small towns in Scotland, and in some burghs, such as Jedburgh, the office was hereditary, and continued in the same family for centuries. They received a livery and small salary, and had sometimes a small piece of land.

At what date the bag-pipe was introduced into the Highlands there is no evidence to show; but it certainly found a Highland welcome, and must have felt more at home than anywhere else. Dr Leyden, in his introduction to the "Complaynte," quotes from the Bannatyne MS. an unpublished poem by Alex. Hume, minister of Logie in 1598, on the defeat of the Armada, the lines—

"Caus nichtelie the weirlic nottes breike  
On Heiland pipes, Scottes and Hybernicke,"

which shows that the bag-pipe had not only come into use in the Highlands, but it had assumed a distinctive character. Here it may be proper to mention that the Highland, Lowland, and original Northumbrian pipes, although they differ in external appearance and in the method of inflation, are essentially the same, the chanter being alike in all three, and the scale being a form of the diatonic.

The writer of this possesses a set of bag-pipes bearing the date 1409. This instrument has only two small drones and chanter. Bag-pipe in



Set of Highland Bag-pipes, bearing date 1409.  
(The property of Mr Glen.)



this country previous to the beginning of last century had no large or bass drone. The two drones are inserted in one stock or joint, that holds them to the bag, which is formed of a forked branch of a tree, the fork giving the drones the proper spread for the shoulder. Carved on the stock are the date MCCCIX. and the letters R. M'D., along with a representation of a lymphad or galley, such as is seen on the sculptured crosses of the West Highlands. On the reverse side is to be seen a triple floriated knot, and on the upper parts of the fork are two carved bands of interlaced work near to the metal ferrules. The lower joint of one of the drones is ornamented in the centre with a carved band in the same style; the corresponding joint of the other drone is not original.

The head-pieces of both drones at the top are cup-shaped, and have each three bands of interlaced work,—two on the joint, and one near the ferrule at the head.

The chanter at the head, and at the lower or bell end, is finely ornamented in harmony with the carving on the other parts, and is also studded with nails round the edge of the bell. It has been repaired with two brass bands and the same number of string ligatures.

The blow-pipe is quite modern, the original having been lost. The ferrules are of bronze, and are highly ornamented in the Celtic style. Four of them have been wanting, and replaced by brass ones.

The wood of which these pipes are made is to all appearance that of the thorn, and in respect of measurement they are much the same as those of the present day. The bag and cover are matters of no importance, as those articles soon wear out and must be renewed. The instrument on the whole has an aged and battered appearance, and the finger-holes on the chanter are very much worn.

Pipers were attached to the retinue of every Highland chief, and the office was hereditary. The duties of the piper were important and multifarious. He had to cheer the clansmen on the march, and rouse their courage and lead the van into battle. In peace he gave life and merriment to the wedding, and in wild wailing notes expressed the general woe at a funeral.

If the Gael cannot claim the credit of inventing the bag-pipe, he can at least boast that he has made it his own by inventing a style of execution which has turned the imperfections of the instrument into beauties, and has composed a rich and varied stock of music specially adapted for it, and that cannot be properly performed on any other instrument.

*Harp.*—It is probable that the Hebrews played upon the harp, although it has been questioned whether the word which has been translated *harp* in the English version of the Bible really refers to that instrument. The Egyptians possessed several sorts of harps, some of which were beautifully formed and ornamented. The Assyrians also possessed the harp, as we know from the bas-reliefs disinterred near the town of Mosul in Asiatic Turkey. The harp was used by the Greeks (as is proved by one represented on a vase in the Munich Museum), although it does not appear to have been a favourite instrument with them. It was popular amongst the Persians in the olden time, as is proved by sculptures near the town of Kermanshah, said to have been executed in the 6th century. The Arabs adopted the Persian harp in the 7th century. The Irish and the Welsh were famous for their performance on the harp, and are said to have possessed that instrument from a remote antiquity. There is a harp in Trinity College, Dublin, which is said to have belonged to Brian Boru, who ascended the Irish throne in 1001 (see the story in the "Ulster Journal," vol. vii.) But there is evidence on the instrument itself which disproves the assumption. Armorial bearings, which were not in use in Ireland until the 14th century, as well as the Gothic letters I.H.S., which were also unknown in the 11th century, are carved upon it. With greater show of reason this harp is said to have belonged to the O'Neills, who flourished in the 14th century, and whose arms it bears. The writer of this paper had an opportunity of examining this interesting relic in 1878, and found that the current descriptions of it, which state that the soundboard is of oak, are inaccurate. The body of the instrument is made of one piece of *redsally* wood, which has been dug out from the back, and the back is inserted.

Two antique harps, of the same type and probably of as great an age, are described by John Gunn in his "Historical Enquiry on the Harp in Scotland from the earliest times," 1807. One called the "Caledonian," and the other the "Queen Mary," were in the possession of Col. Robertson of Lude, and are now deposited in a lumber-room somewhere in Perthshire. It would be well if the Society could obtain even a loan of these instruments, so that the greatest care might be taken of their preservation. The "Caledonian" is said to have come into the possession of the family of Robertson in 1460.

Irish harpers, it is said, were in the habit of visiting Scotland from the 6th down to the 18th century. A sculptured figure playing a small harp has been discovered on a cross at Ullard, in the county of Kilkenny, in Ireland, which is said to date from a period anterior to 800 A.D.

The harp was a favourite instrument in Scotland. In the Highlands it was called *Clarsach*. The fact is attested both by authentic history and sculptured remains. It is represented on a sculptured stone at Nieg or Nigg, in Ross-shire, which may be earlier than the 10th century. It is also to be seen on a cross at Auldbar, Forfarshire, and on Dupplin Cross, in Perthshire. King James I., was celebrated for his skill as a harper. The *clarsach* is mentioned in the "Houlate," written about the middle of the 15th century. About the end of that period payments were made to Irish, English, and Highland harpers, for performing to the king. Private families at that time kept their harper as well as bag-piper. The last native harper in Scotland is commonly allowed to have been Murdoch Macdonald, who was a retainer of MacLean of Coll, and is believed to have died in 1739. He was partly educated by MacLeod of MacLeod's harper, and partly in Ireland.

*The Lute.*—The lute was at one time held in the highest estimation. It was extensively cultivated in Europe, and nowhere was it more familiarly known than in Scotland. Of its invention or introduction we know nothing. In the year 1474 a lutenist was attached to the royal household, and subsequently several are mentioned in the Treasurer's

Accounts. These musicians, it seems, were sent to Bruges to "learn their craft." In 1562 players on the lute received red and white taffety to be coats, and hose, and bonnets. In 1502 private families had luters in their establishments.

The Scottish monarchs themselves cultivated the lute. Disbursements for lutes to James IV. and to James V. are entered in the Treasurer's Accounts. It seems to have been an instrument which the attendants at court could perform on. David Lindsay mentions in his rhyme that the infant king ordered him "to play upon the Lute;" and a present of a lute which cost fifty-six shillings was made to John Barbour in 1540. During the 17th century the lute was very common throughout the greater part of Europe.

Originally the lute had eight thin cat-gut strings arranged in four pairs, each pair being tuned in unison, so that its open strings produced four tones. In the course of time more strings were added. During the 17th century the lute had twenty-four strings. The order of tones varied in different countries and periods.

There has been an immense improvement in the construction of musical instruments in modern times; but some consider that what has been gained in one respect has been lost in another—that various instruments in being perfected have lost their peculiar character of tone, and become too much alike, and have withal been divested of much of their beauty of appearance.