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Old Fiddlers' Tune Books of the Georgian Period

BY ANNE G. GILCHRIST

THE late Frank Kidson, the Leeds musical antiquary and folk-song collector, brought together during his lifetime a valuable collection of at least sixty of these little, narrow, oblong MS. tune-books—conveniently shaped for the pocket—the tunes in which, consisting of popular song and dance tunes, were noted for their own use by musicians of varying skill and musical or other education. It is from this collection that most of my material has been drawn in preparing some notes on the subject of the dance-measures of the Georgian Period. The chief value of these little, old books, brown and worn with age and service, is in the evidence they offer of the changing types of dance rhythms—changing with the fashions of a period ranging from the beginning of the first George's reign to the end of the Regency or a little later—and in the way some of them refer to social or historical events of their day. Such studies would fill a much longer article, but within the limits imposed by present conditions, I must confine myself to a small group of illustrative material out of the mass to which I have had access.

The Kidson MSS. date (where a date can be given) from the violin book of Patrick Cuming (1723) now in the Scottish National Library, to the pre-Victorian days before the waltz had made much progress in country circles, or the polka, as one of these old fiddlers expresses it, had "come up" for the first time in the '40's. Mr. Kidson's books, with a few in my own possession, are mostly Scottish or north-country specimens—the legacies of fiddlers in Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire and Yorkshire—and though they contain many tunes which must be common to all English fiddlers' books of the period, there are certain dance rhythms which seem to belong more particularly—if not exclusively—to this region and to lowland Scotland.

Though little trace of purely modal tunes is to be found amongst these MS. versions, it is evident that many have been traditionally handed on from one fiddler

to another, not learnt from printed copies. And this would account for the phonetic or corrupt forms of some of the titles, *e.g.* "The Self" (Sylph); "The Italian Monfrina, Monfredi, or Morphy" (for Montferina)—a tune surviving amongst our nursery rhymes; "Heel and Fling" (Highland or Hieland Fling); or from misreading of another fiddler's writing the absurd "Honourable Swiss Dollows" as the title of "Miss Dillon's Waltz."

DANCE TUNES

Turning first to the dance-measures in these old music-books, passing over the more familiar minuet, reel, and strathspey, I find as one of the earliest the triple-time hornpipe (also used as a jig-time tune) which preceded the common-time hornpipe and the six-eight jig of later days. The un-named example here given from Patrick Cuming's book (1723) has a fascinating syncopated rhythm which belongs to the period, and was originally a feature of the well-known Scots tune "The Dusty Miller" which follows it.

1. TRIPLE-TIME HORNPIPE

UN-NAMED.

PATRICK CUMING, M.S., 1723 Edinburgh?).

FINE.

D.C.



Early copies show that the "Dusty Miller" had originally a crochet in place of the two quavers (marked with a star) on the same note, and the same is true of "Go to Berwick, Johnny" and other examples of this dance-measure in six running quavers.

2. DUSTY MILLER

KERSHAW M.S., c.1820 (Lancashire).



The "Dusty Miller" seems to have been a very popular tune, and in its later form many verses were sung to it which may have provided "mouth music" for the dancers in the absence of a fiddler. Here are a few examples, collected from fiddlers'

books and various traditional sources. It will be seen how easily they sing to the tune :

O the little rusty, dusty, rusty miller,
I'll not change my wife for either gold or siller.

Dusty was his coat, dusty was his siller,
Dusty was the kiss that I gat from the miller.

Hey, the dusty miller and his dusty coat,
He will win a shilling or he ware a groat. [ere, spend]

She has wrote a letter with a Pen of siller,
Sealed it up and sent it to the Dusty Miller.

O the dusty miller, O the jovial carrier,
First he came to woo her, then he came to marry her.

The miller, according to the character he bears in Scots folk-song, was greedy and dishonest, a miser, and a libertine.

Stenhouse in his note to "Wee Willie Gray" (No. 514 in Johnson's *Museum*) cites half-a-dozen of these triple-time hornpipes (including the above) saying that they have been played in Scotland time out of mind as a particular species of the "double hornpipe," and he states that James Allen, the Duke of Northumberland's piper, assured him that this peculiar measure originated on the Borders of England and Scotland. (It is also found in Northumbrian collections.)¹ It seems possible that the 9-8 country-dance measure of "Hey, my kitten, my kitten" (so called from the nursery words belonging to it, which are ascribed to Dean Swift—they are coarse enough) and of "Roger de Coverley," of which a sonorous violin version is found in Patrick Cuming's book as "The Maltman or Roger the Cavalier," may have been a development of the simple triple time of these early hornpipe tunes.

3. BANNOCKS O' BEARMEAL

PATRICK CUMING MS., 1723.



¹ It may be observed that most if not all of these early triple-time hornpipes—such as "Go to Berwick, Johnnie," "Jockey said to Jeanie," and the Scots or Northumbrian "Dance to your daddy"—have, or have had, rhymes attached to them, which a former generation of editors was apt to deem too "silly" to print. Unlike English, the Scots vernacular has a store of affectionate or derogatory name-diminutives for persons, animals, and things, fitting the falling accent of the terminal pair of quavers or crotchet-and-quaver of a host of Scots tunes. Cf. wearie, dearie; ready, leddy; daddy, laddy; fishie, dishie. Compare this facility of choice with English rhyming to the old dance-tune popularly known as "Pop goes the weasel," where "treacle," "Eagle," and "table" are, in a familiar phrase, "the nearest we can do" to match the "weasel" with a rhyme."

“ Bannocks of bear-meal, cakes of crowdie ” is another early Scots dance rhythm in Cuming’s book which seems to have been sung as well as danced.

4. A PASSPEY—HIGH DANCE

GILCHRIST MS., c.1820 ? (North of Scotland).



Another forgotten dance, the “ Passpey,” I have found in a (probably) late Georgian collection from the north of Scotland, which contains “ The King’s Anthem ”—not yet, apparently, known as “ National.” The Passepié, says Grove’s *Dictionary*, originated amongst Basse-Bretagne sailors, and is said to have been first danced in Paris by street-dancers in 1587, becoming popular in England towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. It may have come to Scotland independently, while the Auld Alliance was still a close one.

5. DRUNKEN HUSSARE

KERSHAW MS.



The curious rhythm of the next tune, the “ Drunken Hussar,” suggests a nursery rhyme in *Mother Goose’s Melody*, 1791. English Hussars did not come into existence till 1806-7, but this rhyme is about a drunken Grenadier, and could easily have been adapted to the tune :

Who comes here ?
A grenadier.
What do you want ?
A pot of beer.
Where’s your money ?
I’ve forgot.
Get you gone,
You drunken sot !

The common-time hornpipe was the successor of a rhythm very frequently seen in these old books, under the name of a "Scots Measure." As there is little to differentiate this from the earlier common-time hornpipes I need not give a specimen. The modern hornpipe seems to have attained great popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century. There were many famous ones—"The Sailor's"—"The College"—"Jacky Tar"—and numerous others called after their composers, who, one may guess, were generally fiddlers themselves—Lascelles', Fisher's, West's (also known as the "Morpeth Rant") the Liverpool, and a host of others, some still remembered.

In Westmorland these hornpipes were danced both solo and in rows, and had many special steps known by curious names. The country dancing-master would teach each pupil a special step which remained his or her exclusive property and was exhibited during the dance at the country assembly, when all the dancers advanced down the room side by side in a row. The dales were famous for their step-dancing.

6. OLDHAM RANT

KERSHAW MS.



The *Rant* was a name rather loosely applied to various lively dance-tunes, but properly seems to have belonged to a quick $\frac{2}{4}$ like the "Oldham Rant" here given from a Lancashire fiddler's book of early nineteenth-century date. The rhythm is reminiscent of "Yankee Doodle," which Frank Kidson believed to be of English origin, the Doodle simply meaning an air to be "doodled" or "deedled" for dancing. (See his article on the history of the tune in the *American Musical Quarterly*, January, 1917.) Early copies of "Yankee Doodle" differ considerably. The second part of the "Oldham Rant" is reminiscent of a morris-tune.

7. PATTERNELLY

GILCHRIST MS. (late Georgian ?) (North of Scotland).



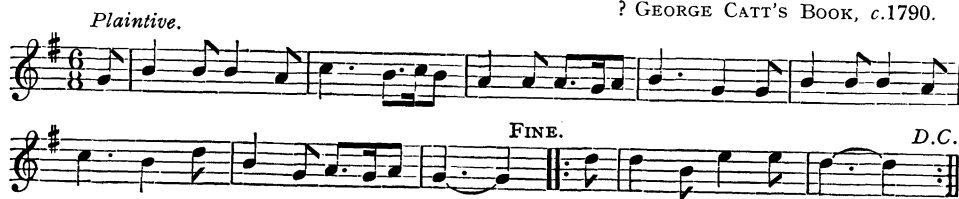
A pretty country-dance, probably belonging like "The Triumph" to the Regency period, but apparently better known in Scotland than in England, appears in a

Scots MS. as "Patternelly" [Petronella ?].¹ It was a longways dance, and began with a neat figure by the two top couples, in which the feet were crossed and re-crossed in exact time to the notes I have marked in the first two bars. I do not think it has ever been revived, like the "Triumph."

HISTORIC TUNES

The second group of tunes from these old MS. books have been chosen for their social or historical connections. Many others might have been included for like reasons. As I have discussed the history of "Malbrouck" elsewhere (see "Who was Malbrouck?" in *The Choir*, Vol. 18, p. 143 *et seq.*, 1927) I will only say here that despite both French and English later popular legend, this old French and Flemish folk-song had no more connection with the Duke of Marlborough than with the Duke of Wellington. I have traced its arrival in England, at least as early as c. 1750, under its Flemish name of "Malbrouck" (at an earlier period its hero was "Mambrou") but the absurd identification of Malbrouck with Marlborough was not born for over sixty years after John Churchill had died in his English bed of old age and the senility following upon a stroke. It is true that he went to the war, like Malbrouck, but he returned alive to his scheming Sarah, instead of any little page dressed *tout en noir* returning to announce his death to his distressed lady.

8. MALBROOK



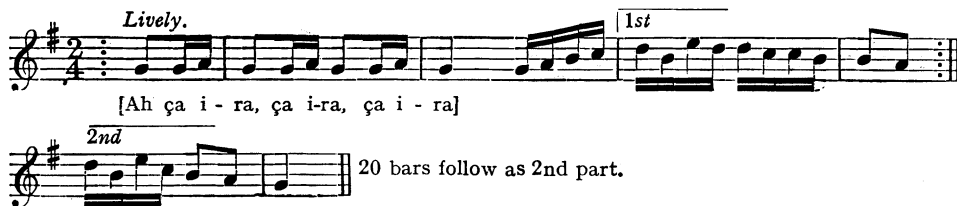
I have here printed the eighteenth-century version (the name is sometimes corrupted to "Mall Brook" or "Moll Brooks," etc.) as found with negligible variation in several of these fiddlers' books, to demonstrate how the plaintive little folk-tune, with its falling cadences and lack of any climax, has been transformed in England, where it became very popular by its adaptation to jovial use as "For he's a jolly good fellow" and "We won't go home till morning"—the rising bellow on "fel-low" or "mo-or-ning" being an entirely British embellishment, as an outlet for enthusiasm, or sign of Bacchanalian high spirits. (Has the likeness of the tune to the "Queen's Jig" of the *Dancing Master* ever been noticed?)

¹ "Patronello" in another MS.

9. CA IRA, CA VA

HENRY WEDDELL'S MS. (early 19th century).

Lively.



[Ah ça i - ra, ça i-ra, ça i - ra]

20 bars follow as 2nd part.

The old French cotillon tune—a trivial vaudeville air which was brutally changed into the savage “Ça ira” of the French Revolution—is found in its early innocence as a country-dance tune in late eighteenth-century fiddlers’ books. Later, it became known in England as “The Fall of Paris” and ended as a favourite harpsicord or pianoforte piece with variations, and as the march past of an English regiment. It may be added that many dance-tunes—both English and naturalised after importation from France, Germany, and Italy—of the period here discussed survive as the tunes of our nursery-rhymes. But that is another story.

10. CROP THE CROPPIES

CARLISLE MS., (c.1810 ?).



“Crop the Croppies” is a lively country-dance tune which has evidently been associated with some political song about the Irish Rebellion of 1798. “Croppy” or “Croppy Boy” was a name given to the rebels by the loyalists, and the title may refer to a barbarous practice (of which I have read somewhere) of capping the rebels’ heads, when they were caught, with a pitch helmet and cropping their locks below its edge. Another “Croppy” song, to the tune of “Down, derry, down,” had a chorus of “Down, down, Croppies lie down!” This was once rashly played by a morris-dancers’ band as the morris-men danced their way through the Irish quarter of a Lancashire town. As soon as the Irish heard the hated tune they fell upon the morris-dancers, and a terrific fracas ensued, in which the offenders had to retreat with torn clothes, broken instruments and broken heads. (There was also a counter-blast called “Croppies, get up again!”)

II. THE NEW GRAND O.P. DANCE

CARLISLE MS.



As a last glance at social history embalmed in these old tunes, the "New Grand O.P. Dance" can only have been suggested by the serious riots at Covent Garden in 1809, when after reconstruction of the opera-house and engagement of expensive foreign artists the management raised the prices for seats, to the great anger of the public. Night after night the opera-goers gave voice to their grievance and demands for the "old prices" by disorder and rhythmical stamping, accompanied by cries of "O.P.! O.P.!" One can hardly suppose that the "Grand O.P. Dance" appeared till matters had quietened down a little. But here is the tune. The notes marked "O.P., O.P.," under the tune in the MS. seem to have been vocalised by the dancers and probably accompanied by stamping the feet "right left, right left." In such ways the sturdy Briton, whose irrepressible cheerfulness is always breaking in, turns tragedy to comedy and strife to mockery.

And as a last odd item of literary interest, here, from a collection of about 1800, is "The Boolonzie," which as "The Boulanger" (a name suggesting a French origin) is one of the dances performed at the ball in *Pride and Prejudice*, and with "Robin Adair" perhaps the only musical items specifically mentioned in any of Jane Austen's Novels. For "Robin Adair" was becoming known about this period as a drawing-room instead of a drinking song.

12. THE BOOLONZIE

Un-named MS. of Country Dances in F. K's collection.

