The Lament for the Children

This tune occurs in the following published sources:

–**Uilleam Ross**'s *Collection*, pp. 12-16;
–**C. S. Thomason**'s *Ceol Mor*, pp. 137-8;
–**David Glen**'s *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp. 100-101;
–***Piobaireachd Society Collection***, first series, iii, 1-3;
–**G. F. Ross**, *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, pp.42-5; *Collection of MacCrimmon and other Piobaireachd*, pp.38-9;

and in the following manuscript sources:

–**Donald MacDonald**'s MS, ff.271-276;
–**Angus MacKay**'s MS, i, 52-54;
–**Colin Cameron**'s MS, ff.58-59;
–**Uilleam Ross**'s MS, ff.228-232;
–**John MacDougall Gillies**'s MS, ff.88-89;
–**Robert Meldrum**'s MS, ff.182-184;

"The Lament for the Children" comes down to us in two basic versions, one via Donald MacDonald and one through Angus MacKay.

Donald MacDonald times the tune as follows:

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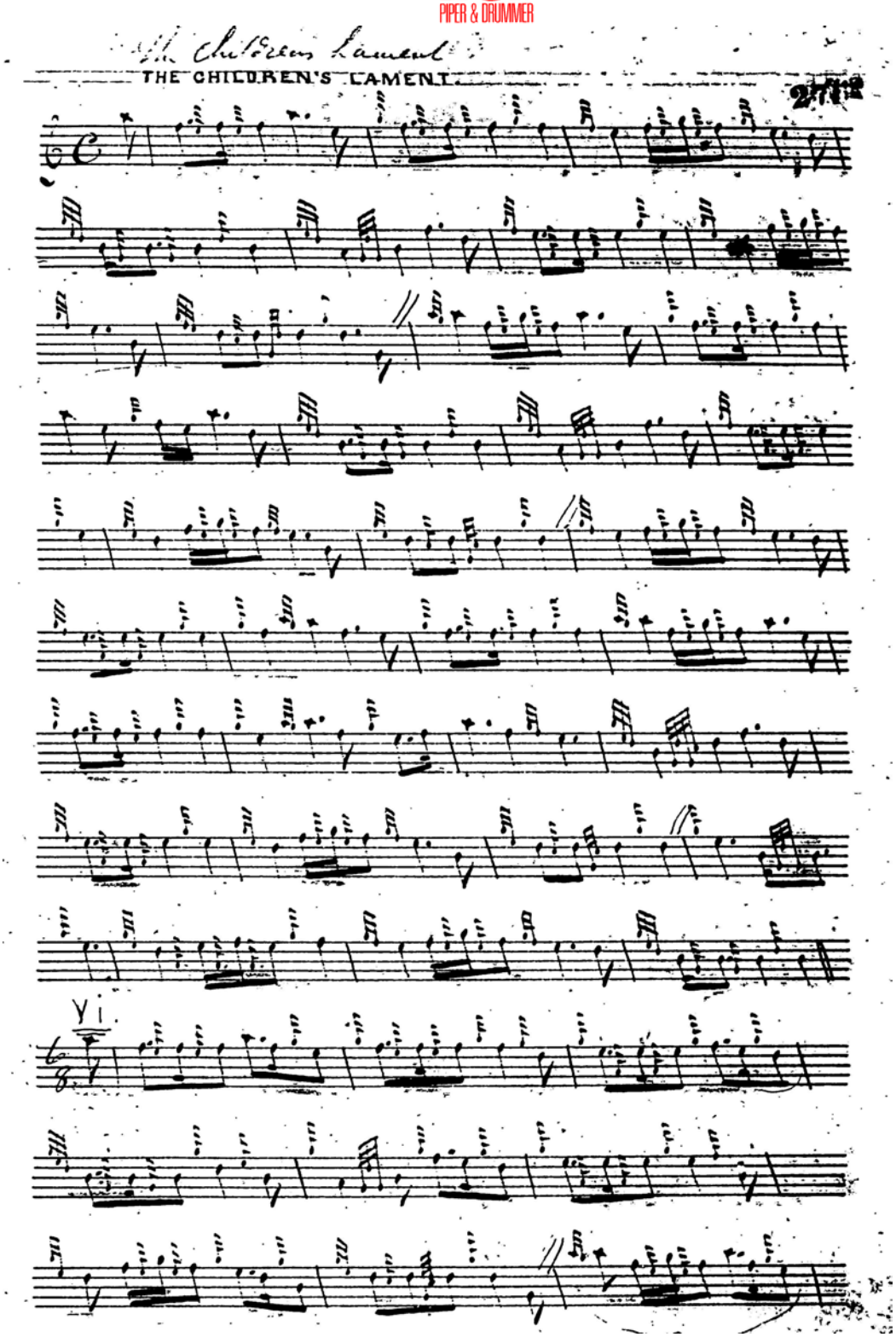
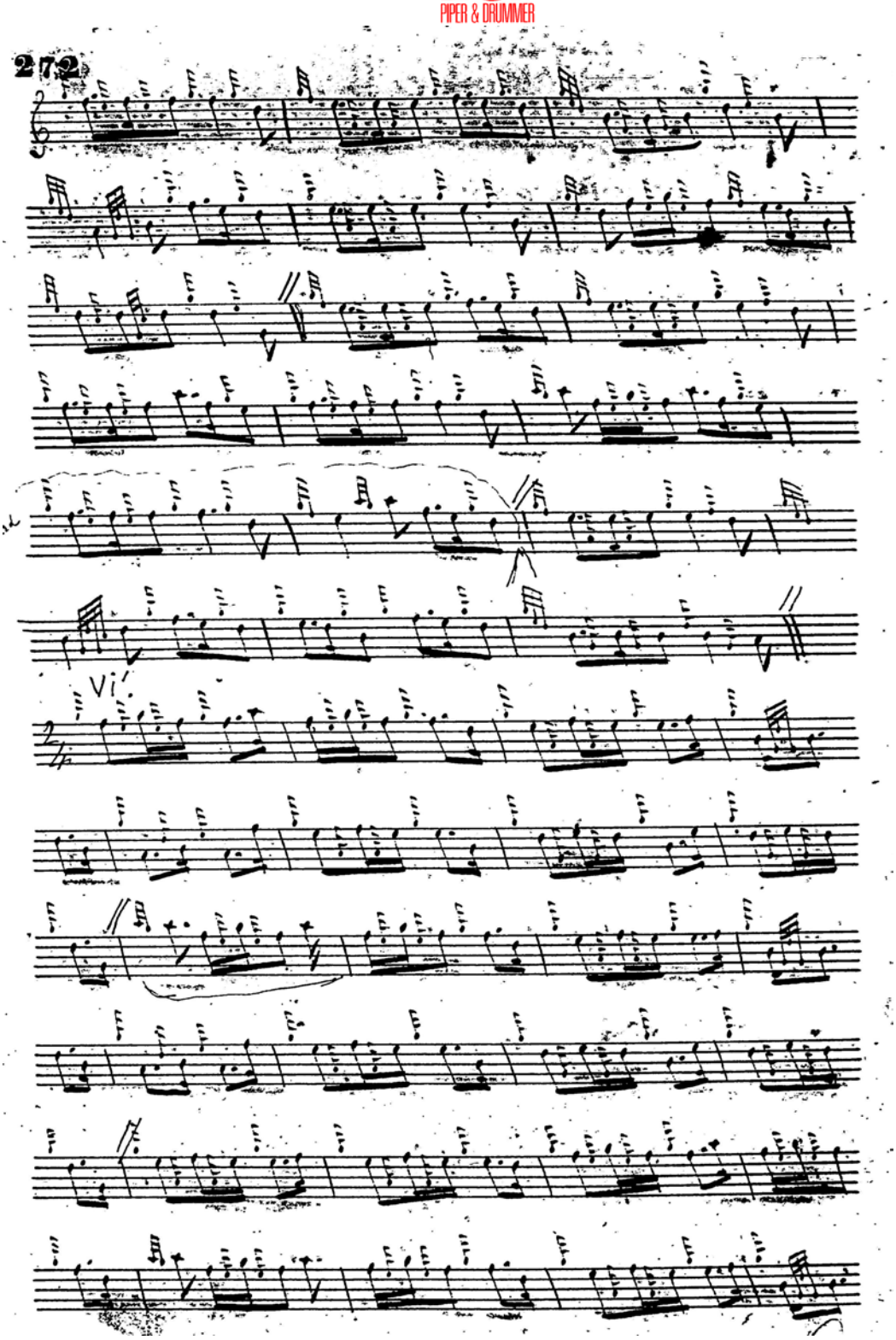
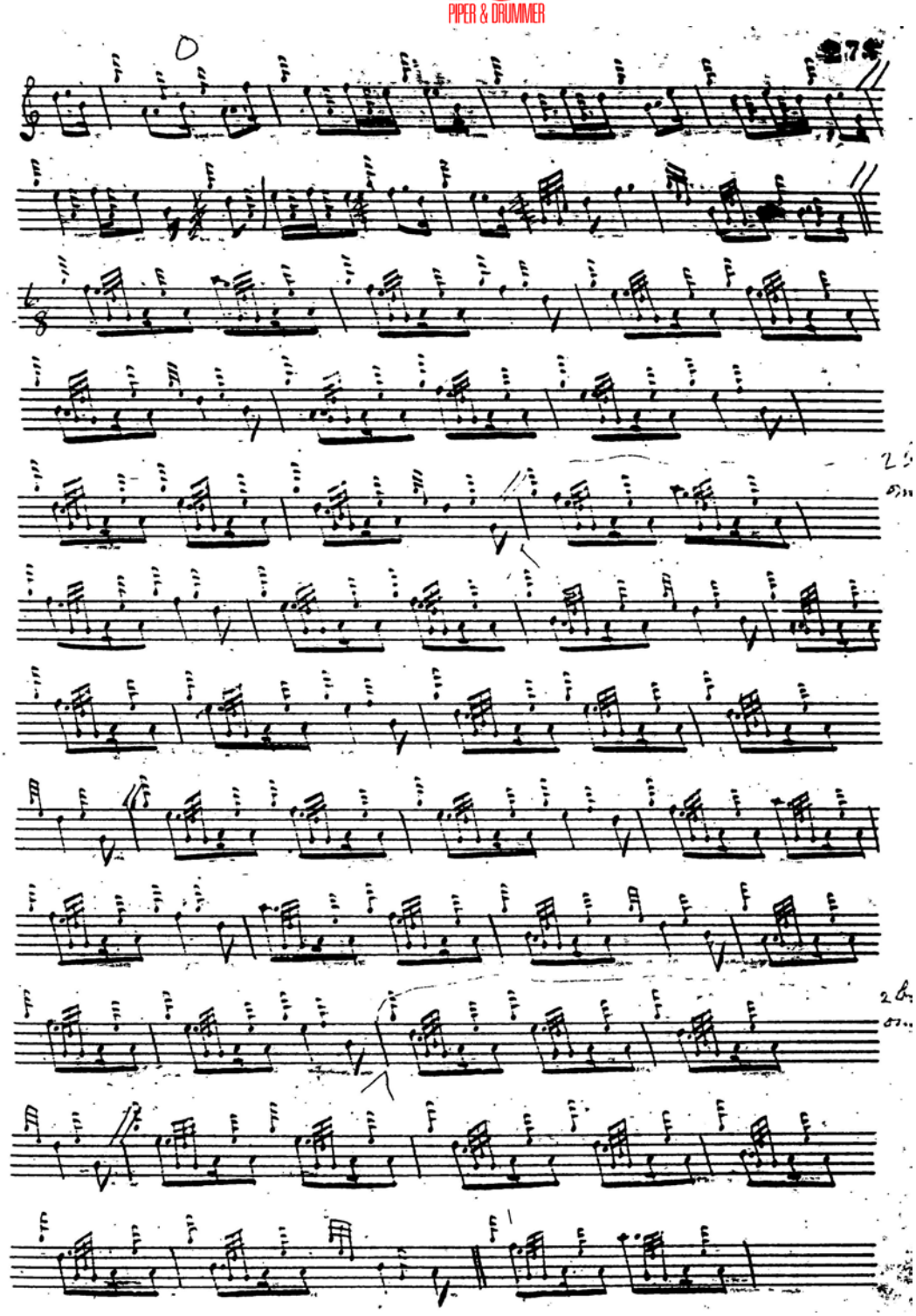
Published by the Piper & Drummer magazine, 2003-'04


The Childrens Lament
THE CHILDREN'S LAMENT.

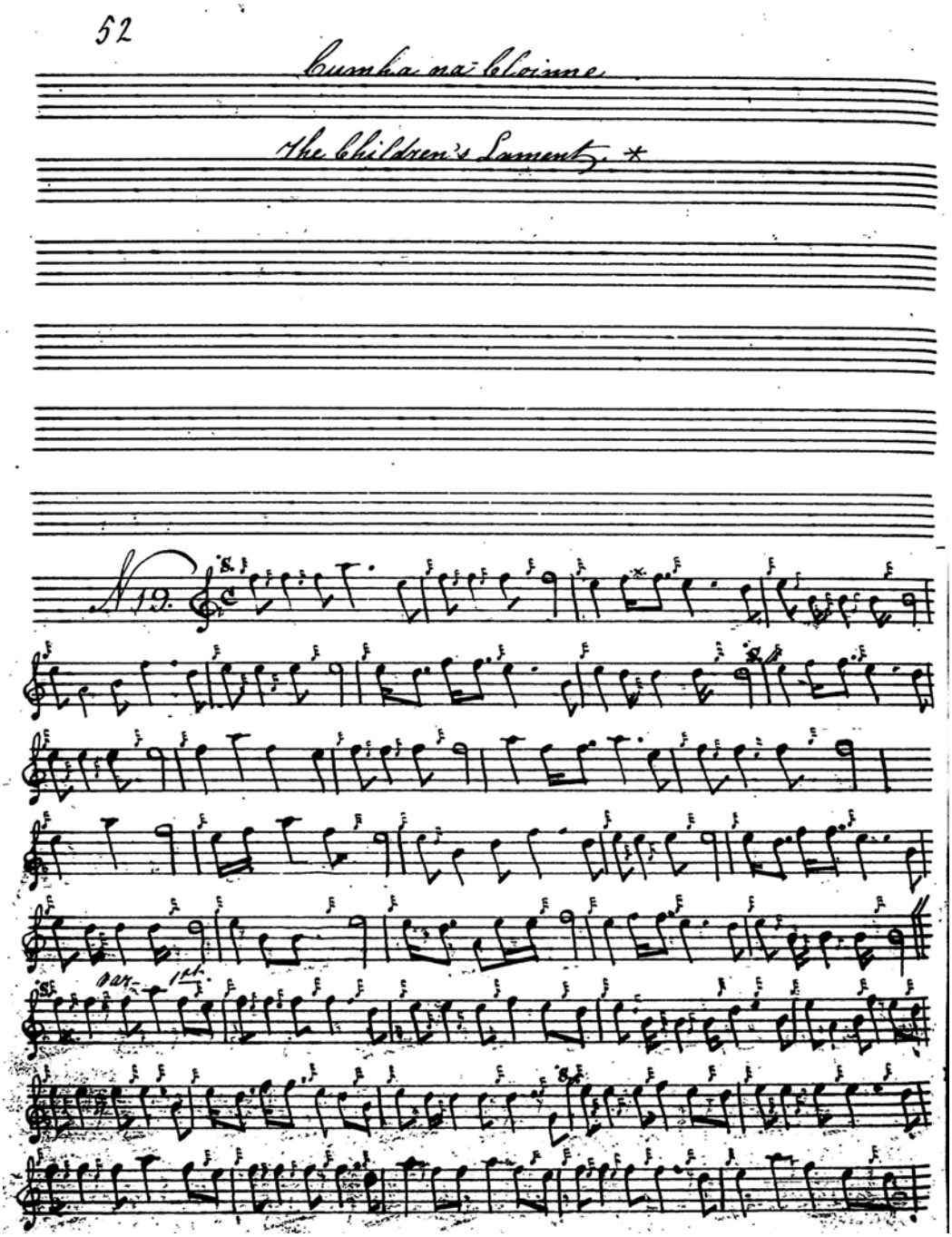


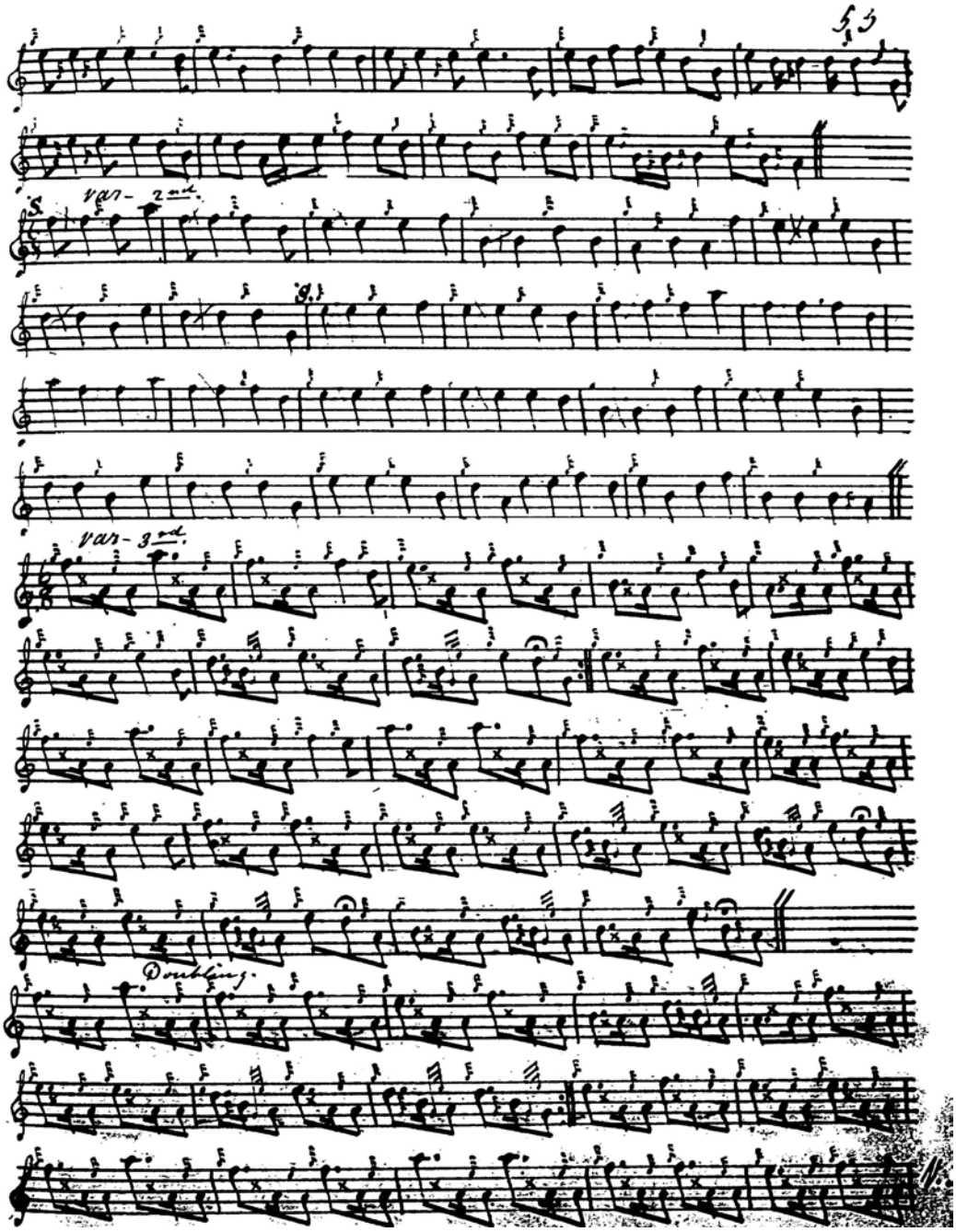


and so on.

The reader will note that MacDonald attractively accents the opening pulse of his echo beats on F and elsewhere but not always on B, and his frequent use of "reflexive" grace-notes. It seems clear that there are bars missing from his doubling of the ground onwards, but enough is reproduced here to give an idea of his characteristically rich and subtle style.

Angus MacKay times the tune like this:



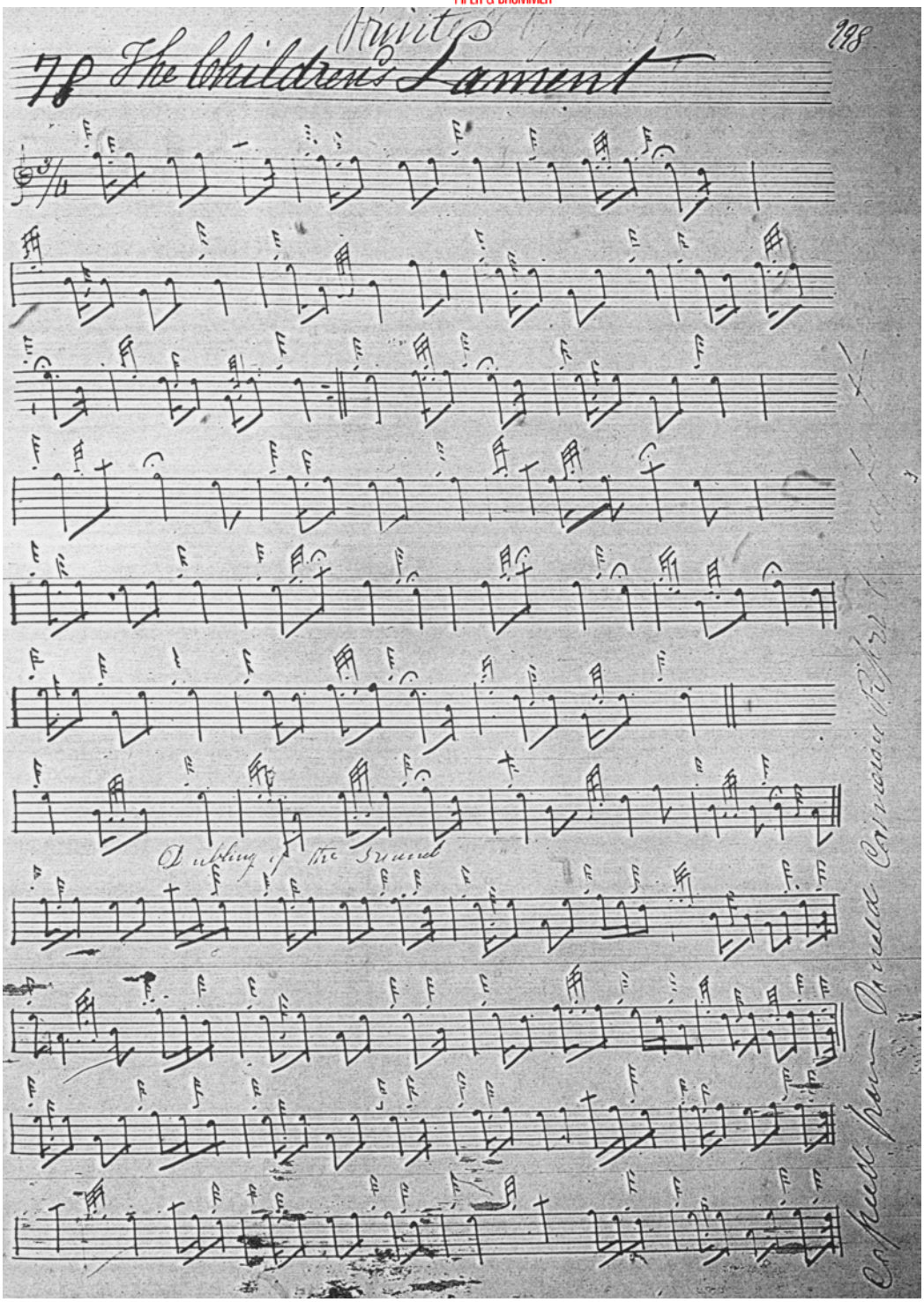


and so on.

The present score lacks MacKay's usual high technical finish: there are missing gracenotes and things, and a string of unaccentuated crotchets. The essence of his style is captured in *Uilleam* Ross's published setting which is reproduced below.

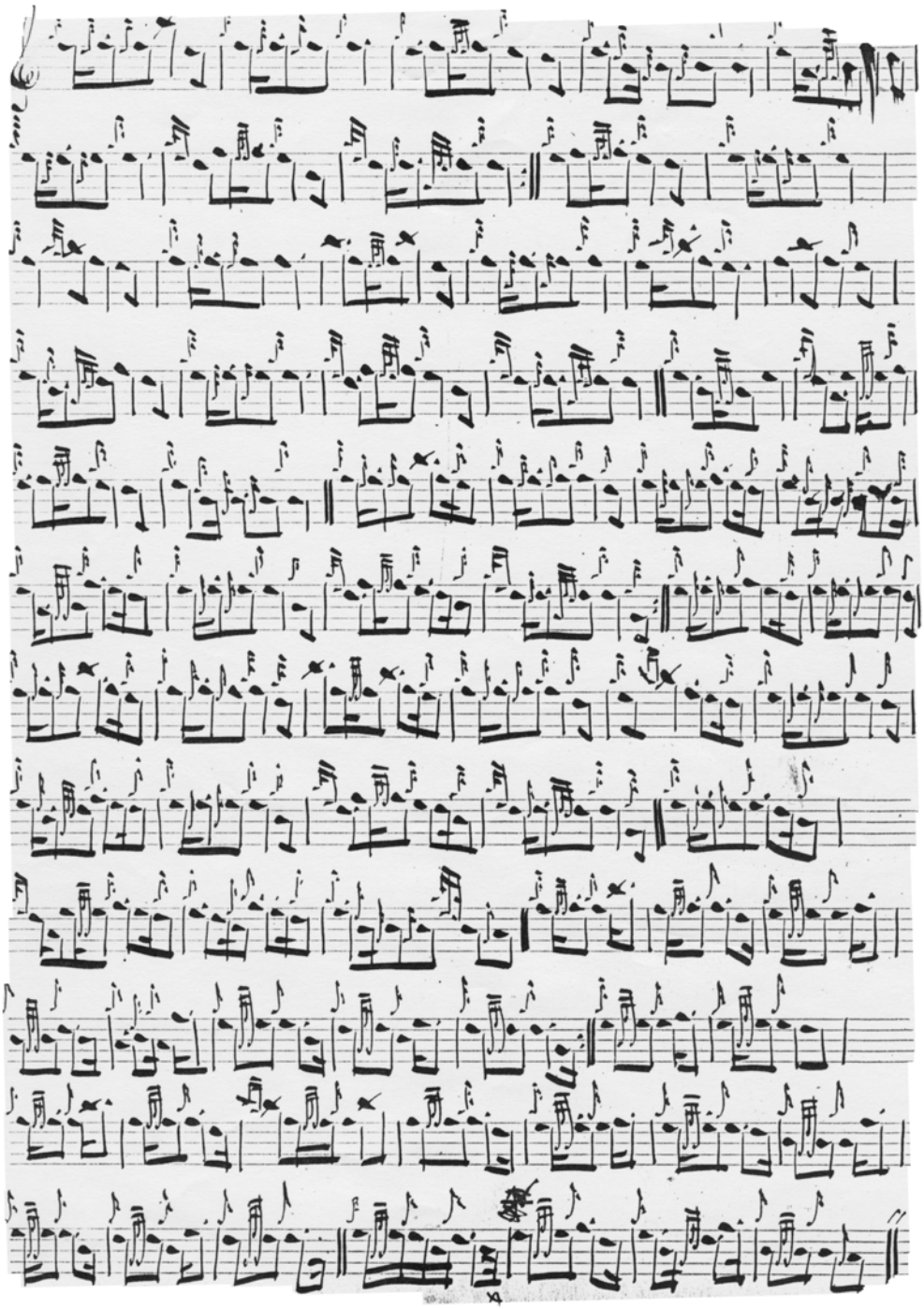
Colin Cameron's setting is very much in the style of MacKay and is not reproduced here.

Interestingly, in ***Uilleam*** **Ross**'s MS, the ground is timed in 3/4, rather than the 6/8 of his published book, and the score is marked "Copied from Donald Cameron piper to Seaforth." Ross was always a stickler for notational accuracy, and readers will note his setting of the second element of his double echo beats as even quavers:



and so on.

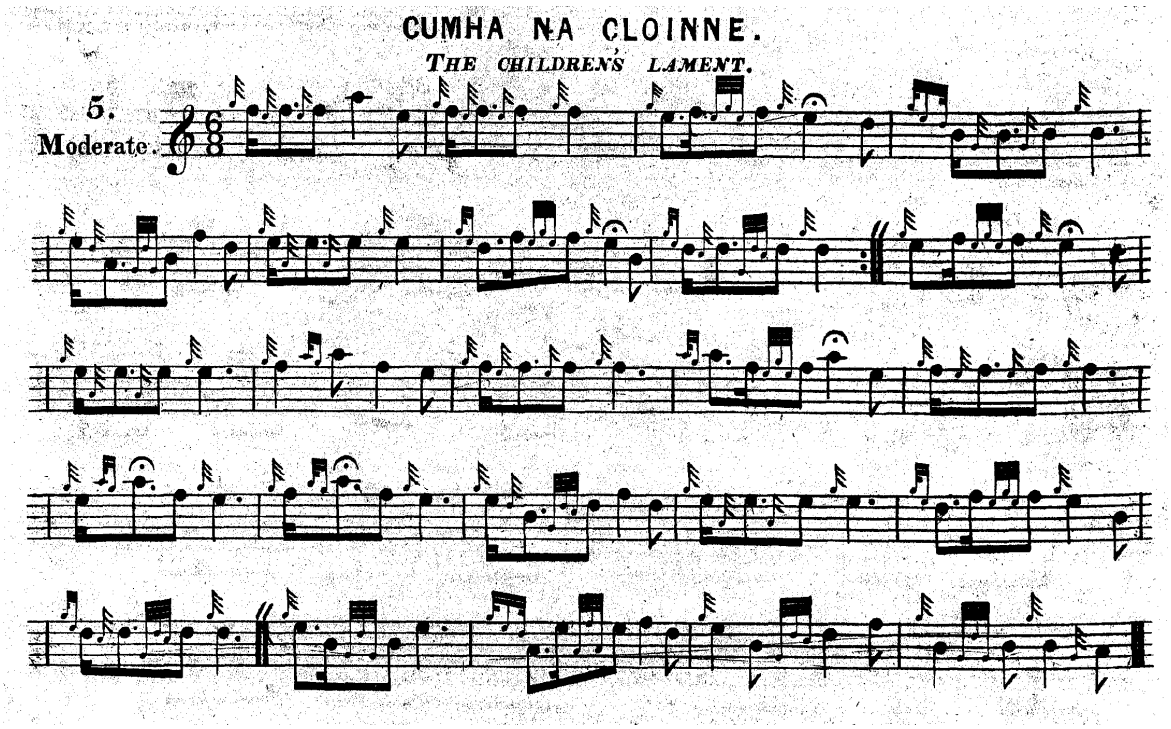
John MacDougall Gillies sets the tune in 6/8 and shows some interesting timings in the ground:

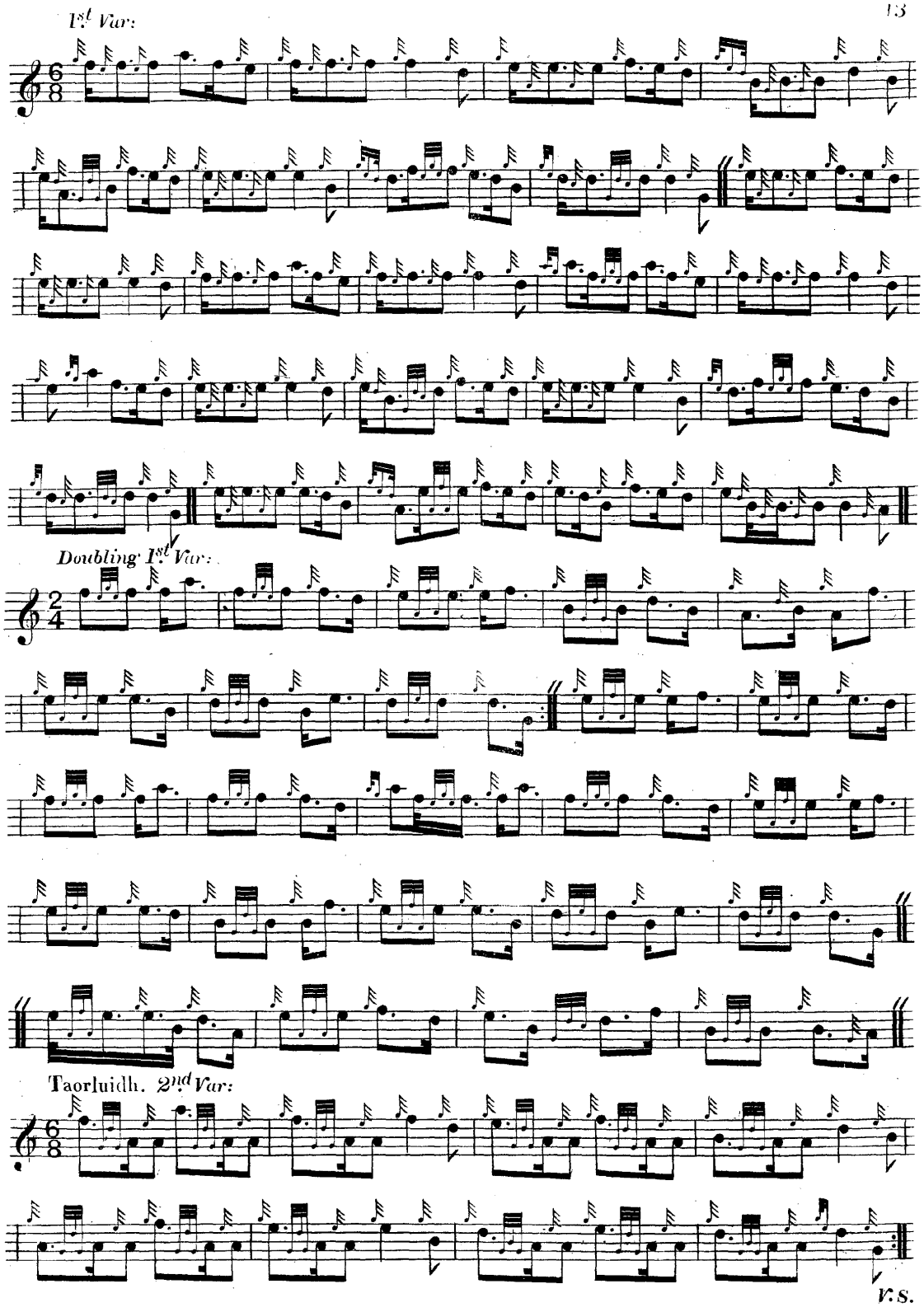


and so on.

Robert Meldrum sets the ground in 6/8, and like Gillies he follows the MacKay style.

With the exception of C. S. Thomason in *Ceol Mor*, there is a high degree of similarity amongst the published settings. The earliest is ***Uilleam*** **Ross**. This was the first published version of the tune, present in *Ross's Collection* from the first edition in 1869 onwards. The following gives some idea of its characteristic timings:





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and so on.

David Glen arranges the tune in his characteristically pleasing style:

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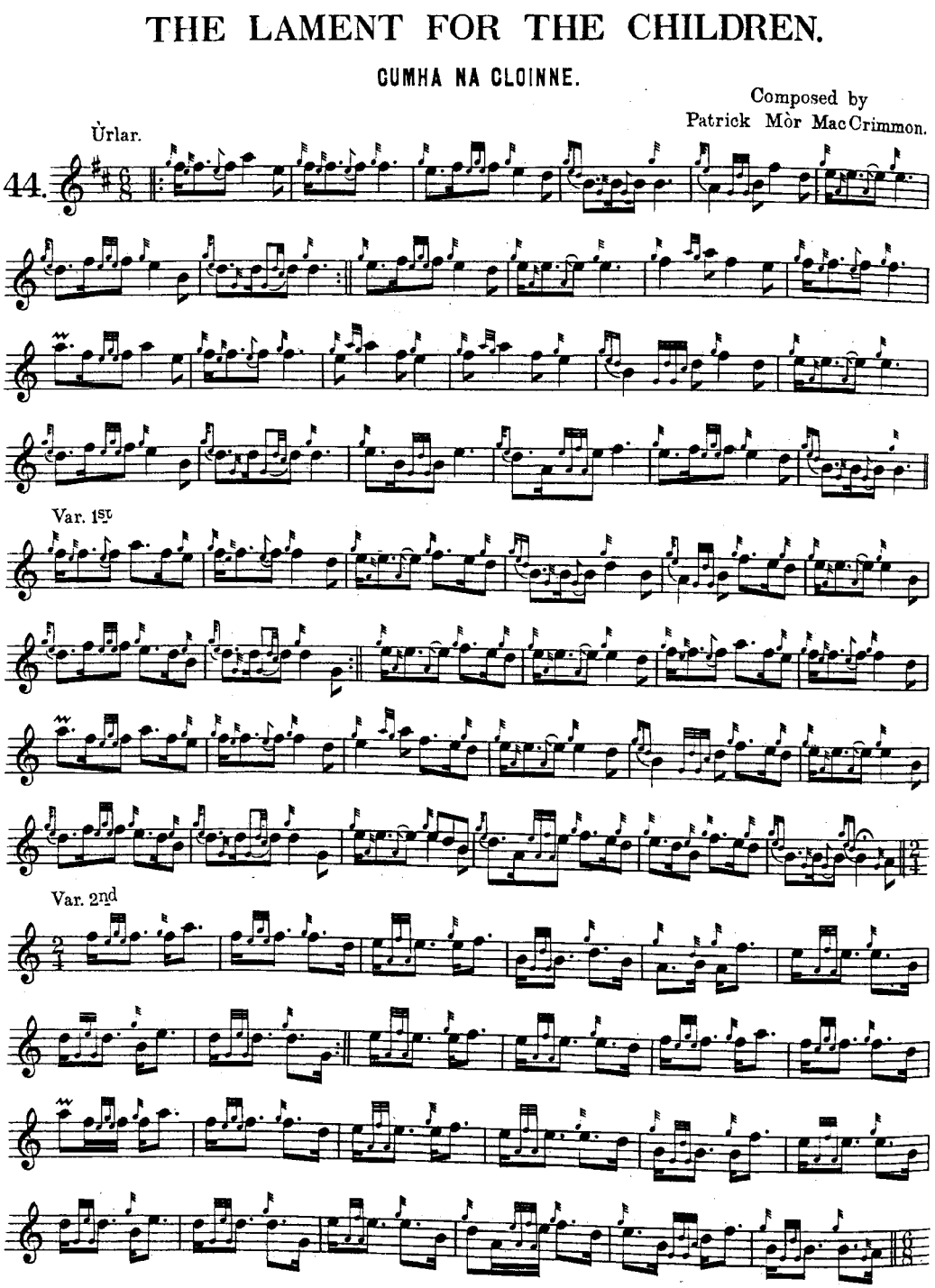
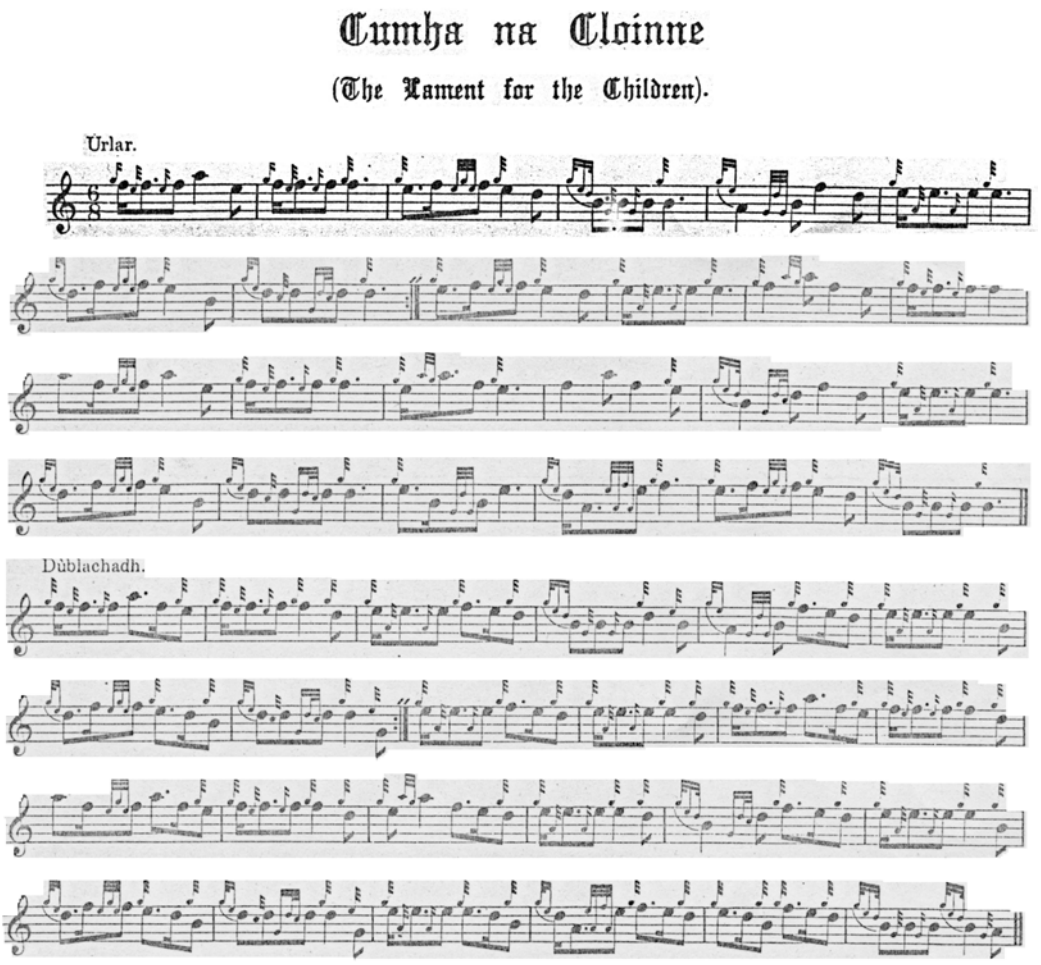


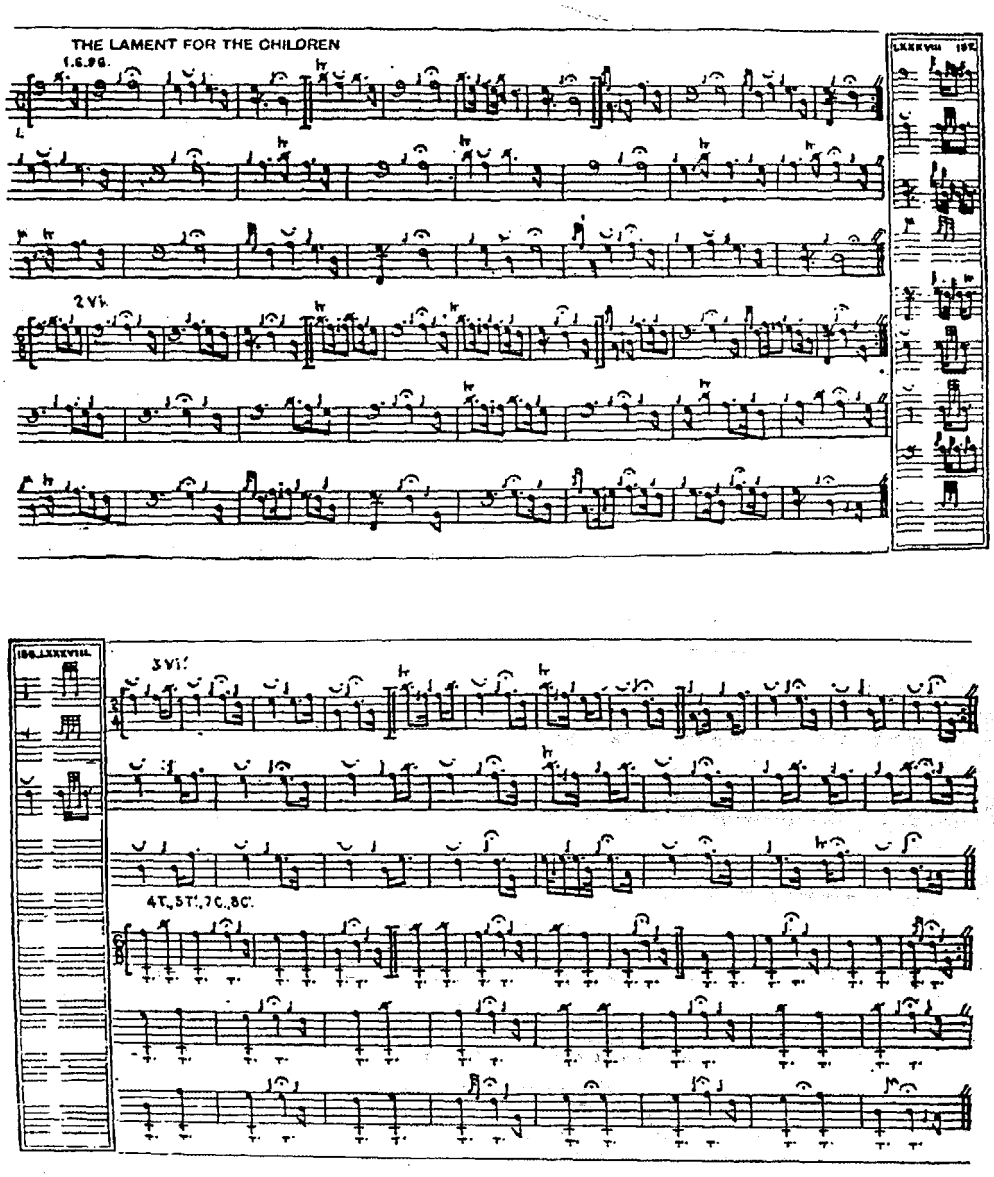
and so on.

The **Piobaireachd Society Collection (first series)** contains an interesting "cut down" in bar 30 of the ground and its doubling. This score is a composite based on the MS of Sir John MacRa of Ardintoul which was compiled about 1820, and an apparently very similar setting of John MacKay, junior, (Angus's brother), a copy of which was supplied by Dr. Charles Bannatyne, who then owned the manuscript. The MacRa MS was then in the possession of Sir Colin MacRae, a founding member of the Piobaireachd Society, for some years its Secretary/Treasurer, and one of the supporters of William Stewart of Ensay with whom he combined to overthrow General Thomason as President and re-instate the traditional style of staff notation in the Society's publications. I do not know the current whereabouts of this manuscript.



and so on.

General Thomason publishes a composite setting in *Ceol Mor,* citing Donald MacDonald and Angus MacKay's MSS, Uilleam Ross's published book, and Keith Cameron and Colin Cameron as his sources: he also indicates that his main teacher, Donald MacKay, Angus MacKay's nephew, was taught the tune by Donald Cameron. Thomason's score brings MacDonald up to the "standard" 32 bar format, rather attractively. Whether this was his own arrangement or came to him through his Cameron sources is not clear:



G. F. Ross's approach to the tune is broadly that of MacKay. There is much ingenious reasoning in Ross's notes, but this does not add very much to the interpretation of the tune at

a practical level, since he attempts to treat differing approaches to certain phrases, lying well within the stylistic remit of the performer, as signs of "mutilation." Ross' scores are not reproduced here.

Commentary:

In his "Piping Reminiscences" published in the *Oban Times* (04/04/1942, p.5), John MacDonald of Inverness noted that "Of the old pipers, Calum Macpherson, Sandy and Colin Cameron, and Angus and George MacDonald were outstanding. Sandy Cameron was at one time with the Marquess of Huntley [sic]. He excelled in tunes of light top-hand work such as the 'Lament for the Children'."

Angus MacPherson wrote, in his book, *A Highlander Looks Back,* that "Many stories of wit and humour are told of my father, 'Old Calum' [Malcolm MacPherson, *Calum Pìobaire*], even to this day...Never will I forget the sad tune as the funeral cortege [1898] wound its way from the little piping cottage to the place of interment at Laggan Bridge. There was weeping in the glen as the bagpipes played their mournful notes of 'Cha Till MacCrimmon,' and when John Macdonald played his last farewell to his beloved tutor with that beautiful piobaireachd 'The Lament for the Children,' as only Donald Mor MacCrimmon himself could emulate. The scene was an unforgettable one as we crossed the bridge on the river Spay, which with its murmuring stream seemed to add its tribute to the solemn occasion...."

When Robert Meldrum died, in July 1941, Robert U. Brown played this tune over his grave in Aberdeen's Springbank Cemetery. Amongst the pallbearers were Alfred E. Milne (G. S. McLennan's friend, who he commemorated in a famous tune) and Malcolm MacInnes, who had helped compile the *Oban Times* series "Pipe-Major Meldrum on Champions Past and Present. A Veteran Piper's Reminiscences" which ran in the paper in the summer of 1940.

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