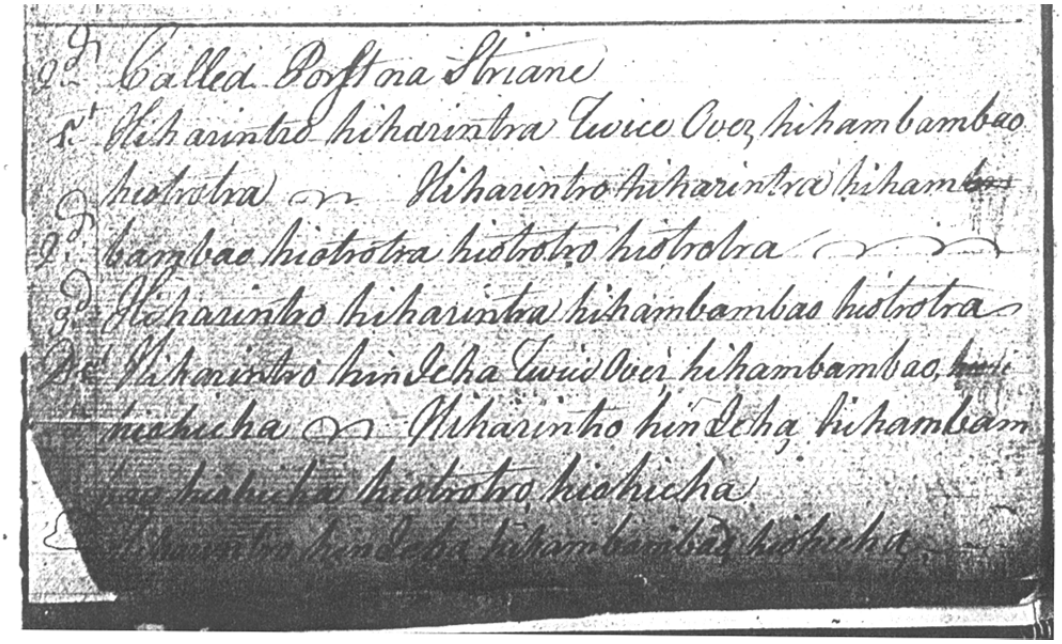
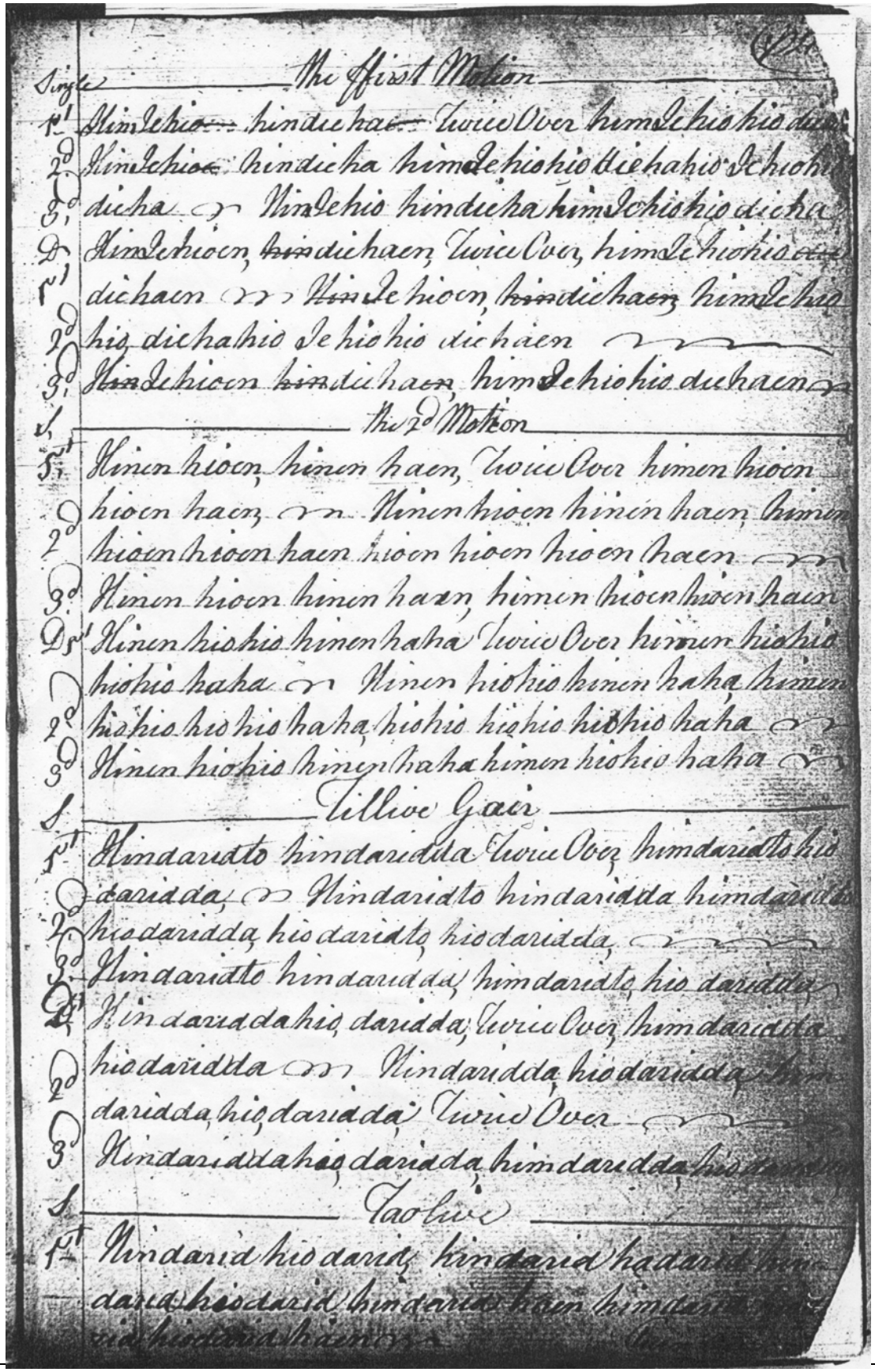
# The Blue Ribbon

There are settings of this tune in the following manuscript sources:
**– Colin Mór Campbell**, "Nether Lorn Canntaireachd," i, 3-6;
**– Donald MacDonald**'s MS, ff.262-267;
**– Angus MacKay**'s MS, i, 175-7;
**– John MacKay**'s MS, ff.156-8;
**– Colin Cameron**'s MS, ff.48-9;
**– Uilleam Ross**'s MS, ff.1-5;
**– Robert Meldrum**'s MS, ff.110-114 (with the title "The Grants' Blue Ribbon" suggesting a source in Thomason);

And in the following published sources:
**– Uilleam Ross**, *Ross's Collection*, pp.4-7;
**– C. S. Thomason**, *Ceol Mor*, pp.141-2 (with the title "The Grants' Blue Ribbon");
**– David Glen**, *Ancient Piobaireachd*, pp.194-6;
**– G. F. Ross**, *Some Piobaireachd Studies*, p.39.

## **Colin Campbell** sets the tune as follows:





Single — the ffirst Motion

1st Hinjehio hindiehae twice Over himjehiohio dieha
2d Hinjehio hindieha himjehiohio diehahio jehiohio
3d dieha Hinjehio hindieha himjehiohio dieha
D Hinjehioen, hindiehaen, twice Over, himjehiohio
5t diehaen Hinjehioen, hindiehaen himjehio
2d hio diehahio jehiohio diehaen
3d Hinjehioen hindiehaen himjehiohio diehaen

S — the 2d Motion

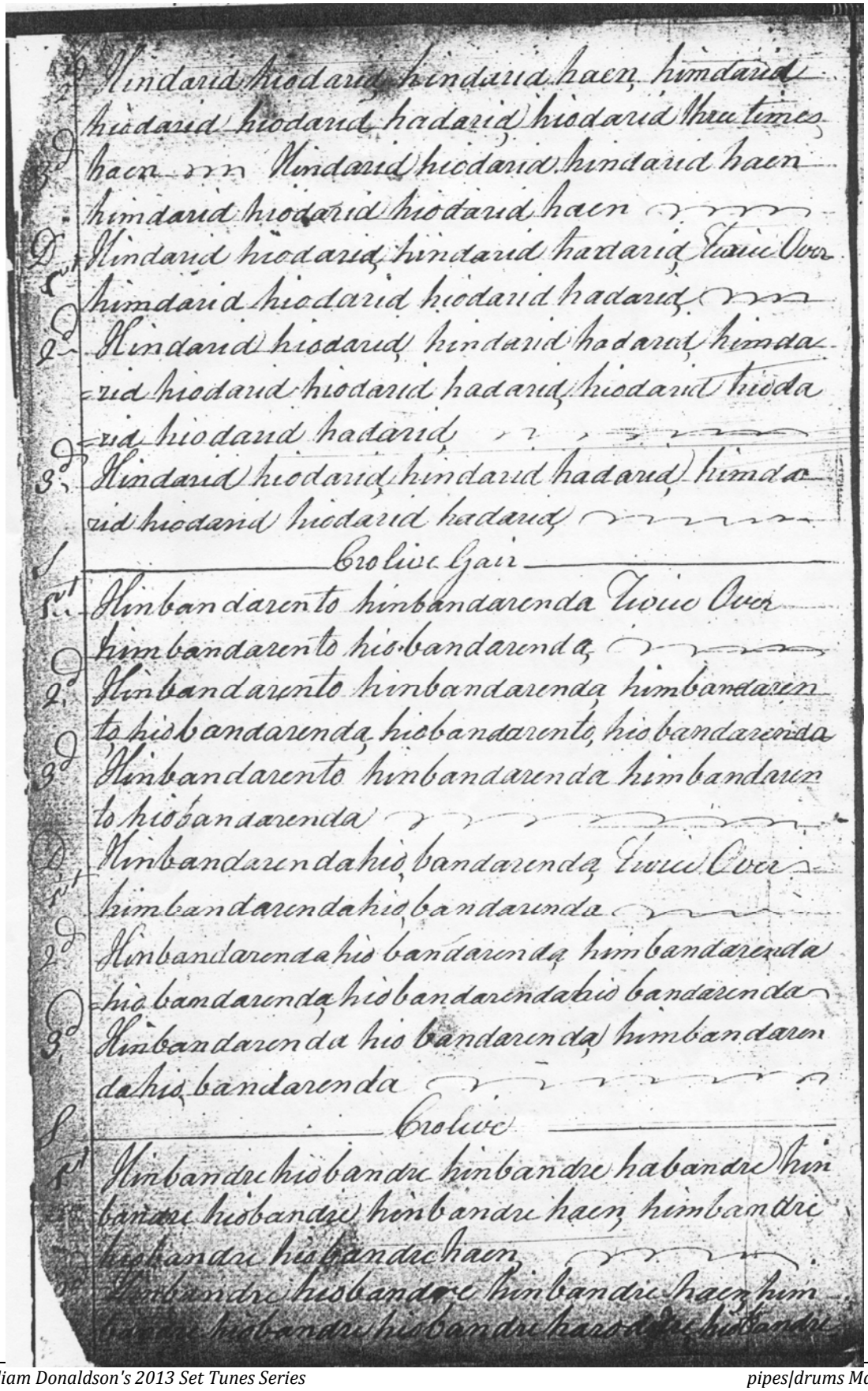
5t Hinen hioen, hinen haen, twice Over himen hioen
hioen haen Hinen hioen hinen haen himen
2d hioen hioen haen hioen hioen hioen haen
3d Hinen hioen hinen haen himen hioen hioen haen
D 5t Hinen hiohio hinen haha twice Over himen hiohio
hiohio haha Hinen hiohio hinen haha himen
2d hiohio hiohio haha hiohio hiohio hiohio haha
3d Hinen hiohio hinen haha himen hiohio haha

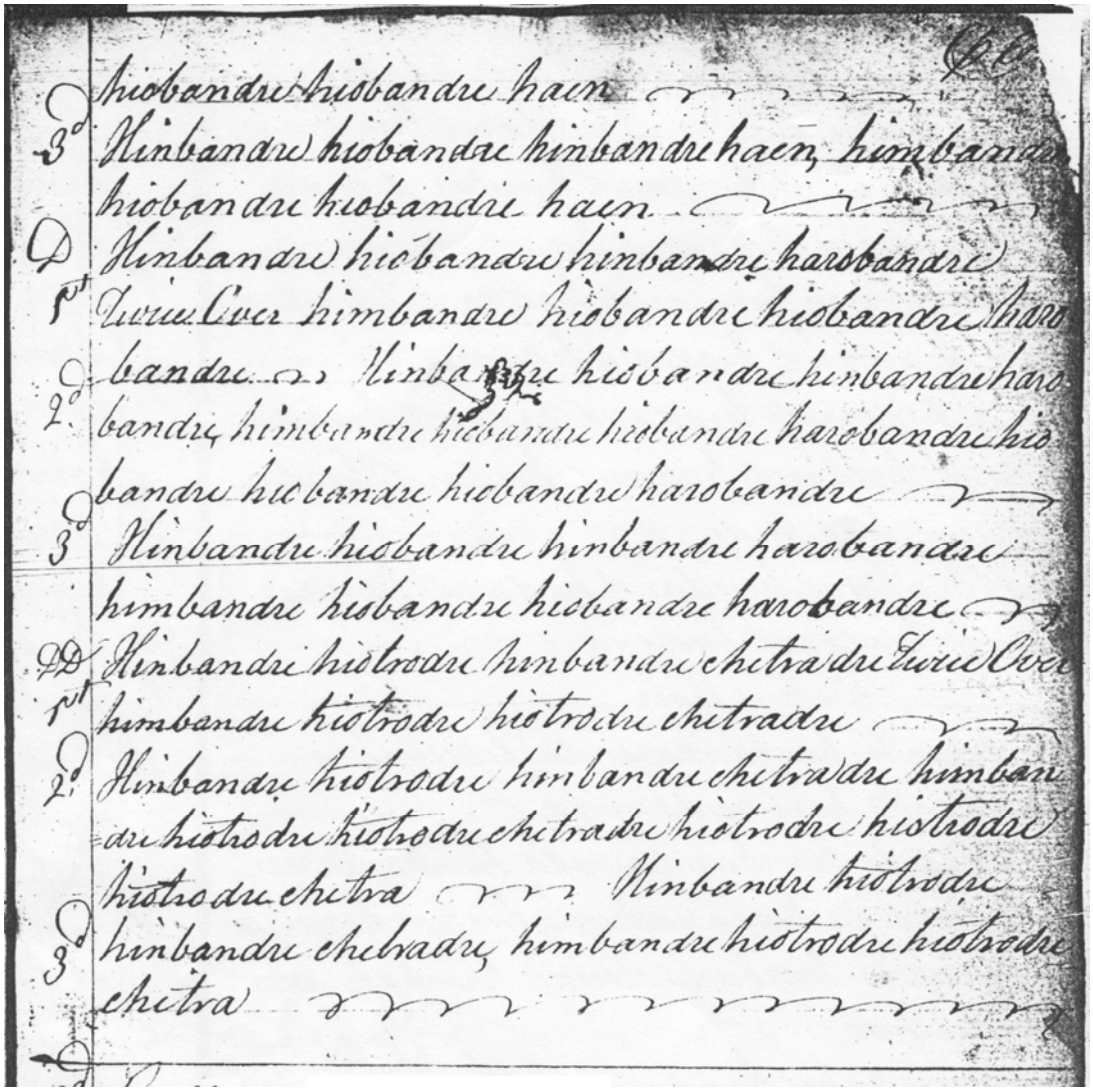
S — Tillive Gair

1st Hindaridto hindaridda twice Over himdaridto hio
daridda Hindaridto hindaridda himdaridto
2d hiodaridda hiodaridto hiodaridda
3d Hindaridto hindaridda himdaridto hiodaridda
D Hindariddahio daridda twice Over himdaridda
hiodaridda Hindaridda hiodaridda him
2d daridda hio daridda twice Over
3d Hindariddahio daridda himdaridda hio[illegible]

S — Taolive

1st Hindarid hiodarid hindarid hadarid hin
darid hiodarid hindarid haen himdarid [illegible]
rid hiodarid haen [illegible]



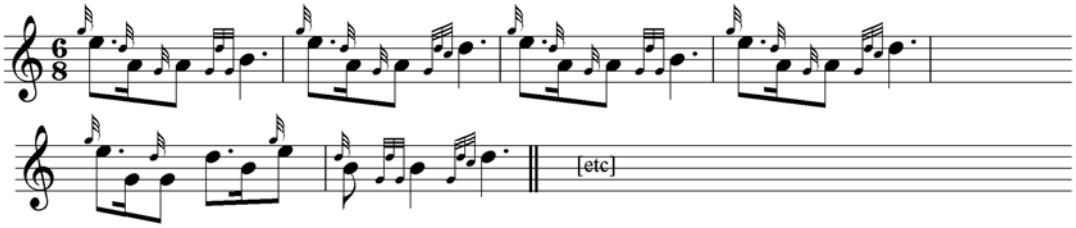


**Colin Campbell** develops the tune through a ground, and three thumb variations which build a pleasing tension between the neighboring tetratonic scales A, B, D, E and G, B, D, E, and a clever alternation between A and high G both in the top and bottom hands—particularly telling in "the ffirst Motion" where the two scales are combined. The doubling of the ffirst Motion creates problems because somebody has deleted the regular returns to the A tonic, so that as it stands it seems a mere repeat of the ffirst Motion singling. The typeset transcript below suggests a possible reading here. The setting has a "Crolive gair"– something of a moveable feast in Nether Lorn nomenclature, sometimes indicating a crunluath fosgailte movement, sometimes, as here, seeming to indicate a pendulum-style movement. In the taorluath doubling the figures return to D rather than alternating between B and D, and the crunluath a mach on D is played, Macarthur style, off E.

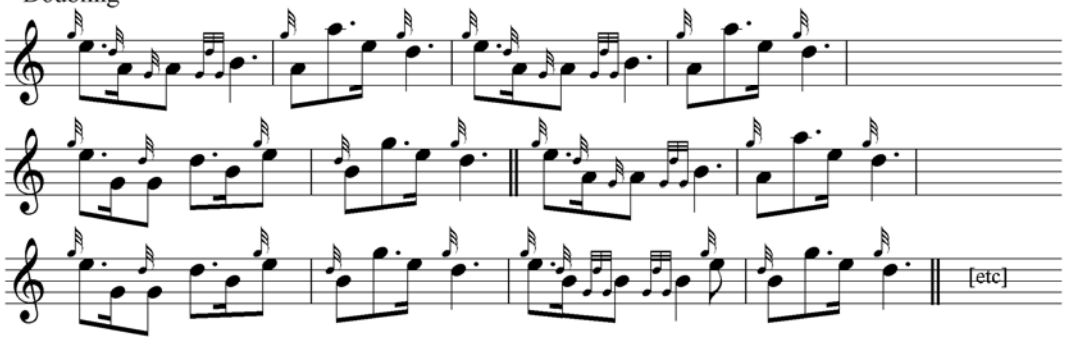
In the musically typeset examples I have read the syllable *ba* in *hambabembao* as an expressed D quaver; it could be a gracenote, although the balance of the tune as a whole does imply that it could be sounded.

The leading features of **Colin Campbell**'s score are as follows:

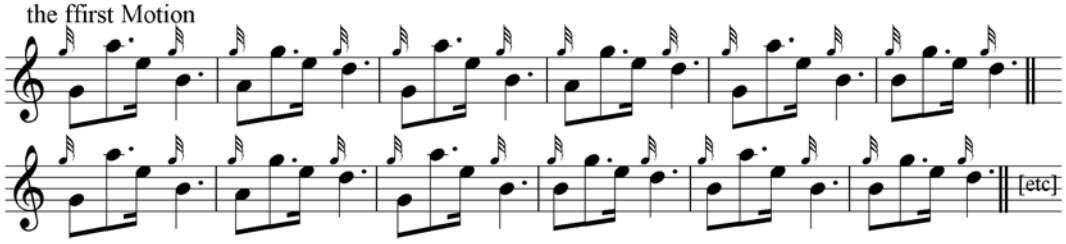
Blue Ribbon Ground--Colin Campbell



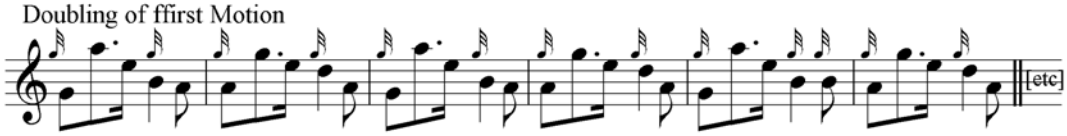

Doubling



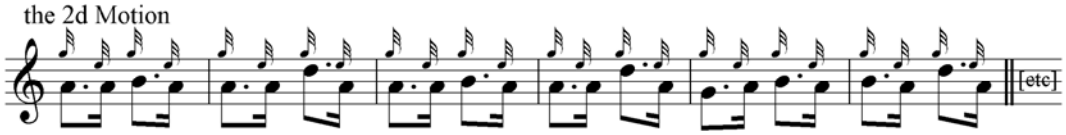

the ffirst Motion



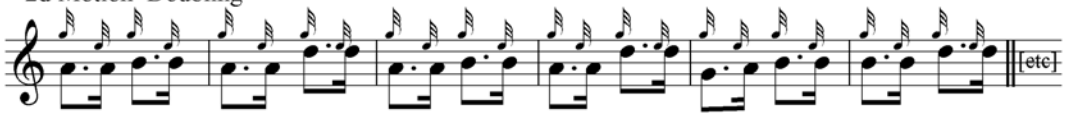

Doubling of ffirst Motion



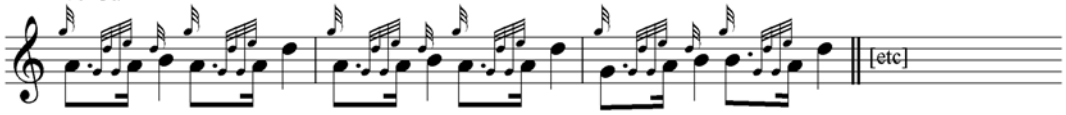

the 2d Motion



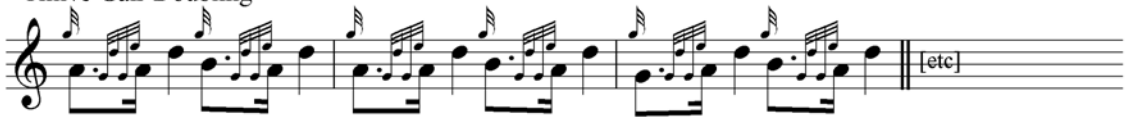

2d Motion Doubling



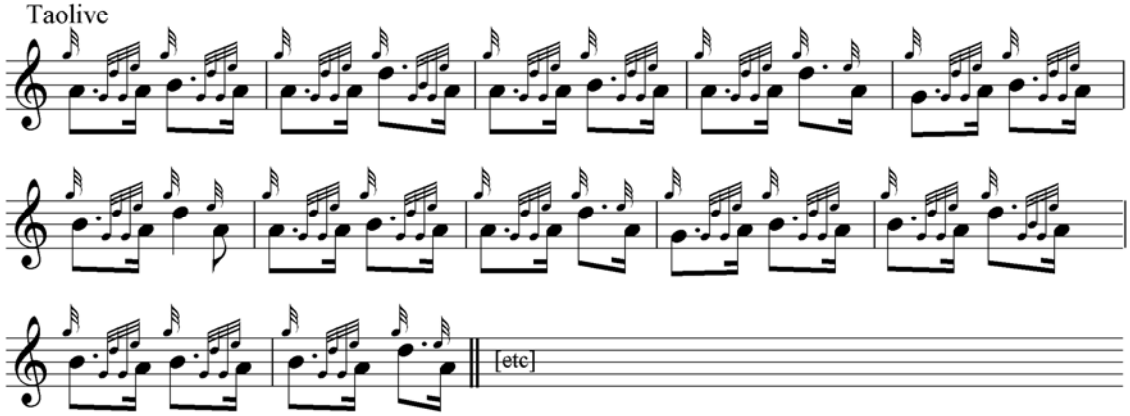

Tillive Gair



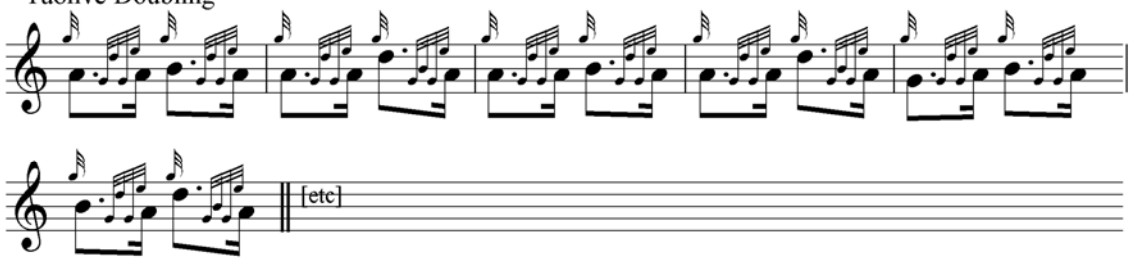
Tillive Gair Doubling



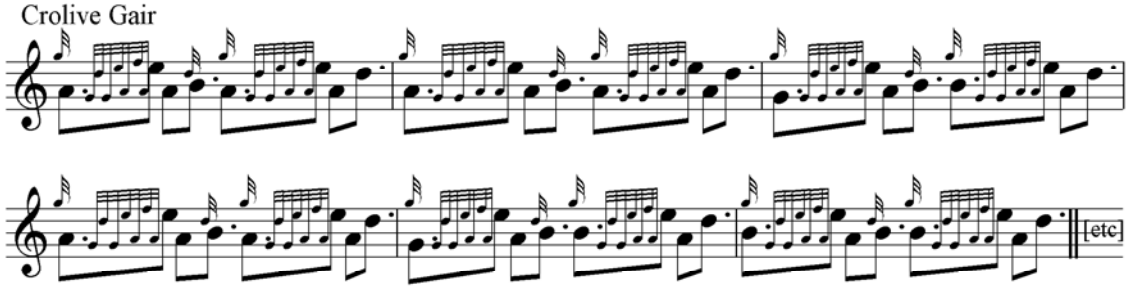

Taolive



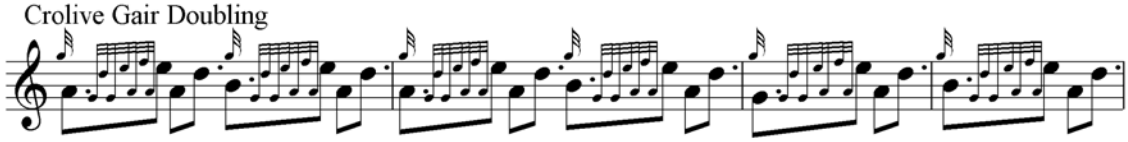

Taolive Doubling



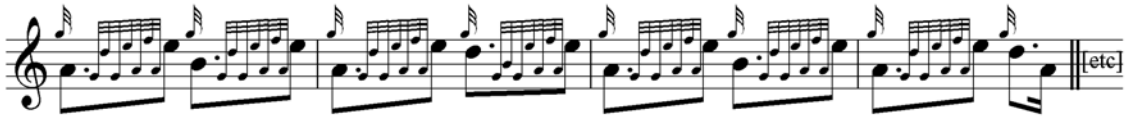

Crolive Gair



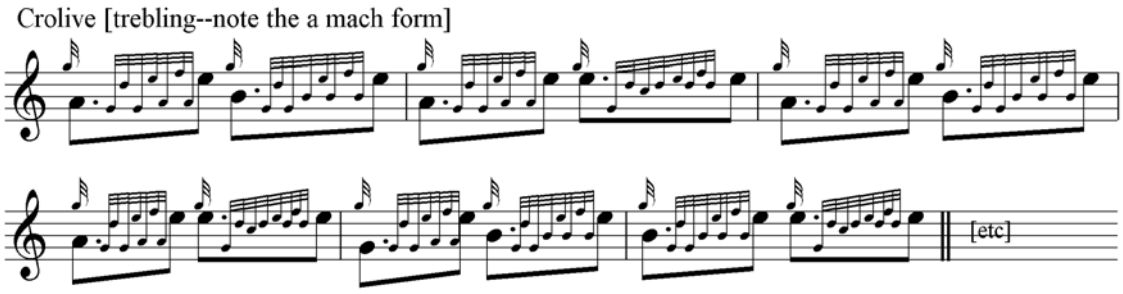

Crolive Gair Doubling



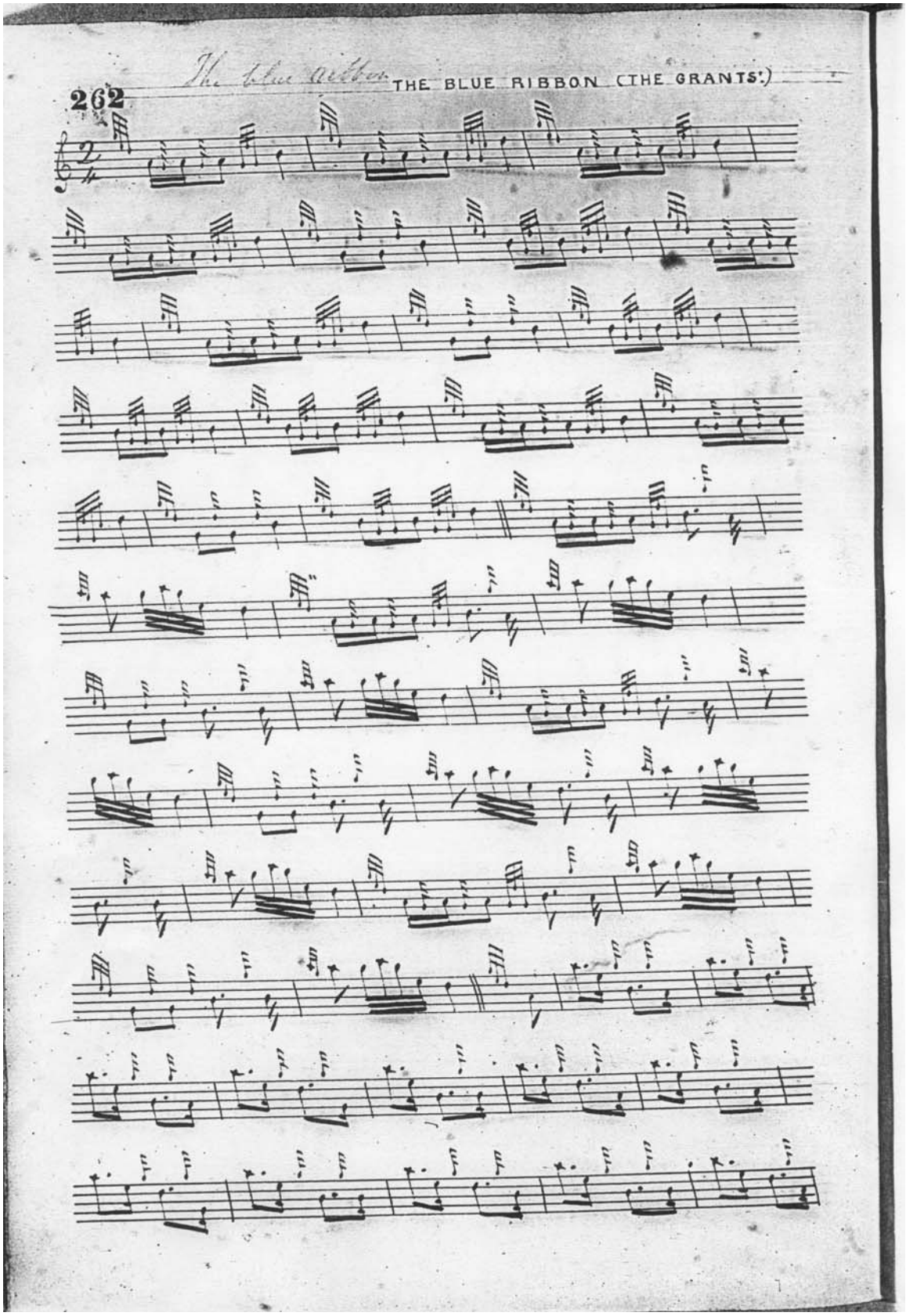
Crolive

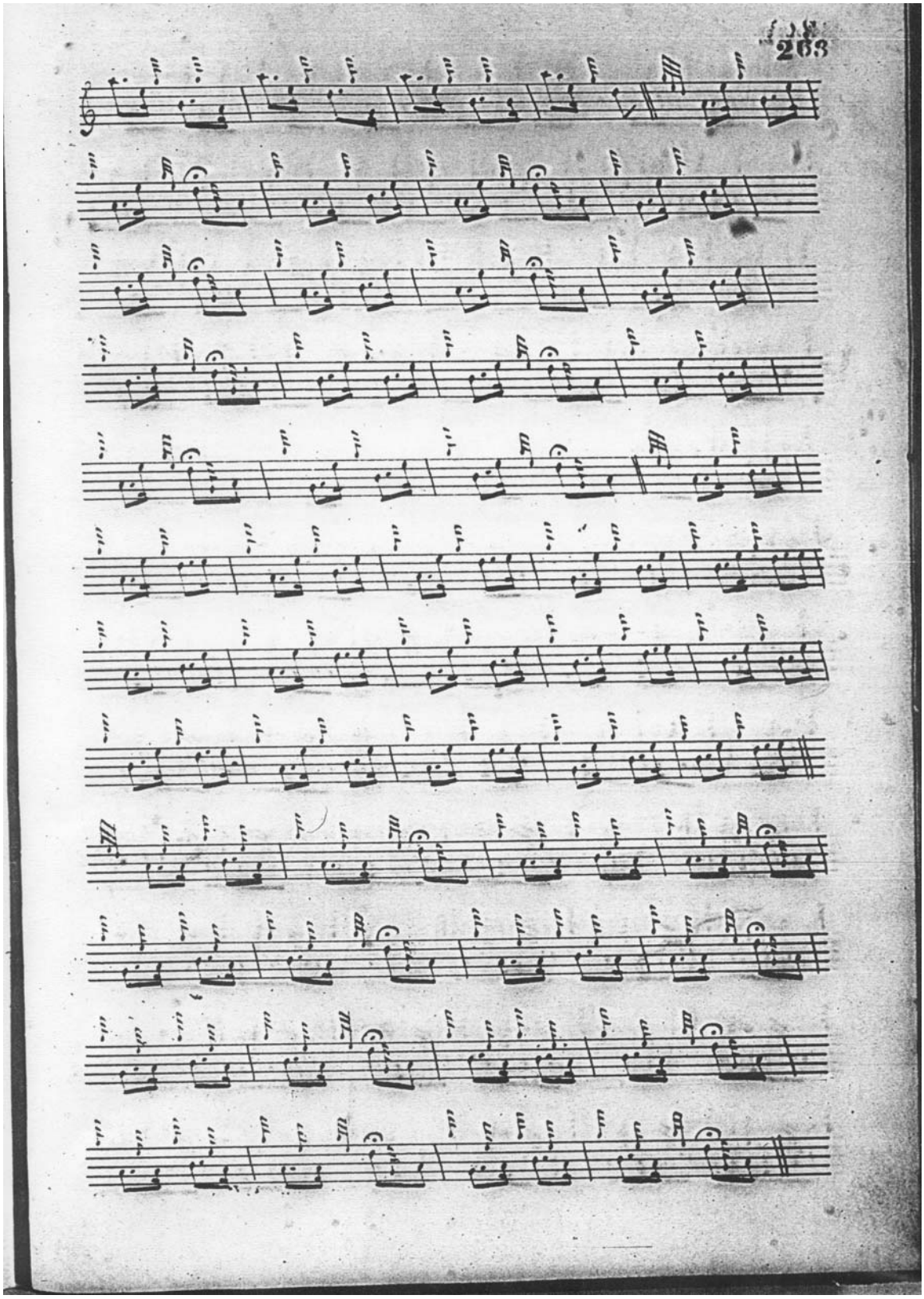


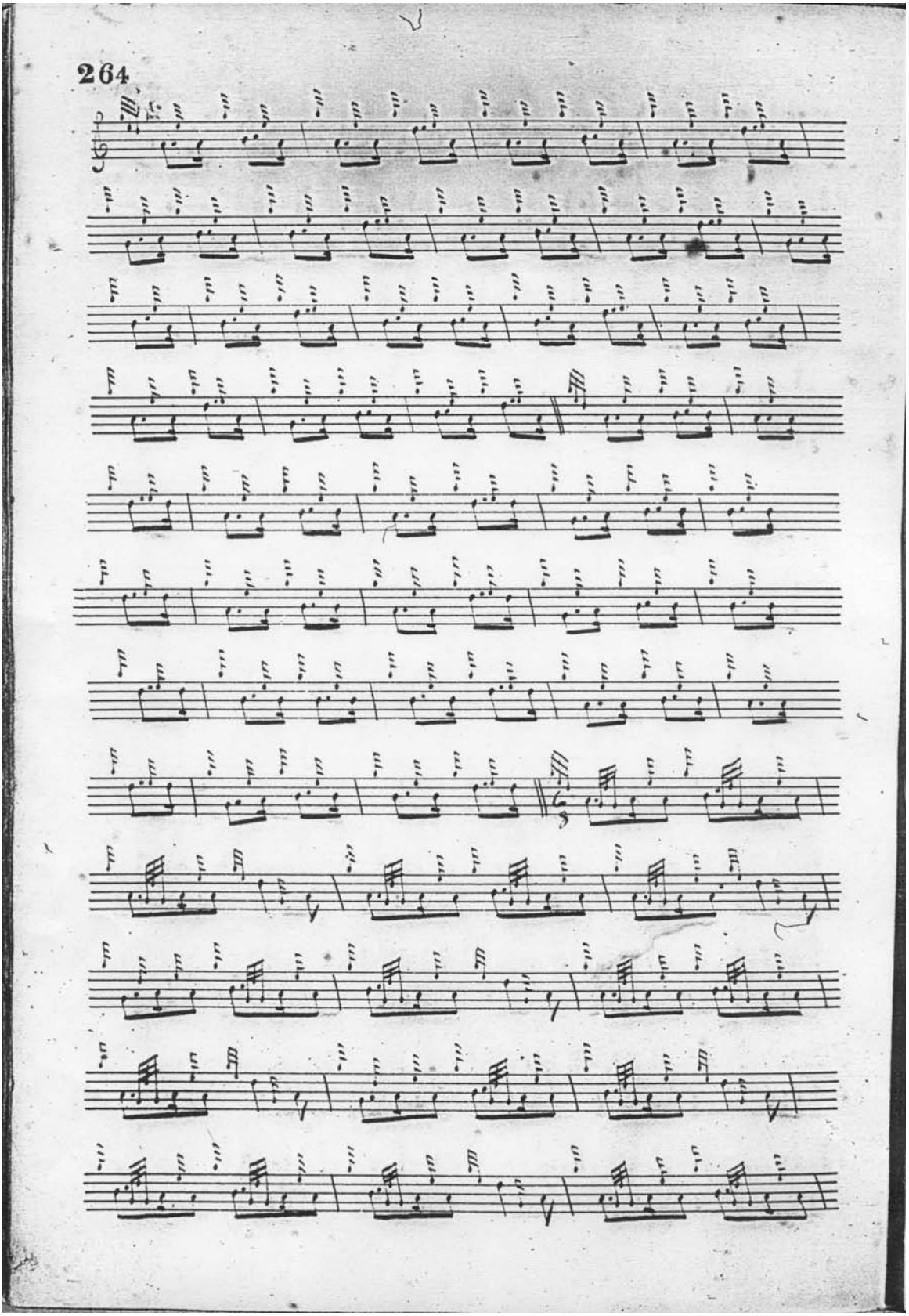
A crunluath duinte doubling follows along conventional lines, and the tune concludes with an interesting a mach:



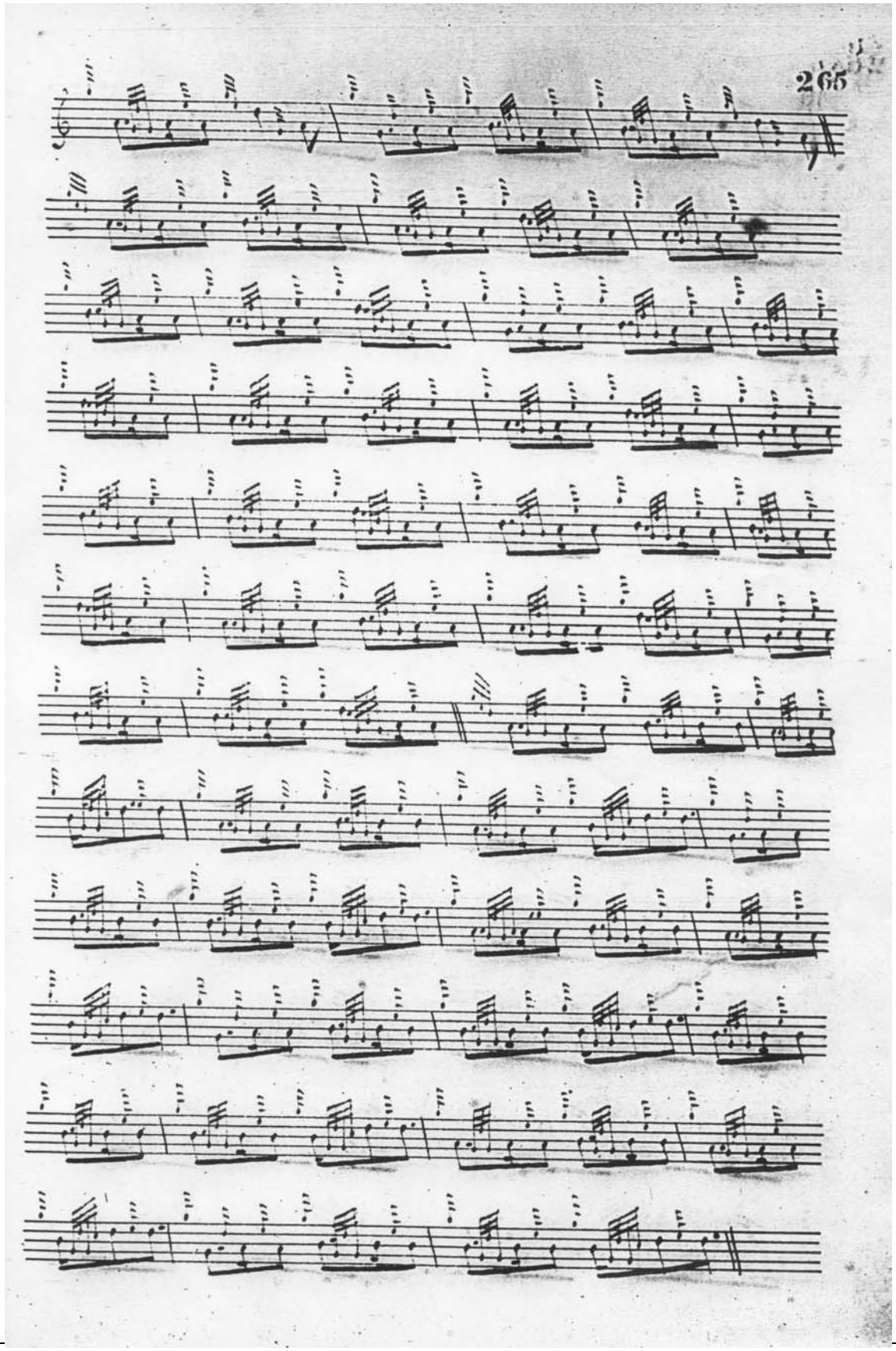

**Donald MacDonald** sets the tune as follows:

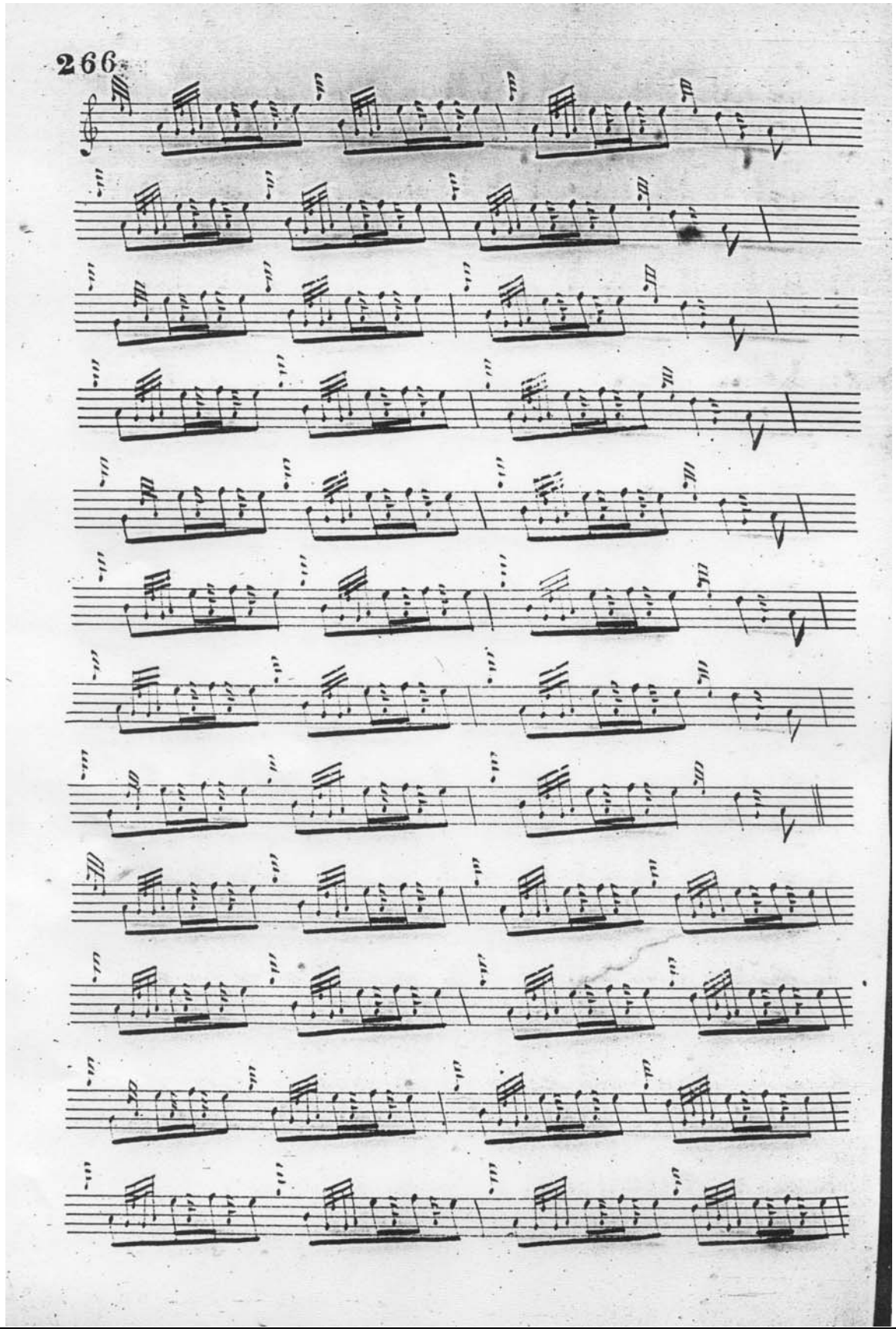

262
THE BLUE RIBBON (THE GRANTS')

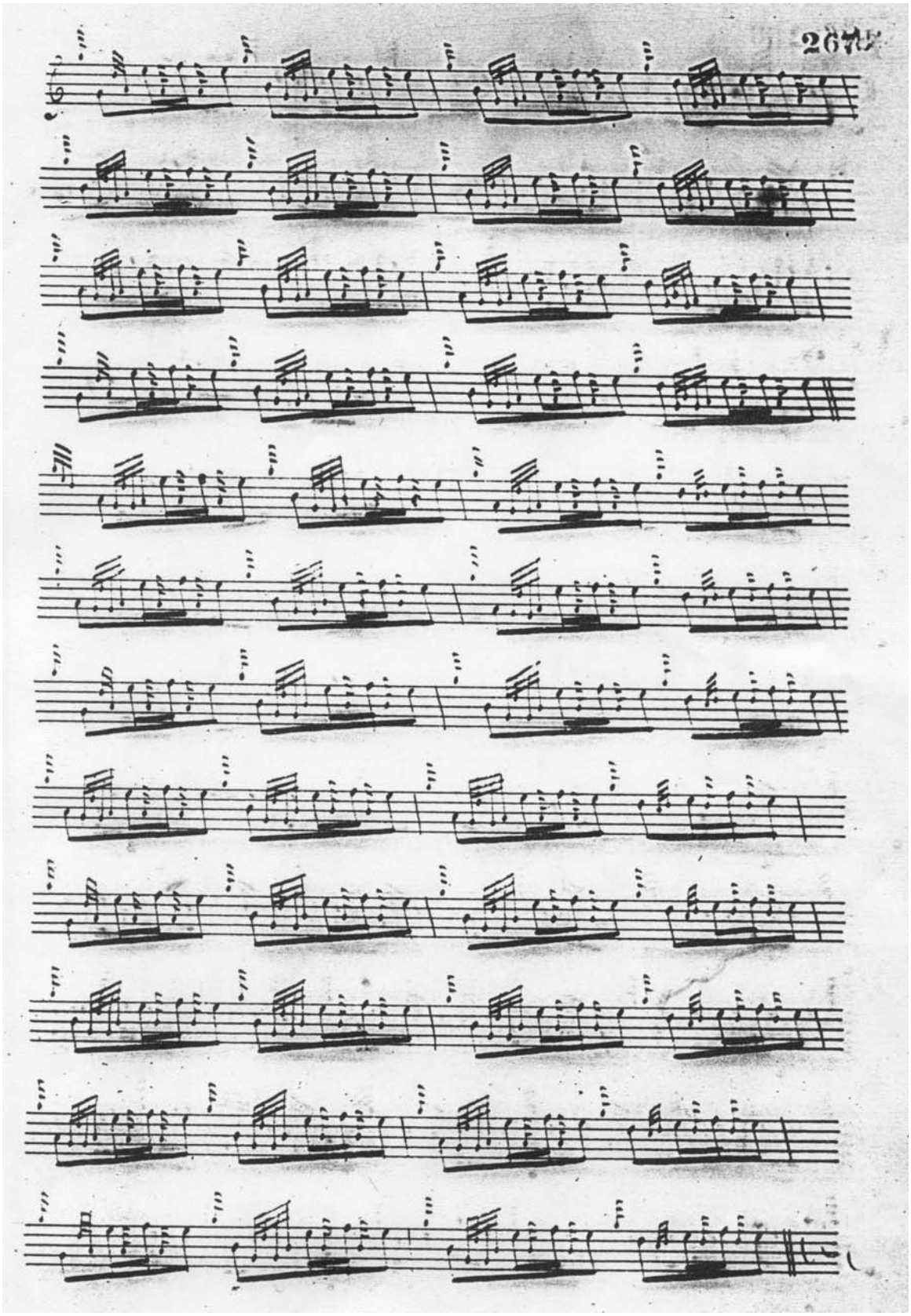

263



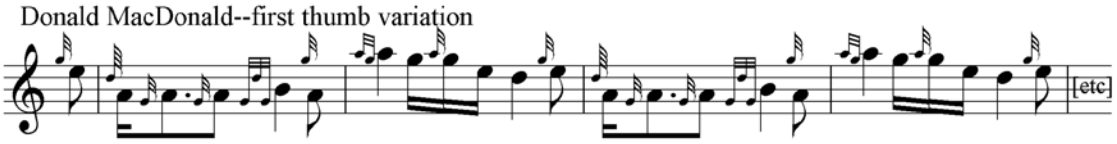

T


265


266



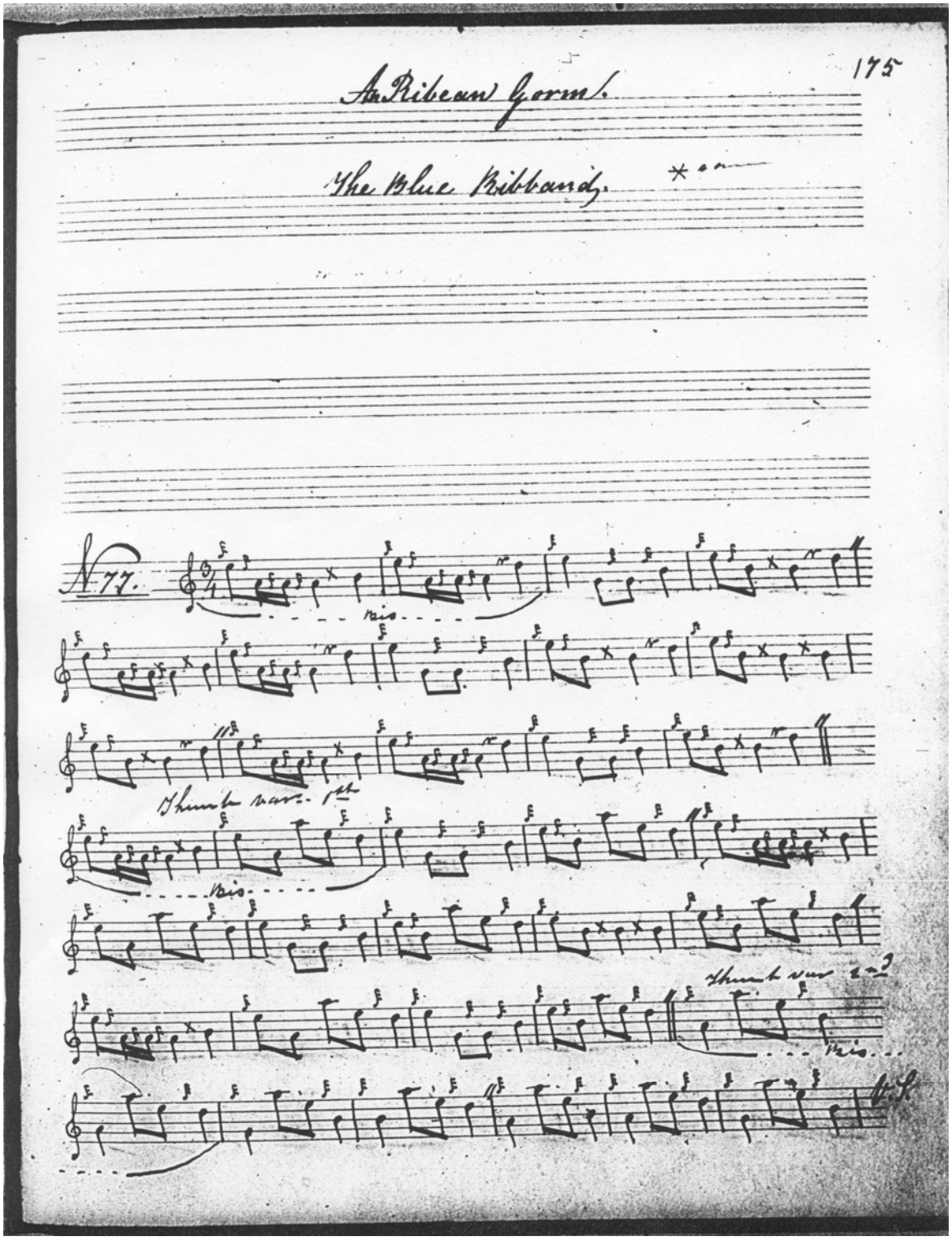
One of the most striking features of **Donald MacDonald**'s score is the ornate decoration in the thumb variation. This might perhaps be timed as follows:

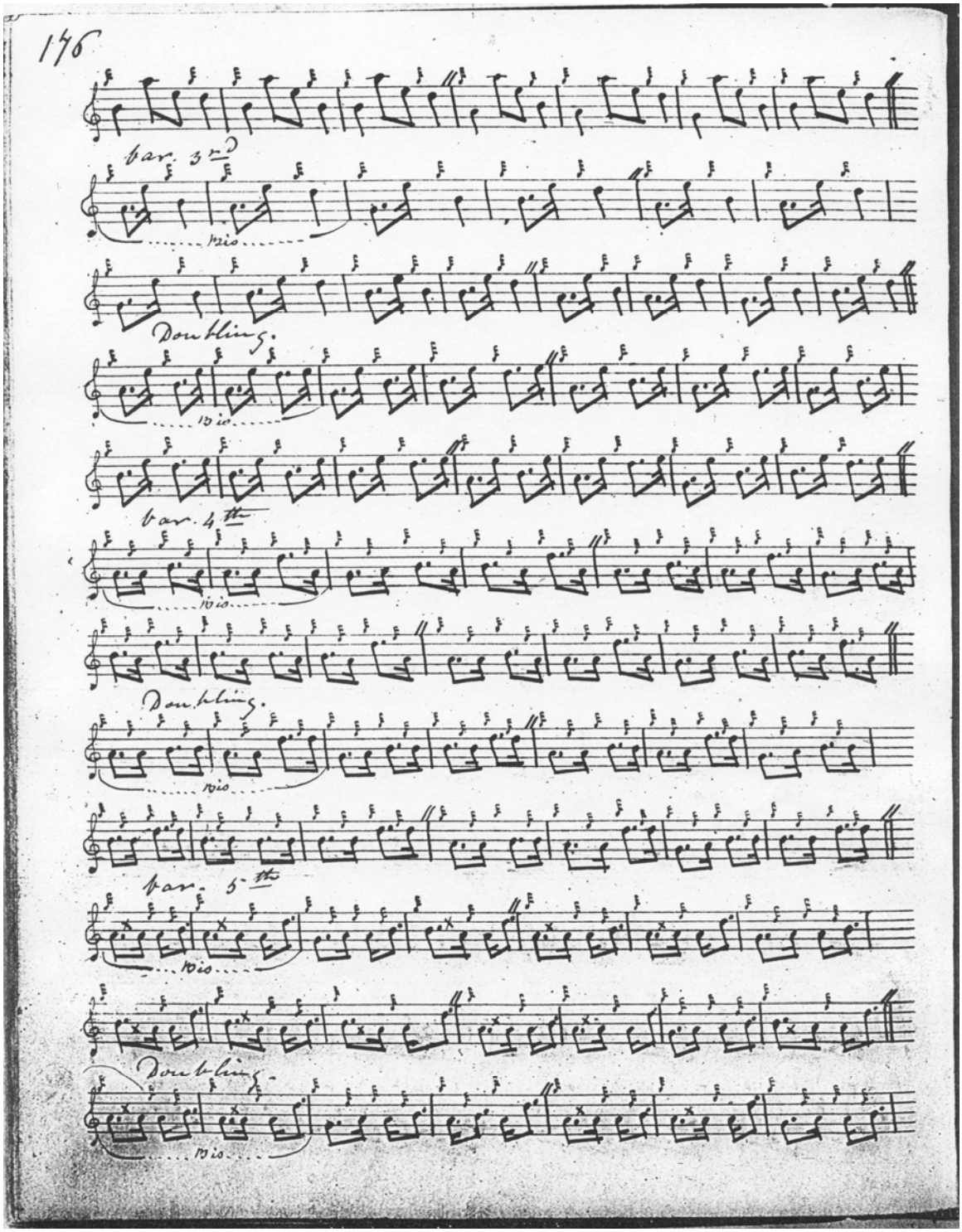


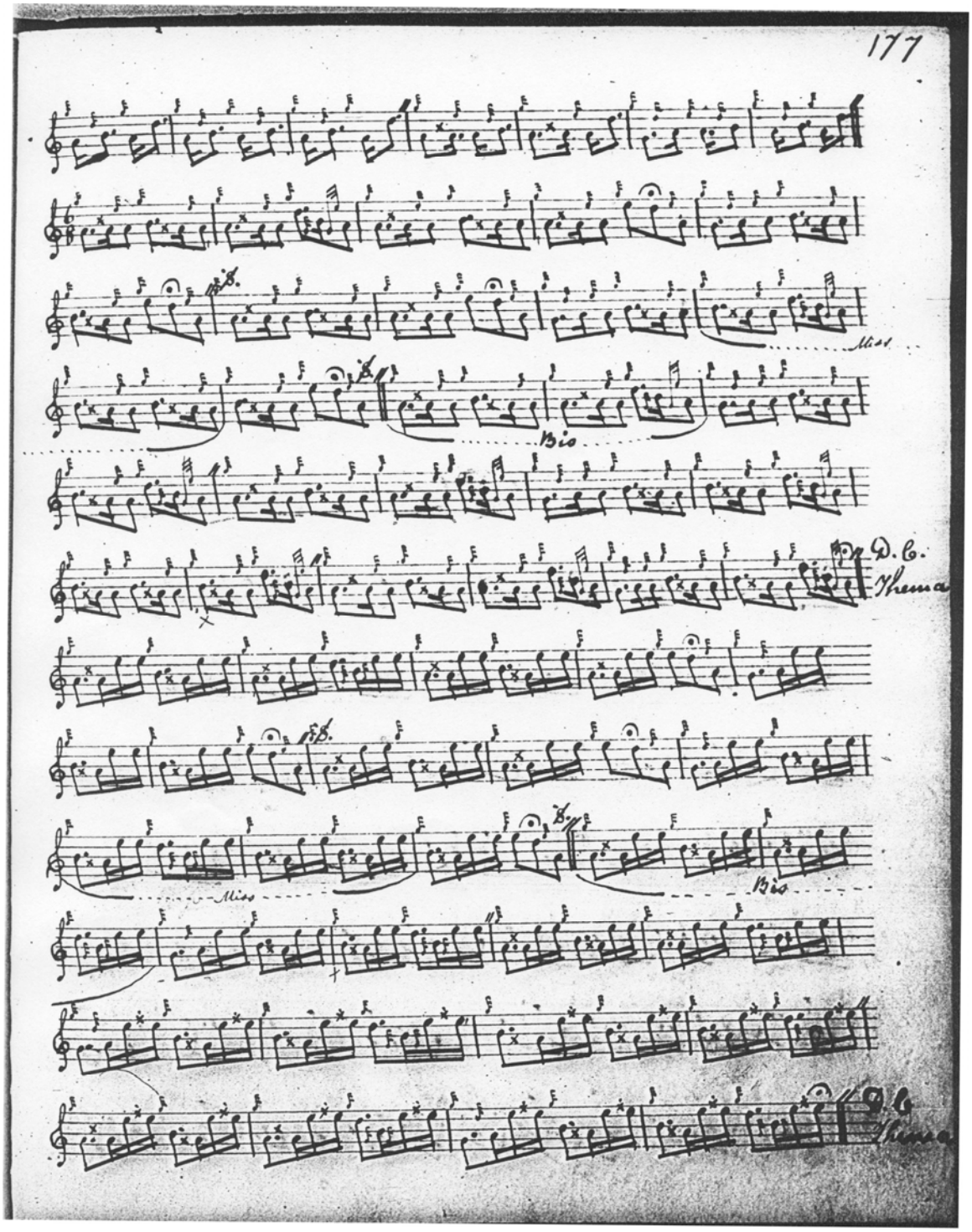

MacDonald develops the tune rather fully, with singling, doubling and trebling of siubhal, taorluath and crunluath. In the taorluath we note his interesting a mach played off an expressed initial quaver on B and then cut in the MacKay style in the movement on D; whereas in the crunluath both are held but here MacDonald uses his characteristic movement on D with pleasing effect.

**Angus MacKay** sets the tune in 3/4, producing a rather "square" effect in contrast to MacDonald's more idiomatic duple time. MacKay's setting tends to be plainer in terms of ornament, and we see this particularly in the first thumb variation.

**Angus MacKay** sets the tune like this:


175
An Ribean Gorm.
The Blue Ribband.
No 77.
bis
Thumb var. 1st
bis
Thumb var 2nd
bis
V.S.

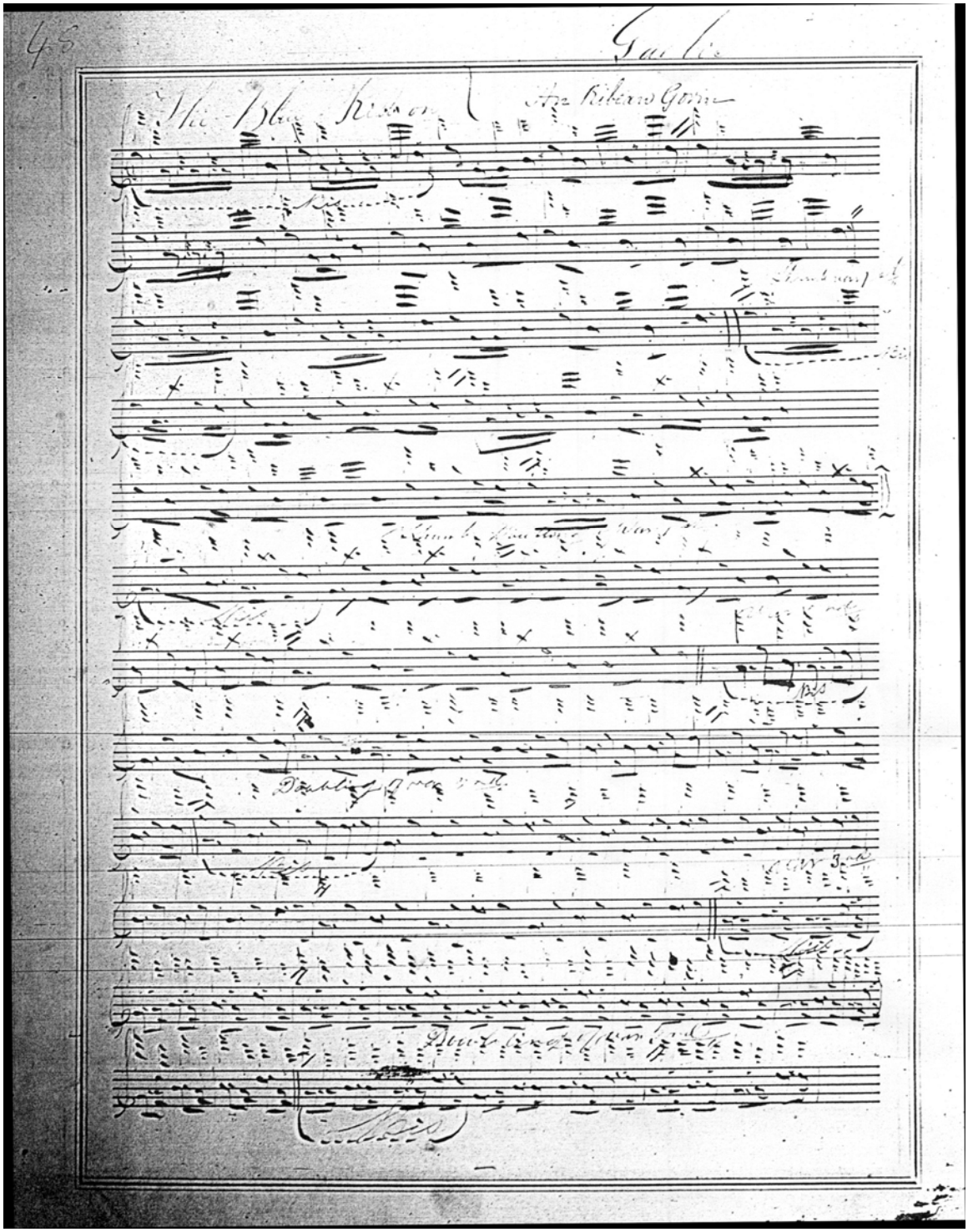

176
var. 3rd
Doubling.
var. 4th
Doubling.
var. 5th
Doubling.




Interestingly Angus MacKay has no taorluath or crunluath a mach. He repeats the ground at the end of the taorluath and crunluath doublings.

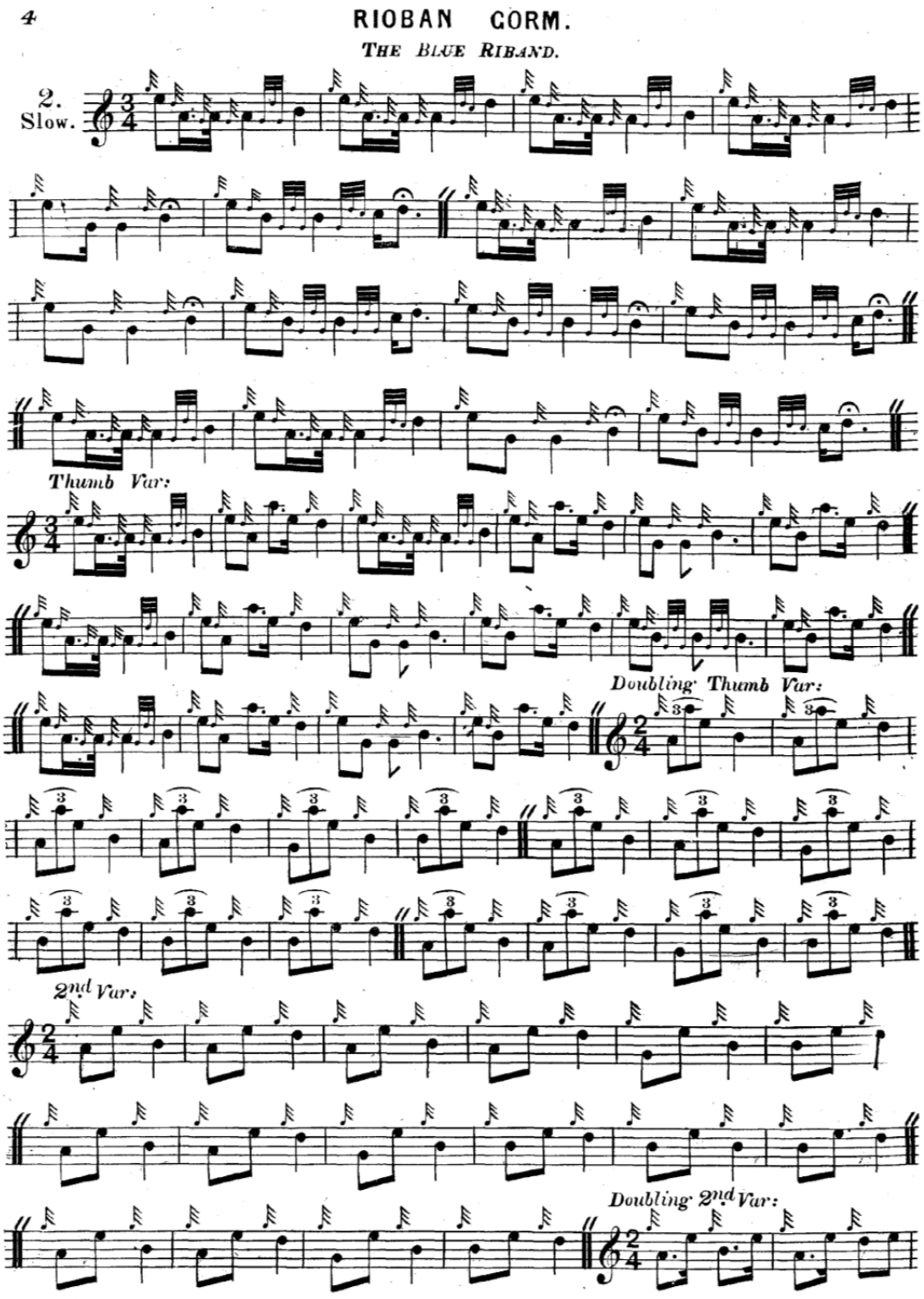
That there was no uniform MacKay "house style" is indicated by the setting of this tune in his brother John's MS. **John MacKay** sets the tune in a rather pedestrian 4/4, lengthening the notes at the end of each bar of the ground, and he has the "Tillive Gair" variations singling and doubling unlike Angus. His score is incomplete, effectively ending with the opening gesture of the taorluath duinte variation, but the scraps which follow suggest that he played a taorluath a mach (again unlike Angus). John MacKay's score is not reproduced here.

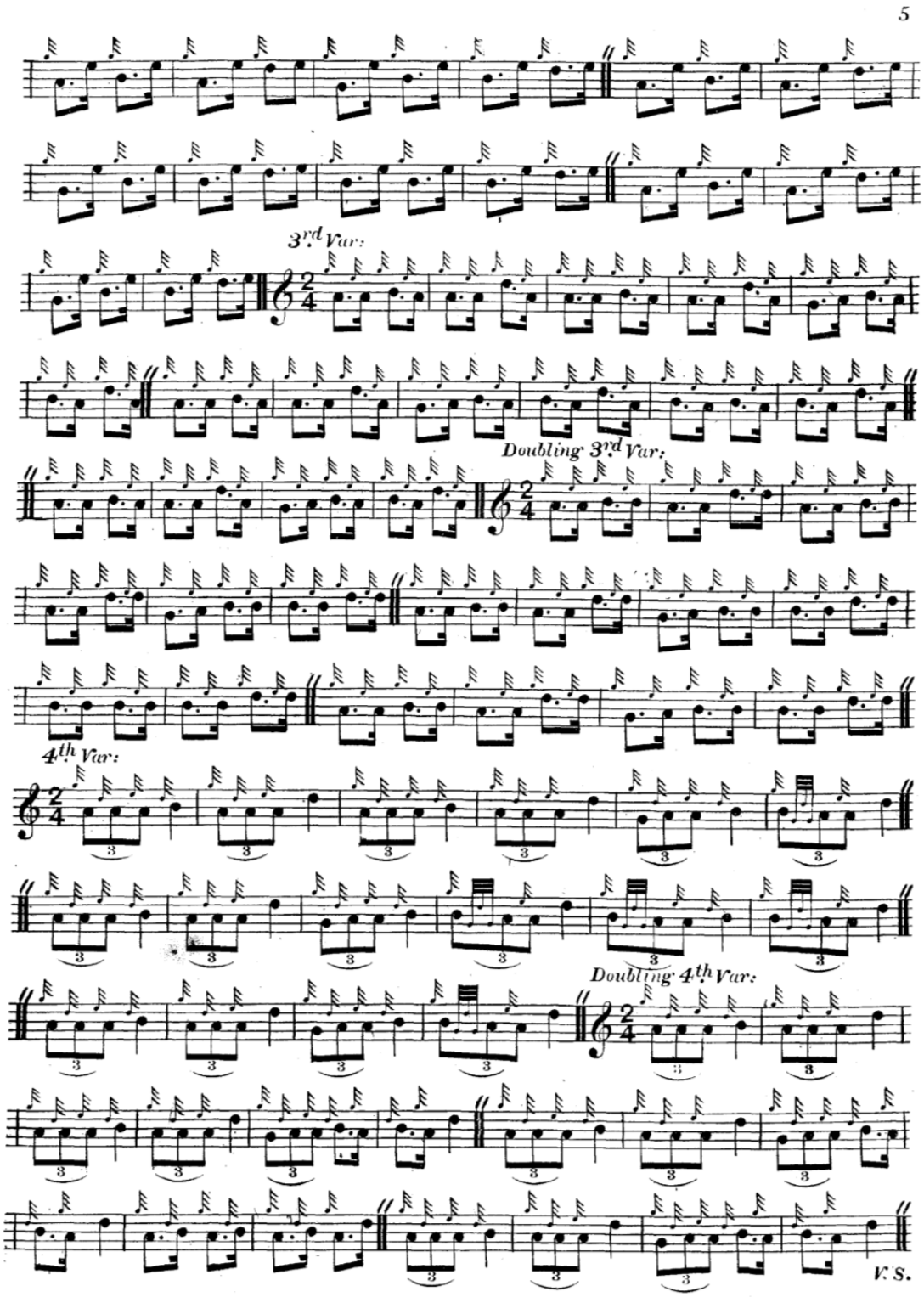
**Colin Cameron**'s setting develops the tune as Angus MacKay does, but once again, we see a different choice of time-signature for the ground, giving a more fluent through-played effect, and avoiding MacKay's tendency to split the ground into discrete melodic chunks:

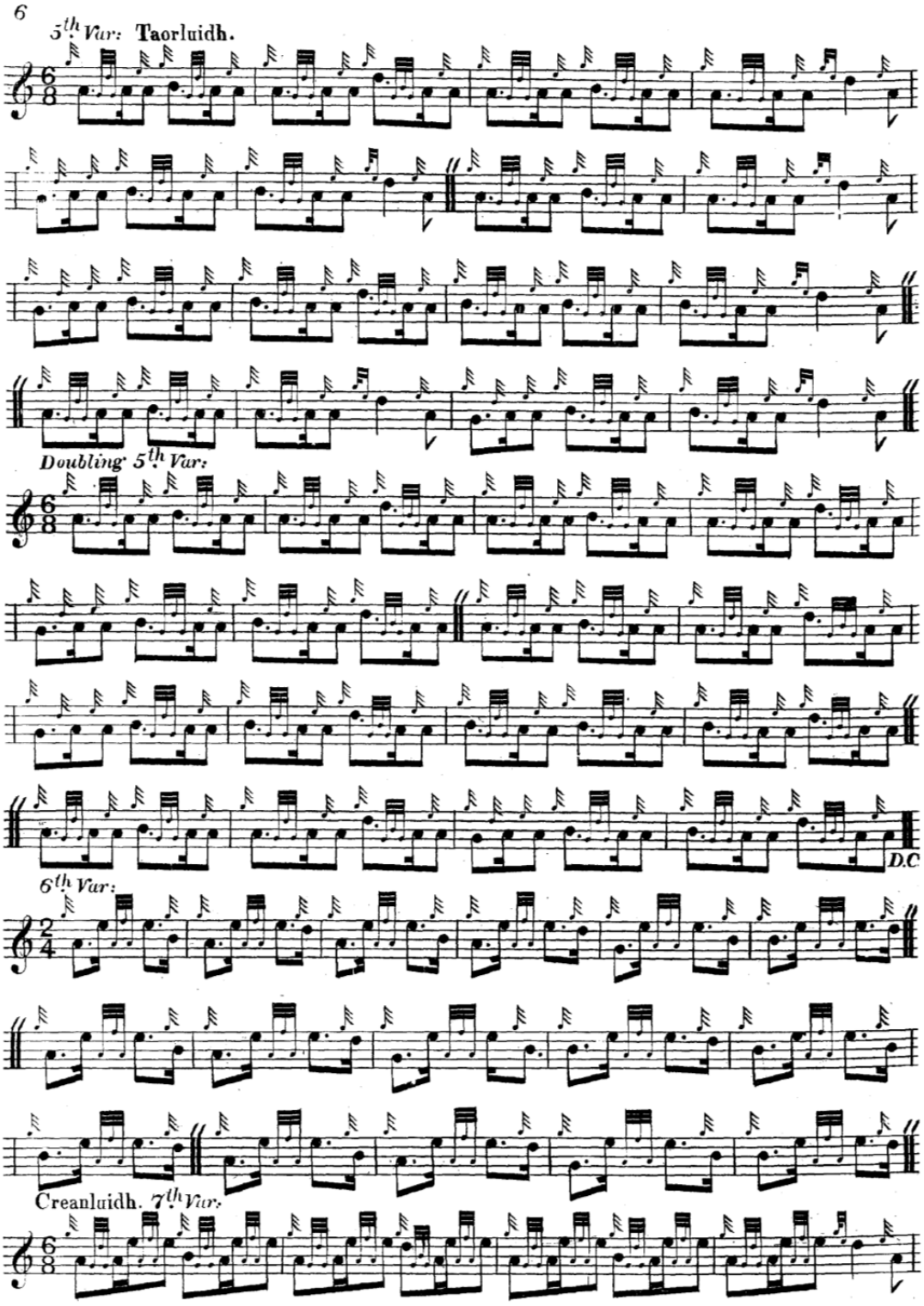


And so on.

**Uilleam Ross** sets the tune like this:

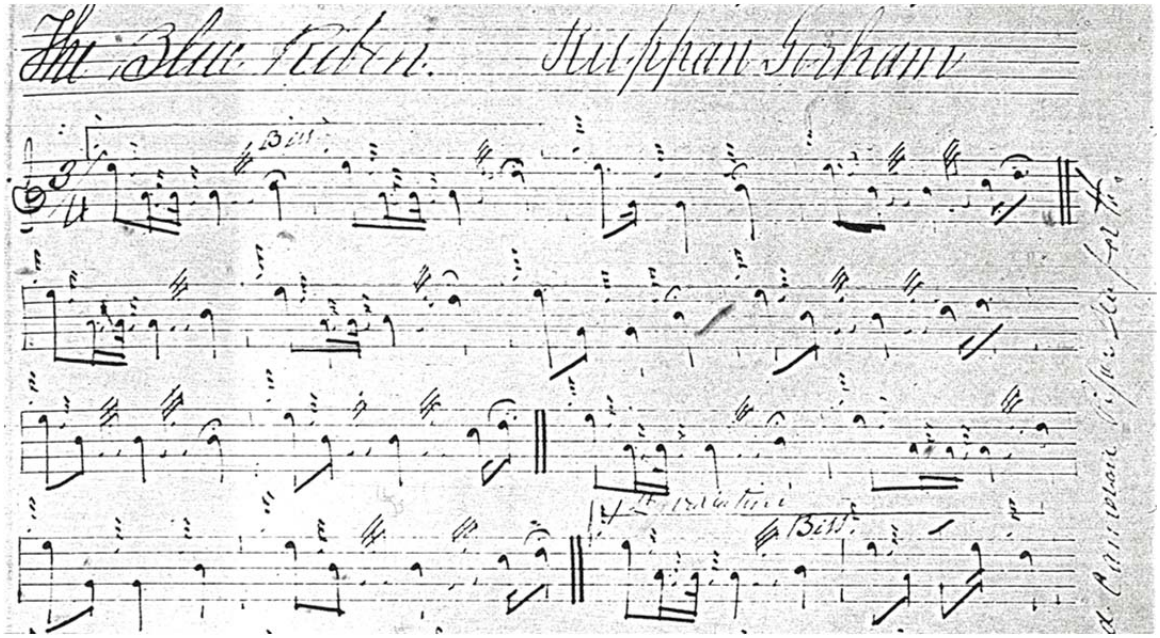

4
RIOBAN CORM.
THE BLUE RIBAND.
2.
Slow.
Thumb Var:
Doubling Thumb Var:
2nd Var:
Doubling 2nd Var:


3rd Var:
Doubling 3rd Var:
4th Var:
Doubling 4th Var:
V.S.


6
5th Var: Taorluidh.
Doubling 5th Var:
D.C
6th Var:
Creanluidh. 7th Var:

And so on.

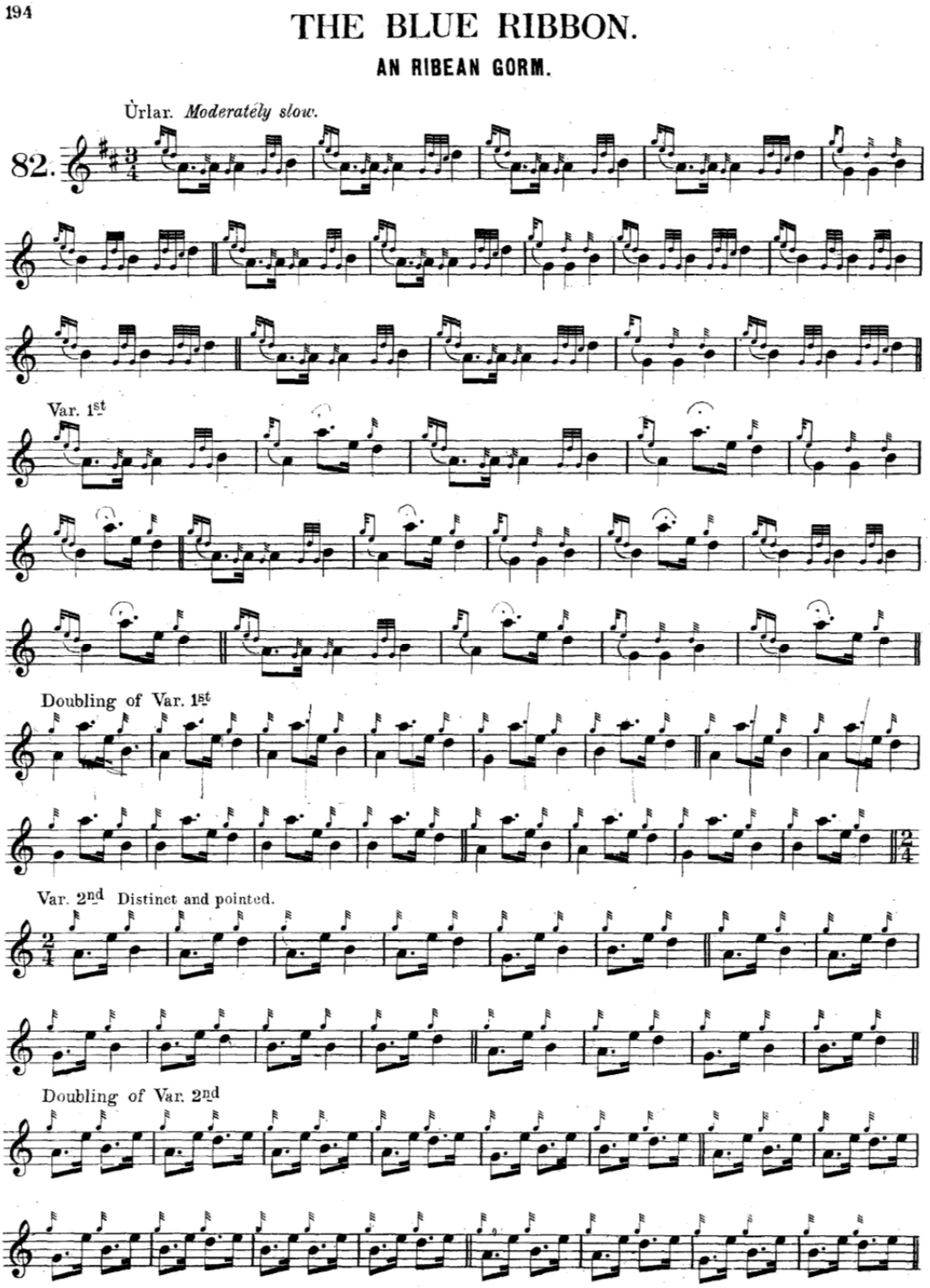
The interest of Ross's setting lies in his substitution of tripling for taorluath figures in the pendulum movement, and in the first crunluath variation, played in a manner similar to what we see in "The Finger Lock" and one or two other tunes (although it is rare). We may note, incidentally, his curious rendering of the throws on D at the end of lines 1-3 of the ground. In Ross MS. they are done like this:



This may perhaps be intended to show a distinctly "heavy" throw at these points, and his typesetter misread the notation. Uilleam Ross was a great-nephew of John Ban MacKenzie, and this may, perhaps, represent a family tradition. Ross's score is a further indication that if a tune was in MacKay it was by no means set in stone for all time thereafter, and later Victorian piper-editors felt quite free to take their own routes through it.

**C. S. Thomason** gives two versions, one entitled "The Blue Ribbon (The Grants)" and one "The Blue Ribbon (Isle of Mull)." The Isle of Mull tune is the piece also known to tradition as "The Tune of Strife," and Thomason includes it again under the "Strife" title later in his collection (p.275) citing Angus MacKay's MS as his source and indicating that it came down through Donald MacKay (Angus's nephew) and that the latter was taught it by Donald Cameron. For the Grants tune– the one we are considering here– he cites Donald MacDonald's MS, Uilleam Ross's published book and Donald MacKay. Thomason follows Uilleam Ross fairly closely, and his score is not reproduced here. Nor is that from **Robert Meldrum**'s

MS which adds little to the expressive possibilities of the tune. **David Glen**, as he frequently does, provides a fine summary of mainstream Victorian tradition, beginning thus:


194
THE BLUE RIBBON.
AN RIBEAN GORM.
Urlar. Moderately slow.
82.
Var. 1st
Doubling of Var. 1st
Var. 2nd Distinct and pointed.
Doubling of Var. 2nd

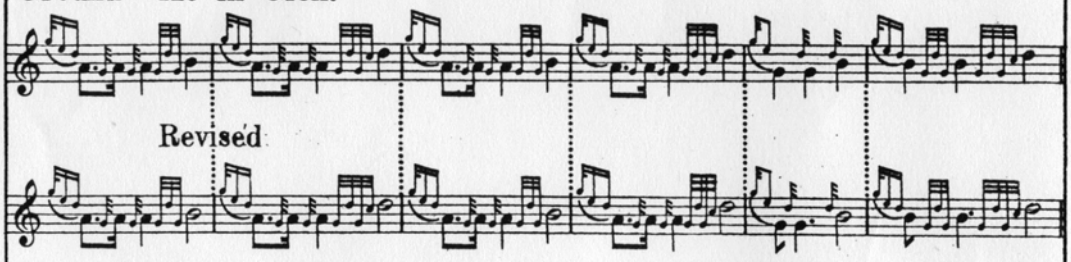
And so on.

In his book, *Some Piobaireachd Studies,* G. F. Ross took issue with Glen's shuttling between time-signatures (which some might think one of the main rhythmical attractions of the tune) and sought to resolve the whole into duple time, as follows:

# THE BLUE RIBBON (The Grants'?)

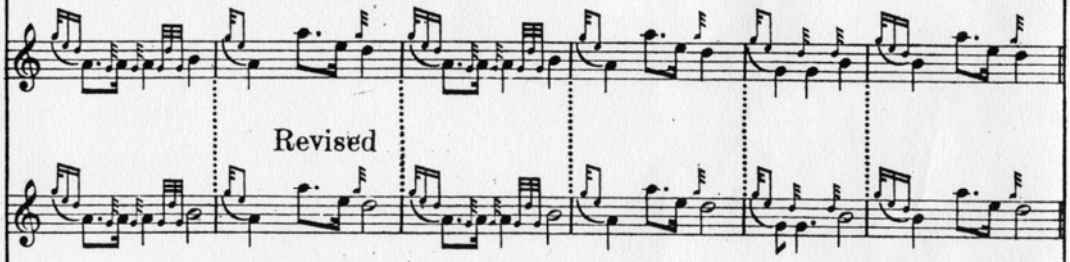
On the left we have a case of a tune in "three" time with certain variations in "even" time. This is an opposite case, for we find the tune an "even" time one with the Ground, First Variation and its Doubling (in Glen's version) written in "three" time. The following revisions are suggested, the First line only being dealt with.

Ground - As in Glen.



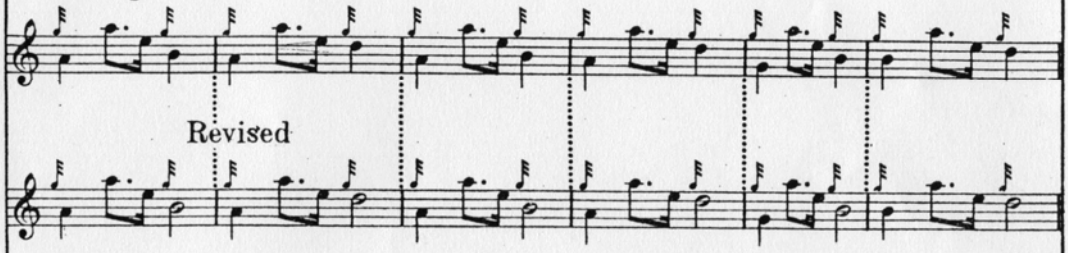

It will be noted the change made is the lengthening of the last note of each bar and, in a few cases, slightly different pointing.

First Variation - As in Glen.




In the above revision, also, the lengthening of the last note of the bar is the main alteration.

Doubling - As in Glen.




This revision places the middle beat of the "three" time version as part of the left half bar.

The result sounds interestingly like John MacKay, but even so the result in playing would be exceptionally square, seriously compromising the fluency of the melody.

*Commentary:*

In his notes, Donald MacDonald says "It would be difficult to make out to whom this air belongs. The MacNiels, [sic] the Macleans, and also the Macquarries, claim it. Be it as it may, it is a bond, the signal of which, is the wearing of the Ribbon in the button-hole of the waistcoat" p.4.

Donald MacDonald calls this tune "The Blue Ribbon (The Grants)." He has another tune called "The Blue Ribbon," which is recorded elsewhere in tradition as "The Tune of Strife," and there are strong thematic links between the two. C. S. Thomason distinguished between them by calling one "The Blue Ribbon (The Grants) and the other "The Blue Ribbon (Isle of Mull). The Nether Lorn gives "Porst na Straine" as the name of the "Grants" tune, and there are linguistic links as well. In his dictionary Dwelly records *"stri"* as strife, and *"striall/striam/strian"* as a strip of cloth. So that a possible translation might be "The Ribbon Tune." In volume ii of the Nether Lorn is a tune called "Ribban Goarm," which is "The Tune of Strife," beginning *Chenodin tra ffour times chenodintro hintrotra hiotrarodin himbantro*.

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