NEW CHILD BALLAD VARIANTS FROM ORAL TRADITION

Hamish Henderson and Francis Collinson

In the biographical note on Professor Francis James Child which he wrote for *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Professor G. L. Kittredge stated:

". . . Mr. Child made an effort to stimulate the collection of such remains of the traditional ballad as still live on the lips of the people in this country and in the British Islands. The harvest was, in his opinion, rather scanty; yet, if all the versions thus recovered from tradition were enumerated, the number would not be found inconsiderable. Enough was done, at all events, to make it clear that little or nothing of value remains to be recovered in this way."

Gavin Greig's magnificent Aberdeenshire ballad collection (gathered in the early years of this century, and published posthumously in 1925 by the Buchan Club) furnished a decisive disproof of this over-pessimistic conclusion, but the title chosen for it by its editor, Alexander Keith—*Last Leaves of Traditional Ballads and Ballad Airs*—suggested that the time had in fact come to write the final obituary for the Scots traditional ballad, even in its seemingly impregnable ancestral stronghold in the North-East. This elegiac note, as Keith himself has readily and generously admitted, was premature. It is true, to be sure, that since Greig's day there has been a certain falling-away, but the collection in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies has made it abundantly clear that the classical balladry of Scotland is still with us. Even in the last decade it has been possible to collect versions of Child ballads—such as No. 3 (The Fause Knight upon the Road), No. 13 (Edward) and No. 49 (The Twa Brothers)—which are not represented in *Last Leaves*, as well as excellent versions of many which are. Indeed the late Professor Gordon Hall Gerould uttered what was probably, even in the 1930s, a necessary truism when he remarked "Collecting need never come to an end while ballads are stil sung" (1932:15).

Although Greig's belief that Aberdeenshire retained more of the traditional balladry of Scotland than any other area was undoubtedly well founded, much of the School's most valuable work has been done in East-Central Scotland—the Dunkeld area, and Strathmore. Even the great cities have contributed their quota; a version of Tam Lin (Child 39—another ballad which Greig did not find in the North-East) has been recorded in Glasgow. Previously unexplored areas like the Kintyre peninsula have yielded not inconsiderable returns. However, the most spectacular gains have been made not so much as a result of the reconnoitring of new geographical areas as through the investigation of various social groups like the miners, the tinkers, and sections of the urban working class—groups which up till now have been to a great extent neglected by collectors. One single example must speak for many. The late Geordie Robertson, who recorded "Robin Hood and the Peddlar" for the School, knew Gavin Greig quite well; he actually played the pipes at one of the productions of Greig's bucolic comedy "Mains's Woo'in". For years he lived on a croft within easy walking distance of Greig's school-house at Whitehills, New Deer. Yet Greig never made any attempt to collect folk-songs from him. The reason was, in all probability, a social one; Greig got the great bulk of his wonderful collection from the farming community, and Geordie Robertson was a tinker—a settled tinker, a crofter and a "made horseman", but still a tinker. In Greig's day this represented a real social barrier, and—as the School's collectors have found in the recent past—these social barriers, although much less solid these days, do still form a real stumbling block. It does not pay to let some informants know that one has been consorting socially with tinkers—let alone camping with them, or scrounging peats with them.

While we do not, therefore, regard our collection as anything more than yet another stone added to a famous cairn which will receive many additions from others in the years to come, we may perhaps claim that we have opened up a fair stretch of new territory. Without doubt, the collection will continue to grow steadily. A point has been reached, however, at which it is possible to make a provisional assessment of the results of our field-work to date; in this number of *Scottish Studies*, and in several succeeding numbers, we shall present the best of our ballad discoveries to the public.

Like most collections made since the introduction of

mechanical devices for recording, and particularly since the invention of the tape recorder, our collection consists of unaltered and "unimproved" transcriptions of sound recordings. The tape recorder has not only greatly facilitated the work of collecting, it has also made it possible to reproduce both texts and tunes with an accuracy which one suspects was the exception rather than the rule in folk-song publications until fairly recently. If this mechanical aid makes us addedly conscious of the fragmentary nature of some of the material, it at any rate affords us the inestimable advantage of knowing its limits, and hence of reaching a greater understanding of its nature.

There has been scope, also, for a certain amount of revaluation in the field of ballad airs. The thing most often repeated in popular articles about the "typical Scots melody" is that it is constructed upon the pentatonic scale. Although many Scots airs do conform to this construction, a greater number are found to be based on the six-note (hexatonic) scale; while many others are constructed on scales synonymous with the so-called "Church-modes", the commonest being the Dorian, Aeolian, Mixolydian and of course Ionian or ordinary major scale.

The method of classification of the scales on which the tunes are constructed is as follows:

Pentatonic Scales. The form of the pentatonic scale CDE-GA, that is, with gaps at the fourth and seventh, is taken as the basic position and is numbered as Pentatonic I. The other positions are numbered according to the position of the final or "keynote" as it is to be found in the diatonic major scale. Thus the scale DE-GA-C, is classified as Pentatonic II, the note D, which is the final of that scale, being the second note of the diatonic major scale of C. The pentatonic scale with final on the fifth note of the diatonic major scale (G in the scale of C), i.e. GA-CDE, is therefore numbered Pentatonic V, and the scale with final on the sixth degree, A-CDE-G, is numbered Pentatonic VI.

Hexatonic Scales. The hexatonic scales are similarly classified according to the position of the final in the diatonic major scale *according to the key signature*, this note (the final) being expressed by a Roman numeral. Of the scale so located, the position of the single gap is indicated by an Arabic numeral preceded by a minus sign within brackets. Thus the scale DEFGA-C, will be labelled Hexatonic II (—6).

Accidentals which do not occur in the melody are not included in the key signature. In every case the scale is written out for clarity in staff notation at the end of each tune, the final or keynote being shown by a minim.

The compass of the melodies

The compass of the melodies varies, in our records, from six degrees of the scale (though the single example is doubtful, and should perhaps be eight degrees) to one single example of thirteen scale degrees, i.e. an octave and a sixth. The commonest extent of compass is that of an octave.

In this respect these Lowland Scots melodies may be said to differ from a comparable cross-section of Gaelic song tunes, of which a larger proportion might be expected to be of small compass. Six scale degrees is a not uncommon compass for many of the Gaelic waulking-song melodies, for example.

The compass, like the scale, is expressed in staff notation at the end of every tune, the position of the final being indicated by a minim. The number of degrees of the scale to which it extends is added in figures.

Summary of the scales used

Out of a sample of thirty-eight tunes analysed, the scales may be summarised as follows:

Pentatonic	11
Hexatonic	15
Seven-note	12

While one cannot deduce the proportion of scales to be found in the Lowland Scots ballad-tunes from such a small number, it may be said with some confidence from wider experience that the proportions here shown are probably not too wide off the mark.

CHILD 2. *The Elfin Knight*

The first three ballads in Child's thesaurus *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* are "riddling songs"—that is, they are confrontations resolved, one way or another, by the power of the word. No. 1, Riddles Wisely Expounded, is a dialogue between a young man and a girl; the girl successfully answers a series of posers put to her by a suitor, and gets her reward,

which is of course the hand of her antagonist. Sometimes it turns out that the suitor is really the Devil, and he disappears "in a blazing flame" when one of his names is spoken. (This latter is believed by some scholars to be the original form of the ballad.)

No. 2, *The Elfin Knight*, is also a courtship ballad, but in it the girl counters a series of impossible riddling demands (usually connected with the sewing of a Holland or cambric shirt) by challenging her lover to do a series of equally impossible tasks—sowing an acre of land with peppercorns, shearing it with a sheep's shank-bone and so on. The "Elfin Knight" of the title, who appears in most of the Scots versions printed by Child, is believed by the great ballad-editor to be "an intruder in this particular ballad"; in most of the European analogues of the story, the protagonists are ordinary human beings. In America, the wheel has turned full circle; "in this country the elf, an interloper in Britain, has been universally rationalised to a mortal lover" (Coffin 1950:31). In one of the versions collected by Motherwell (Child 2 I) the Elfin Knight has become the Devil; as Child states, "he has clearly displaced the elf-knight, for the elf's attributes of hill-haunting and magical music remain, only they have been transferred to the lady. That the Devil should supplant the knight, unco or familiar, is natural enough . . . the devil is the regular successor to any heathen sprite" (Child 1882:14).

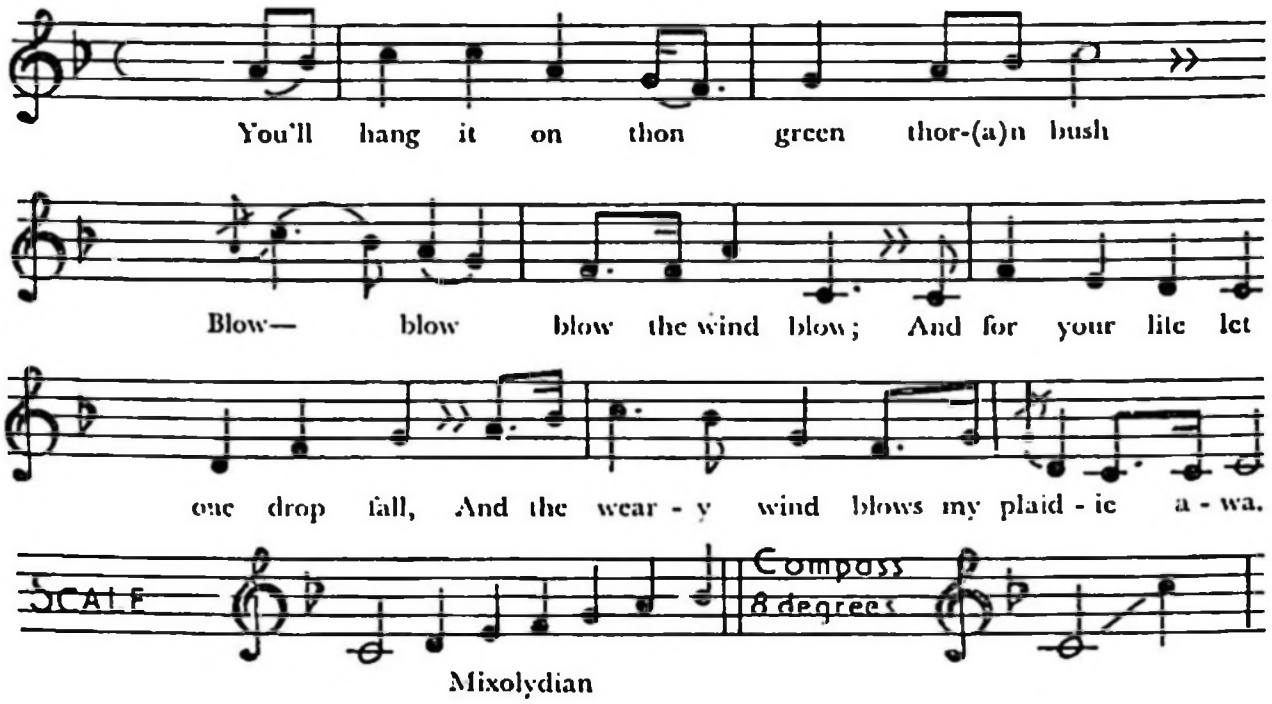
Our A version is a fragment sung by Andra Stewart, a general dealer of traveller stock, in the house of his sister Mrs. Bella Higgins, in Blairgowrie, Perthshire. The date of the recording was July 1956. Andra first heard the ballad from his mother; he did his best to remember more of it, but without success. Before recording two verses, he had a conversation with his sister, who suggested that one of the speakers was "a shepherd on the hill". Prompted by Bella, Andra produced the following verse, which he thought was about "a wool blanket":

> You'll dip it into yon draw-well
> Blow, blow, blow the wind blow,
> And for your life let one drop fall,
> And the weary wind blows my plaidie awa.

Questioned about the end of the ballad, he said: "He says something about the Lord to him; he went away in a ball of fire, the devil, on this hill. That's why he knew he was talking to the devil."

A

Andra Stewart: The Elfin Knight



1. You'll hang it on yon green thorn bush,
   Blow, blow, blow the wind blow,
   And for your life let one drop fall,
   And the weary wind blows my plaidie awa.

2. Since you gave those three tasks to me,
   Blow, blow, blow the wind blow,
   Let me give three tasks to you,
   And the weary wind blows my plaidie awa.

Andra's air for this ballad shows the characteristic common to many Scots tunes of a final cadence which is modally at variance with the rest of the tune. Here, though the final cadence compels us by the rule of the last note to classify the mode as Mixolydian, the melody has much of the feeling of the Ionian mode in the key of F, but in the plagal position, and ending on the dominant.

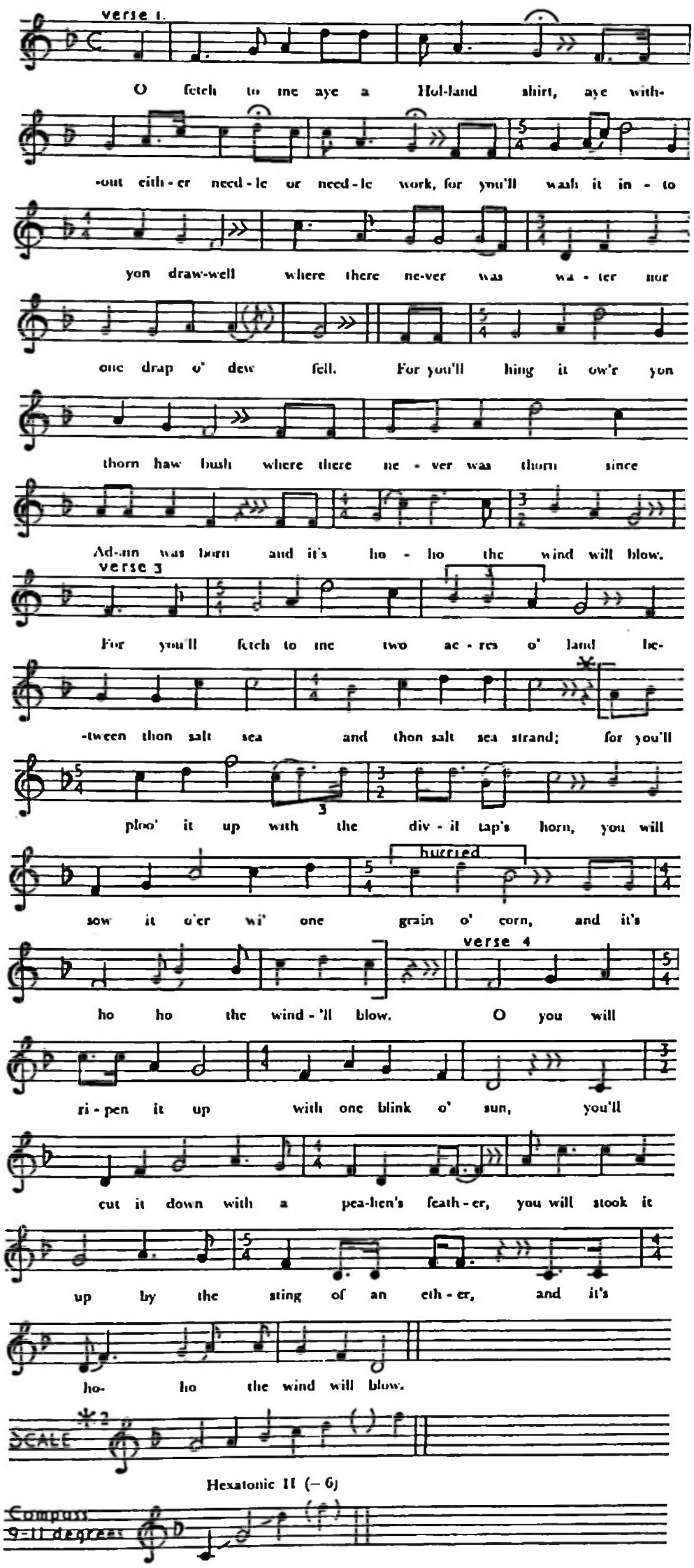
The form is AB^1CB^2.

The version B recorded by Mrs. Martha Reid ("Peasie") of Birnam, Perthshire, in 1955, is much more complete; it is clearly related to the version printed by Peter Buchan in *Ballads of the North of Scotland* (1828:II, 296), and also to the version recited for Gavin Greig by Miss Bell Robertson, New Pitsligo. One stanza (No. 6) recalls Stanza 9 in Child's M version:

> Ye'll shear it wi a peacock's feather,
> An bind it all up wi the sting o an adder.

B

Mrs. Martha Reid: The Elfin Knight



1. O fetch to me aye a Holland shirt,
Aye without either needle or needle-work;
For you'll wash it into yon draw-well,
Where there never was water, nor one drap o' dew fell.

2. For ye'll hing it ow'r yon thorn-haw bush,
Where there never was thorn since Adam was born,
An' it's ho, ho, the wind'll blow.

3. For you'll fetch to me two acres o' land,
Between thon salt sea and thon salt sea strand.
For you'll plou' it up with the Divil tap's horn,
You will sow it o'er wi' one grain o' corn,
An' it's ho, ho, the wind'll blow.

4. For you will ripen it up with one blink o' sun
You'll cut it down with a pea-hen's feather
You'll stook it up by the sting of an ether,
An' it's ho, ho, the wind'll blow.

5. For you'll yoke two sparrows in a match-box
An' cart it home to your own farmyard,
An' it's ho, ho, the wind'll blow.

6. For surely when you pit sich tasks on me,
I'll surely pit aye as hard on you:
How many ships sails in my forest?
How many strawberries grows on the salt sea?
An' it's ho, ho, the wind'll blow.

The tune of Peasie's "Elfin Knight" is exceedingly irregular. As far as can be established, B♭ does not occur in all stanzas, and the final note differs in several stanzas. The above modal classification is calculated on the *majority* of stanzas.

It is almost impossible to establish a norm for the melody, which is to some extent rhapsodic. The third stanza, however, possesses more regularity than the others, and shows a five-phrase tune. The fourth stanza shows marked differences of mode from the others, particularly in its descent to the note D at the cadence of the first phrase and at the final cadence, which latter, of course, if accepted, will change radically the modal classification set down above.

CHILD 3. *The False Knight upon the Road*

When Professor Child drafted his article on "this singular ballad" he had two versions only to go on—both printed by Motherwell in his Minstrelsy. The first of these was the famous "Fause Knight" of the anthologies, and the second no more than a one-verse fragment, plus a tune. By the time he came to compile Additions and Corrections to Vol. 1, however, there was a third version to be added; this had been contributed by the indefatigable William Macmath of Edinburgh, who got it from the recitation of his Aunt, Miss Jane Webster, formerly of Airds of Kells, Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, Galloway. His sister also provided, for Child's Appendix of Tunes, an air for the ballad which is "rhythmatically the exact counterpart of Motherwell's first text" (Bronson 1959:34). Collecting in the United States has provided a number of supplementary versions although Coffin states: "American texts of this song are quite rare, and it is [Arthur K.] Davis' opinion they emanate from Virginia . . . to a large extent". Hearing of the Scots versions in the School's archives, Mr. Seán O'Boyle of Armagh asked for, and got, a Northern Irish version in 1958.

We are dealing, therefore, with what is, and what always seems to have been, a comparatively rare ballad. There is no version in Greig's *Last Leaves*, and all the versions tape-recorded by the School are, to a greater or lesser extent, fragmentary.

Referring to the ballads in which riddles and tricks serve as the material for the narrative, Professor G. H. Gerould says: "Perhaps the strangest of all such ballads is the Fause Knight upon the Road (3), in which a young boy has to find ready replies to the questions put to him, or be carried off, presumably by the devil" (1932:61). The identity of the "False Knight" is never explicitly stated in the Scots variants, but the singers nearly all, when asked to talk about the song, and its meaning, explain that he is meant to be the devil. In the Irish version mentioned above, the homiletic character of the ballad is heavily underlined.

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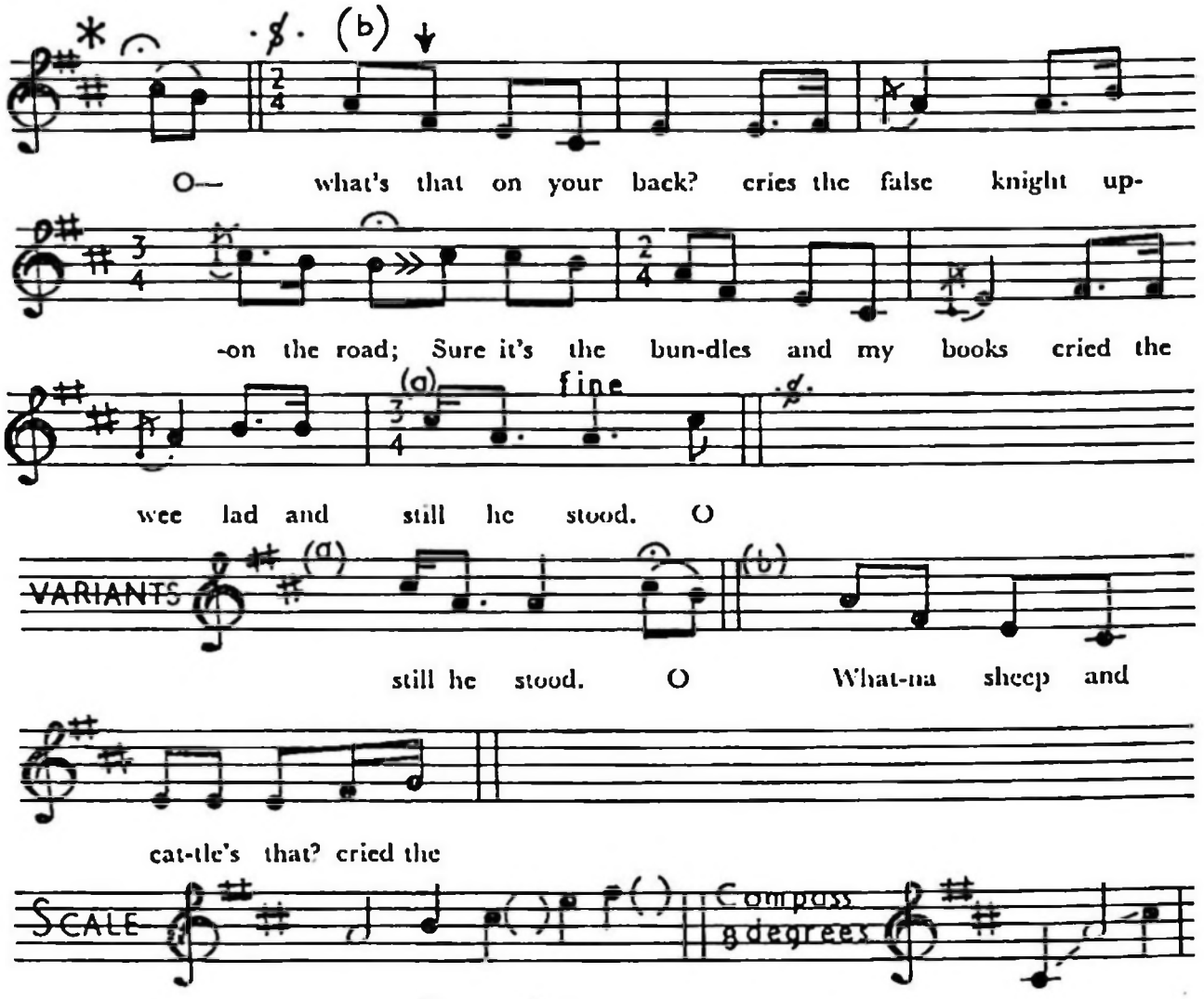
A

Duncan MacPhee: False Knight



Pentatonic I

1. "O what's that on your back?" cries the false knight upon the road.
"Sure it's the bundles and my books," cried the wee lad and still he stood.

2. "O will you give me share?" cries the false knight upon the road.
"O I canna gie ye share," cried the wee boy and still he stood.

3. "O whatna sheep and cattle's that?" cries the false knight upon the road.
"Sure it's my father's noo, an' mine" cried the wee boy and still he stood.

This variant was recorded in the berryfields of Blairgowrie, Perthshire, in the summer of 1955. The singer was then 19 years of age. His tune is strongly reminiscent of "The Rose Tree", also known as "The Old Lea Rigg", a fiddle tune which appears in Gow's second book of Strathspeys, Reels, etc. (Dunkeld 1788). It is the obvious original of the tune of Sir

Harry Lauder's song "Stop yer ticklin', Jock".—Commenting on the ten recorded tunes from Scotland and the U.S.A., Professor Bronson states: "Perhaps the basic rhythmical pattern of them all is that of a reel" (1959:34). The Nova Scotia tune collected by Helen Creighton seems to have the same dance associations: her indication of tempo is "Very quickly, in jig time" (1933:1).

B

The late Mrs. Bella Higgins of Blairgowrie, whose tune for the ballad is almost identical with that sung by Duncan McPhee, contributed the following text shortly after he recorded his version:

1. "O where are you going?" said the false knight upon the road,
   "I'm going to the school," said the wee boy, and still he stood.

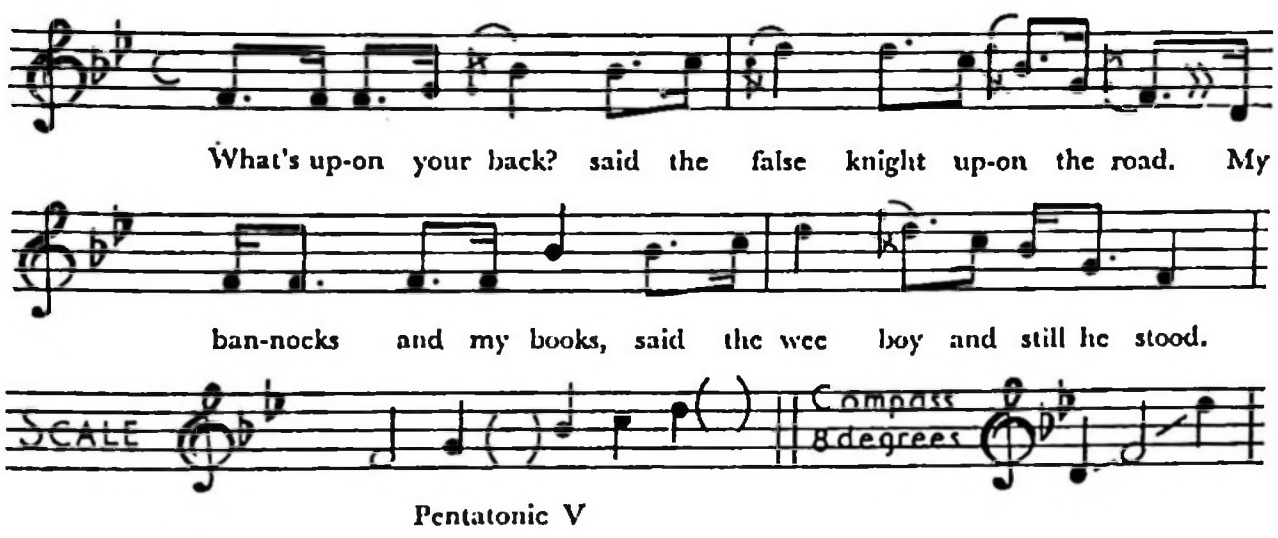
2. "What's that upon your back?" said the false knight upon the road.
   "My bonnock and my books," said the wee boy, and still he stood.

3. "If I had you at the sea," said the false knight upon the road,
   "And a good ship under me," said the wee boy, and still he stood.

4. "If I had you at the well," said the false knight upon the road.
   "And you into hell," said the wee boy, and still he stood.

C

Nellie MacGregor: False Knight



Pentatonic V

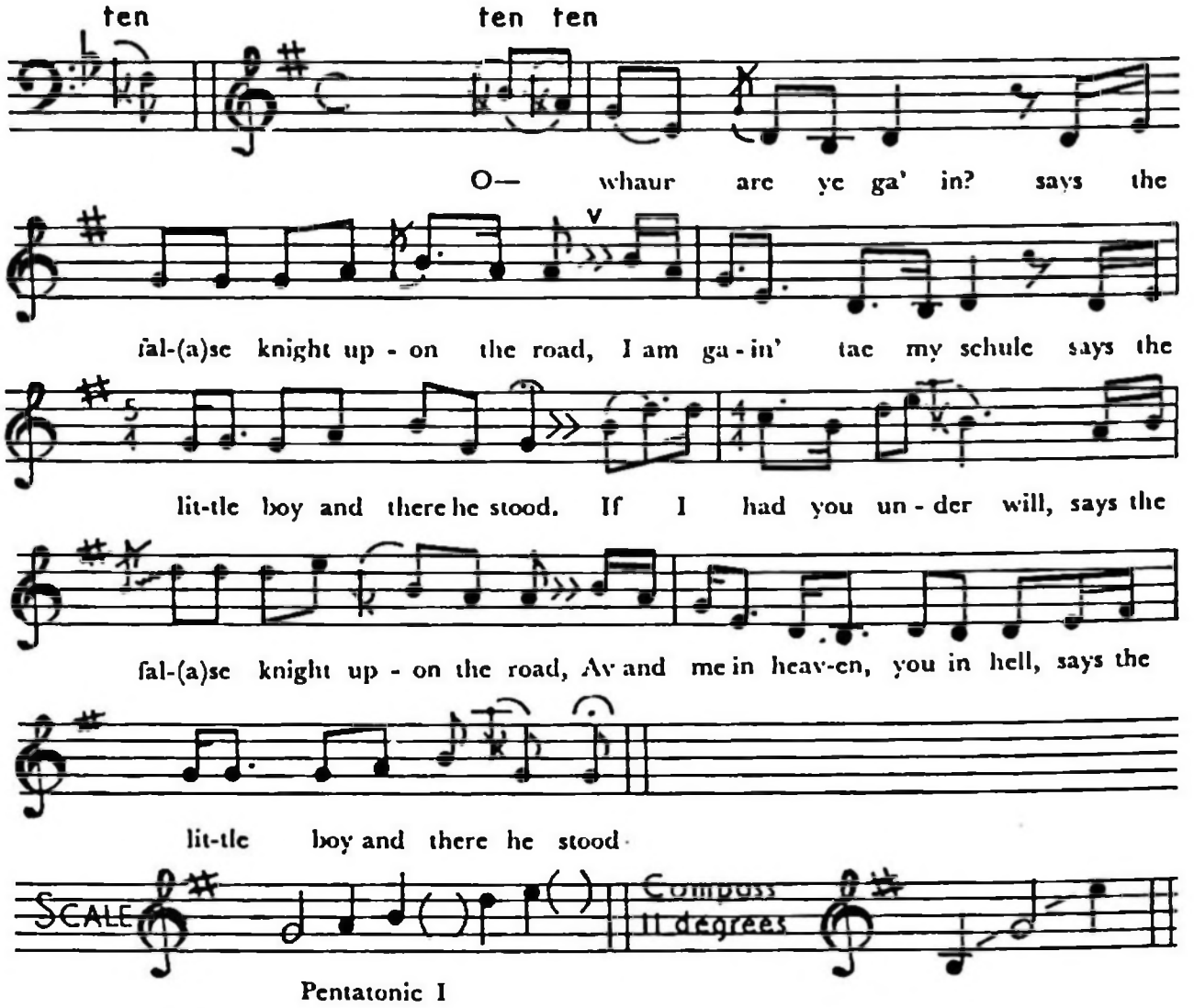
A two-phrase tune, Form AA.

"What's upon your back?" said the false knight upon the road.
"My bannocks an' my books," said the wee boy, and still he stood.

This fragment, which was recorded in Aberdeen in 1954 from a city-dwelling tinker woman, was the first indication we received that this rare ballad was still in circulation in Scotland. The extreme simplicity of the pentatonic tune suggests that it may well have been used as a nursery rhyme.

D

Willie Whyte: False Knight



Form AABA.

1. O whaur are ye ga'in? says the false knight upon the road.
   I am ga'in tae my schule, says the little boy, and there he stood.

2. If I had you under will, says the false knight upon the road.
   Ay, and me in heaven, you in hell, says the little boy, and there he stood.

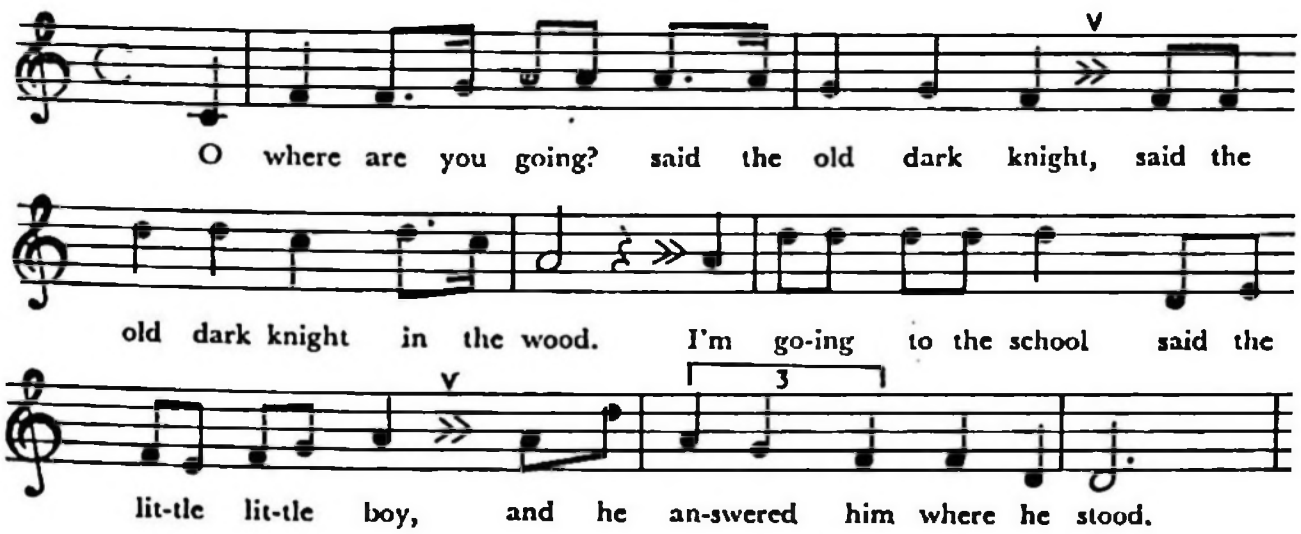
3. Has your mother any more like you? said the false knight upon the road.
   Ay, but none of them for you, says the little boy, and there he stood.

In this version, collected from Willie Whyte of Hayton, Aberdeen in the summer of 1962, the supernatural figure of the False Knight has become more human, if no less sinister; the text suggests the figure of the child-murderer.

The air is another variant of the "Rose Tree" tune, alias "The Old Lea-Rigg". (The third phrase, however, is different from the phrase published by Gow.)

E

Miss Margaret Eyre: The False Knight in the Wood



Hexatonic II (—6)
with secondary tonal centre
on F.

Form A, B, C, D.

"O where are you going?" said the old dark knight,
Said the old dark knight in the wood.
"I'm going to the school," said the little little boy,
And he answered him were he stood.

Miss Eyre's tune is an interesting example of the characteristic of many Scots tunes of beginning in one key or mode and ending in another. Here the first three phrases or sections can all be considered as being in F major (or allied gapped mode) and only in the last section does the melody turn towards and end in the relative minor. By the rule of the last note, the mode must be set down as having its final on D, with the resultant modal classification as set down above; but the feeling of the

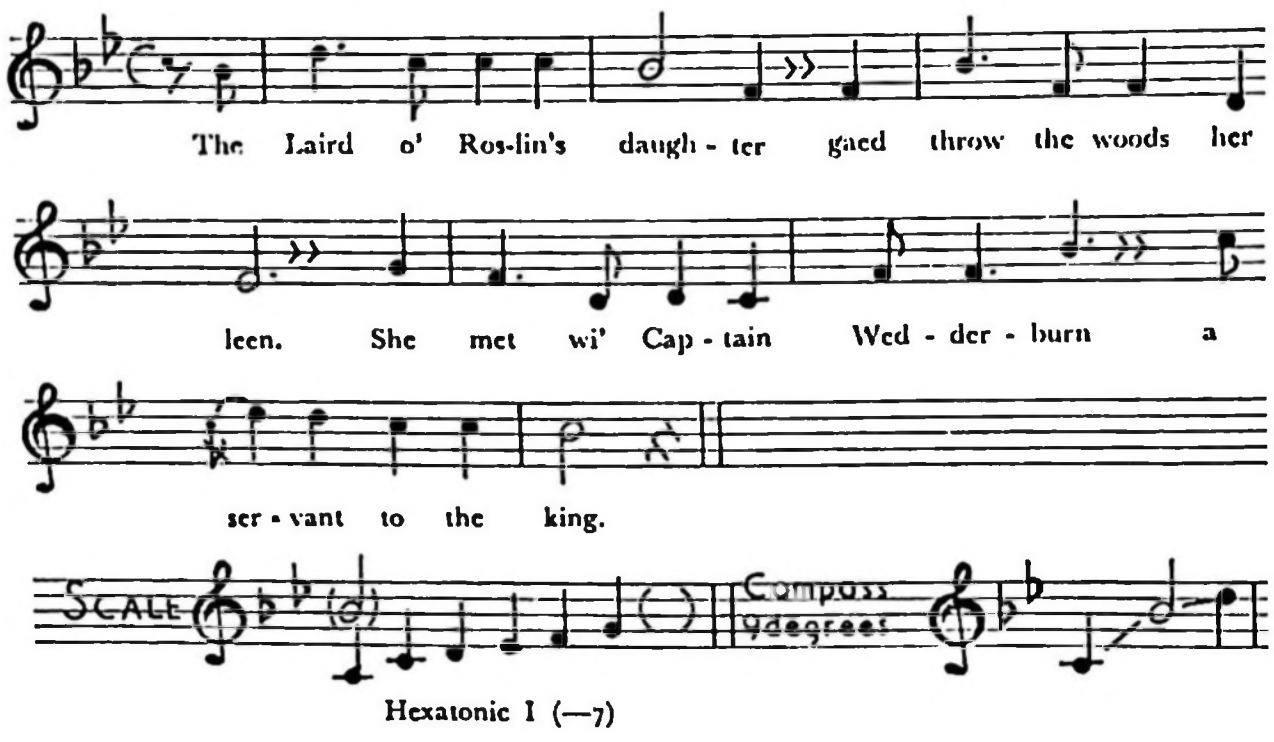
melody as a whole is of centring round a secondary concealed final in F.

Child 46. *Captain Wedderburn's Courtship*

Although there is a considerable gap in Child between the foregoing ballads and Captain Wedderburn's Courtship, it seems entirely fitting to bring them together. Bronson remarks, with evident justice, that the trappings of Captain Wedderburn's Courtship (the "butler's bell", the "livery man" and so on) suggest a comparatively late date for the origin of the ballad as it now circulates, but the riddling motifs which it employs go back to ancient times. In effect (as Child points out) it is a counterpart of the Elfin Knight, and it incorporates a famous riddle song ("I gave my love a cherry") which has long had independent existence, and may well have preceded the ballad of which it is now generally regarded as forming part.

Our version was recorded by the late Willie Mathieson, an Aberdeenshire farm servant who was both folk-singer and collector; he picked up songs and ballads all over the North-East, as he moved around one farm to another, and wrote them down in large ledger books (photographed for the archives for the School of Scottish Studies in April 1952). *Captain Wedderburn's Courtship* is the first of these. Although (or maybe because) it omits the journey to Edinburgh and the landlady's praise of the heroine's beauty, which feature in most Scottish variants, Willie's version achieves a most felicitous lyrical unity.

Willie Mathieson: Captain Wedderburn's Courtship



Hexatonic I (—7)

1. The Laird o' Roslin's daughter
Gaed through the woods her leen:
She met wi' Captain Wedderburn
A servant to the King.
He said unto his servant man,
If it werena for the law
I would tak her hame to my bed
An' lay her neist the wa'.

2. The Laird o' Roslin's daughter
Amang her father's trees—
Oh would you let me walk alone
Kind sir, if that you please.
For the supper bells they will be rung,
And I'll be missed awa.
I winna lie in your bed
At either stock or wa'.

3. Oh haud awa frae me, she said,
And do not me perplex.
Afore I lie in your bed
You'll answer questions six;
Questions six you'll answer me,
And that is four and twa,
Afore I'll lie in your bed
At either stock or wa'.

4. What is greener than the grass,
What's higher than the trees?
What is worse than weemen's voice,
What's deeper than the seas?
What bird's first—what bird's next
And what on them doth fa'?
Afore I'll lie on your bed
At either stock or wa'.

5. It's holly's greener than the grass,
Heaven's higher than the trees;
Auld Nick's waur than woman's voice,
Hell's deeper than the seas,
The cock crows first, the sea bird's next,
The dew doth on them fa',
And we'll baith lie in ae bed
And ye'll lie neist the wa'.

6. Oh haud awa frae me, she says,
Oh haud awa frae me;
Afore I'll lie in your bed
You'll cook me dishes three.
Dishes three you'll cook to me
And that is ane and twa,
Afore I'll lie in your bed
At either stock or wa'.

7. Ye maun gie me to my supper
A chick withoot a bone.
Ye maun gie me to my supper
A cherry withoot a stone.
Ye maun gie me to my supper
A bird withoot a ga',
Afore I'll lie in your bed
At either stock or wa'.

8. It's when the chick is in the shell
I'm sure it hath no bone,
And when the cherry's in full bloom
I'm sure it hath no stone.
The dove she is a gentle bird,
She flies withoot a ga',
And we'll baith lie in ae bed
And ye'll lie neist the wa'.

9. It's ye maun gie me some winter fruit
That in December grew;
Ye maun gie me a silk mantle
Whose warp was ne'er cut through.
A sparrow's horn, a priest unborn,
This night to join us twa,
Afore I'll lie on your bed
At either stock or wa'.

10. My father has some winter fruit
That in December grew;
My mother has a silk mantle—
It's warp was ne'er cut through.
A sparrow's horn ye weel may get,
There's een on ilka claw,
And there's twa upon the nibbie o't—
My love ye'll get them a'.

11. There is a priest stands at the door
Just ready to come in;
There's neen can say that he was born
Withoot committin' sin.
There was a hole cut in his mither's side,
He fae the same did fa',
And we'll baith lie in ae bed
And ye'll lie neist the wa'.

12. Oh little did that fair maid think,
That morning when she rose,
That very nicht would put an end
To all her maiden joys.
She's married Captain Wedderburn,
A man she never saw,
And noo they lie in ae bed,
And she lies neist the wa'.

CHILD 11. *The Cruel Brother*

There is only one recording of a fragment of this ballad in the School's archives, and it does not appear in *Last Leaves*, but—if we are to believe Aytoun—it was once one of the most popular ballads in Scotland. Bronson suggests (1959:185) that "it was probably inevitable that with the dying-out of a family code which could rate the forgetting to ask a brother's assent to his sister's marriage as a mortal affront, the ballad would wither away."

Our version was collected from Mrs. Martha Stewart in the berry-fields of Blairgowrie, July 1955. The fragment begins at the point where the heroine, stabbed by her brother immediately after her wedding (which has taken place without his consent being either asked or given), bestows a series of bequests on her parents, sister, etc., much as in various versions of Lord Randal (Child 12).

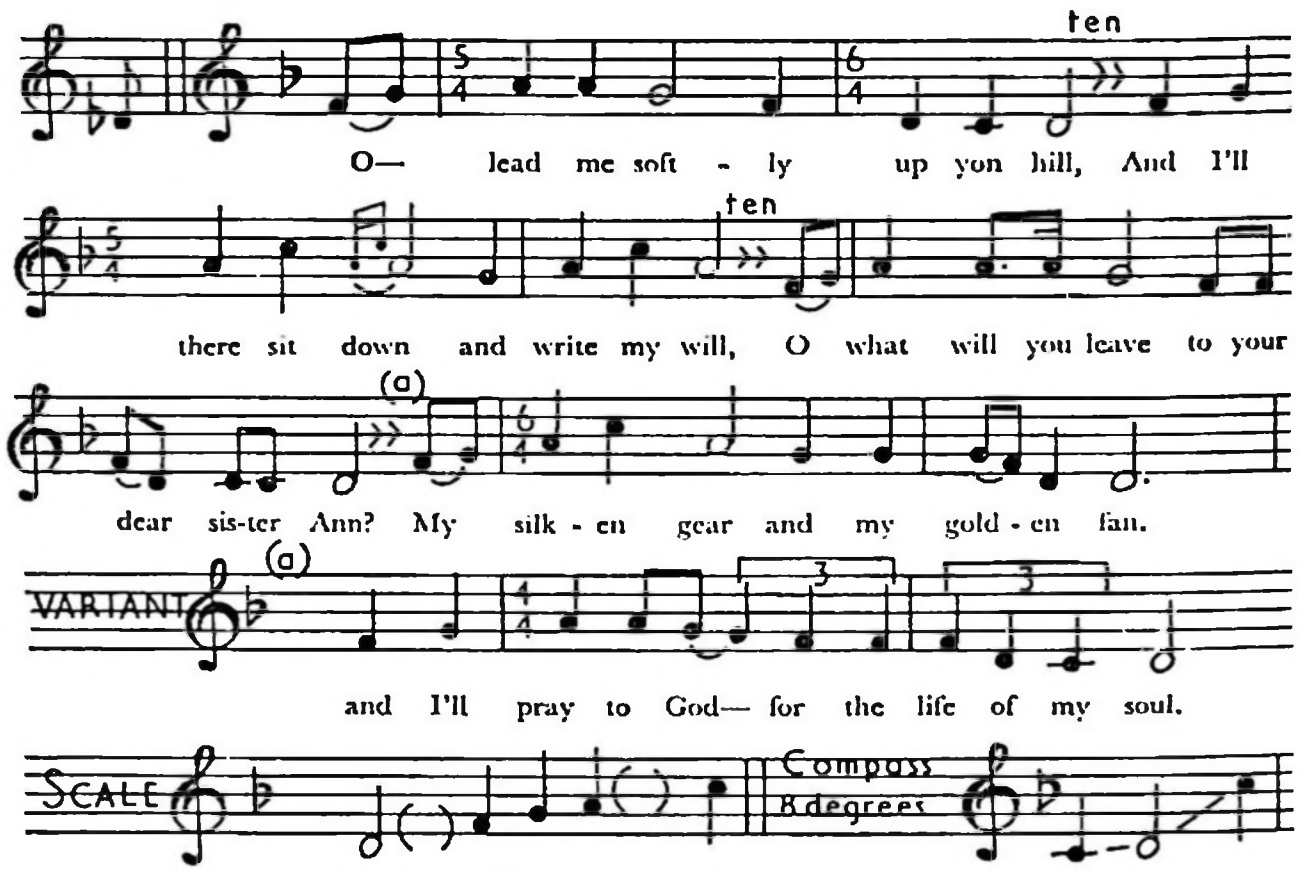
The text bears a close resemblance to that obtained in 1800 by Alexander Fraser Tytler from Mrs. Brown of Falkland (Child 11A), and indeed suggests that at some stage or other this printed text had been seen by one or other of the singers in the line of tradition which led up to Martha's version, although the latter learnt the ballad orally from her father. However, Martha's last verse is not in Child's A version, which ends:

This ladie fair in her grave was laid,
And many a mass was oer her said.

But it would have made your heart right sair,
To see the bridegroom rive his haire.

Nor is Martha's final verse in any of the other versions, Scots and American, printed by Child and by Bronson.

Martha Stewart: The Cruel Brother



Pentatonic VI

Form AB^1AB^2.

1. O lead me softly up yon hill,
And I'll there sit down and write my will.

2. O what will you leave to your dear sister Ann?
My silken gear and my golden fan.

3. And what will you leave to your mother dear?
The silver-shod steed that brought me here.

4. And what will you leave to your dear brother John?
The gallows-tree to hang him on.

5. And what will you leave to your brother John's wife?
The wilderness to end her life.

6. And you'll dig my grave right down to the doil,
And I'll pray to God for the life of my soul.

CHILD 14. *The Banks o' Airdrie*

In Motherwell's Minstrelsy, this ballad is given the poetic title of "Babylon, or the Banks o' Fordie", Baby Lon being the name of the robber who murders two of his sisters for resisting his advances before discovering their identity from the youngest. Curiously enough, our version was collected not very far from the Fordie burn; it was sung by Mrs. Martha Reid ("Peasie") of Birnam, who also gave us the longer of the two versions of the Elfin Knight. However, Peasie's title for it was The Banks of Airdrie, and this locale seems to be that favoured by the travelling folk; it appears in a version published by Francis Hindes Groome in his book *In Gipsy Tents* (1880), and it is also the title of a two verse fragment preserved (without tune) by Gavin Greig's informant Bell Robertson, and received by her "from a tinker boy nearly 70 years ago" (Greig-Keith 1925:15).

As several scholars have pointed out, Child 14 affords a most effective example of the incremental repetition which is one of the characteristic features of much ballad narrative. "While the outlaw brother in *Babylon* makes his proposal to each sister in turn, receives from the first two the same despairing refusal, and kills them one after the other, we look forward to the climactic third with an instinctive expectation of something different to come. Yet there is no immediate change. The formula begins still again:

> He's taken the youngest ane by the hand,
> And he's turned her round and made her stand.
>
> Says, "Will ye be a rank robber's wife,
> Or will ye die by my wee pen-knife?"

Her defiant reply, of course, snaps the thread:

> "I'll not be a rank robber's wife,
> Nor will I die by your wee pen-knife.
>
> For I hae a brother in this wood,
> And gin ye kill me, it's he'll kill thee."

The cumulative effect has been secured. There is nothing more to follow save the revelation of the brother's name and his remorseful death" (Gerould 1932:107).

It is also a ballad which displays the infinite adaptability of folk-song, for in one of the American versions printed by Bronson the "Rank Robber" has become the "Bank Robber"

(1959:250). A version of it has also been recorded from little girls at Kingarth, Bute:

> Three sisters went to gather flow'rs,
> Three sisters went to gather flow'rs,
> Three sisters went to gather flow'rs,
> Down by the bonnie banks o' Airdrie O.
>
> (Reid 1910:78)

In some districts "Airdrie O" has turned, on the lips of children, into "Sweet Rio". Dorothy K. Haynes reports a version learned at a Scottish orphanage.

> Will you be a robber's wife?
> Will you die by my penknife?
> Will you be a robber's wife
> Down by the Bonnie Banks, sweet Rio?
>
> (Haynes 1958:32)

Mrs. Martha Reid: Banks o' Airdrie

1. Three pretty sisters had come to the wood to find
their brothers,
When they met in with the robber John.
He catched the first pretty sister by the hand,
He wheeled her roond and he made her stand
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

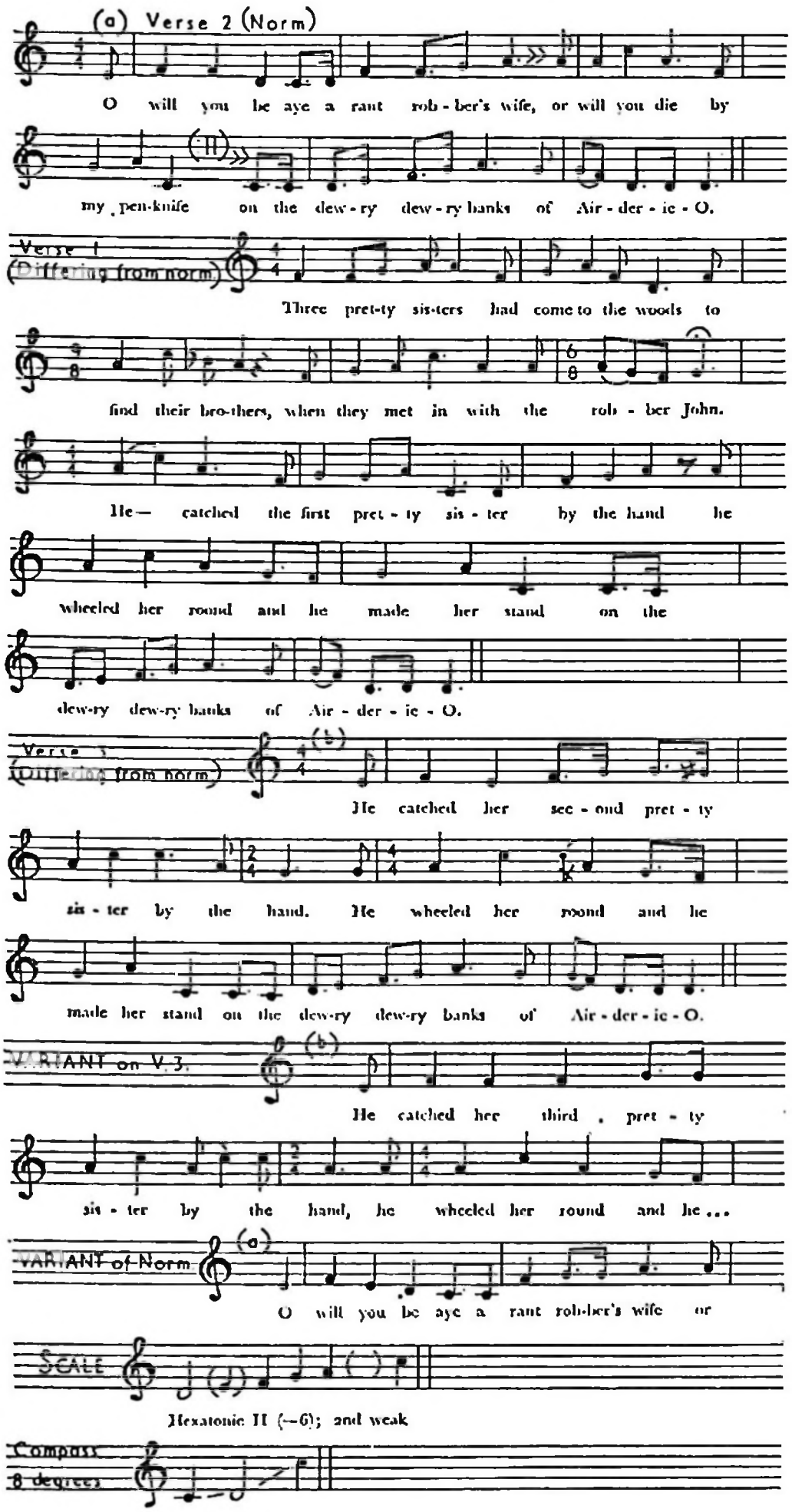
2. O will you be aye a rant robber's wife,
Or will you die by my pen-knife
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

3. O I'll not be, aye, a rant robber's wife,
I won't die by your penknife,
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

4. He catched her second pretty sister by the hand,
He wheeled her roond and he made her stand
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

5. O will you be aye a rant robber's wife,
Or will you die by my penknife
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

6. O I'll not be, aye, a rant robber's wife,
I would rather die by your penknife
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.


(a) Verse 2 (Norm)
O will you be aye a rant rob-ber's wife, or will you die by
my pen-knife on the dew-ry dew-ry banks of Air-der-ie-O.
Verse 1
(Differing from norm)
Three pret-ty sis-ters had come to the woods to
find their bro-thers, when they met in with the rob-ber John.
He— catched the first pret-ty sis-ter by the hand he
wheeled her round and he made her stand on the
dew-ry dew-ry banks of Air-der-ie-O.
Verse 3
(Differing from norm)
He catched her sec-ond pret-ty
sis-ter by the hand. He wheeled her round and he
made her stand on the dew-ry dew-ry banks of Air-der-ie-O.
VARIANT on V.3.
He catched her third pret-ty
sis-ter by the hand, he wheeled her round and he...
VARIANT of Norm
O will you be aye a rant robber's wife or
SCALE
Hexatonic II (—6); and weak
Compass
8 degrees

7. He catched her third pretty sister by the hand,
He wheeled her roond, and he made her stand,
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

8. O will you be, aye, a rant robber's wife,
Or will you die by my penknife
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

9. O I'll not be, aye, a rant robber's wife,
I'll not die by your penknife:
I have a brother in this wood,
If you kill me, he's sure to kill you
On the dewry, dewry banks of Airderie O.

10. O come tell to me, aye, your brother's name,
Come tell to me aye your brother's name
On the dewry dewry banks of Airderie O.

11. I have a brother called Robin John,
I have a brother a minister in the west,
I have another banisht owre the seas
For if you kill me, he's sure to kill you
On the dewry, dewry banks of Airderie O.

12. O dearie me, what is this I have done?
I've killed my three pretty sisters, a' but one,
I've killed my three pretty sisters, a' but one,
On the dewry, dewry banks of Airderie O.

The rhythm and phrase sequence are both inclined to wander, and it is fortunate that the norm can be established with some certainty. In spite of its rhythmic licence and fragmentary repetitions, however, the main contours of the melody remain remarkably recognisable throughout the stanzas.

The single B♭ in verse one cannot be said to be established in the scale. Neither can the G♯ in verse three.

Child 39. *Tam Lin*

Although "Tam Lin" is justly regarded, thanks to the splendid version sent by Robert Burns to James Johnson for the *Scots Musical Museum*, as one of the major ballads in our tradition, only four tunes have ever been reported for it—and one of these (Janet of Carterhaugh, from the Blaikie MS. in the National Library of Scotland) is a question mark, with no

text to back it. Of the others, one (of English origin) was collected in the United States, one is Irish (Belfast, but from Connemara originally), and the third is the tune accompanying Burns's text in the Museum. Until Willie White's fragment (our B) was recorded, Aberdeenshire was unrepresented. The two tunes in our archives, therefore, represent one-third of all the tunes ever recorded for this remarkable ballad.

Bessie Johnstone's version (our A) was recorded in Glasgow in 1957. We first heard of the singer in the berryfields of Blairgowrie the previous year, but the Dumbarton address we got for her there proved useless, and the trail we had to follow was long and complicated. Success came eventually after a phone call to Barlinnie; an official very kindly agreed to carry a message, couched in tinker's cant, to one of the inmates who knew the family.

Bessie's version preserves two distinct sections of the first half of the ballad: the opening scene, when Tam Lin (the mortal who was in thrall to the fairies) seduces a girl, and then the series of instructions which he gives her as to how she can redeem him from among the Fairy throng.

A

1. Lady Margret, Lady Margret,
   Bein, sewing at her beam,
   She lookèd east, she lookèd west
   And she saw those merry green woods,
   growing green,
   She saw those merry green woods.

2. As she kilted up her petticoats,
   It's up to them she ran,
   And when she came to those merry green woods
   She pu'd those branches down,
   my dear,
   She pu'd those branches down.

3. For it's there she spied a gentleman
   Comin' through the wood to her side.
   It's I gave you O leave, O leave,
   To pull those branches down,
   my dear,
   It's I'll give you O leave.

4. For it's wonst I could pull those trees, those trees,
It's wonst I could pull those branches.
Its wonst I could pull those trees, those trees,
All athout the leave of you,
my sir,
All athout the leave of you.

5. For he catcht her by the middle small,
And gently laid her down.

---

6. For it's since you've got your will of me,
Come, tell me now your name.

---

7. For to-morrow it is the new Hallowe'en,
An' the quality's goin' to ride,
You'll pass them by at the old mill bridge,
As they go ridin' by,
my dear,
As they go ridin' by.

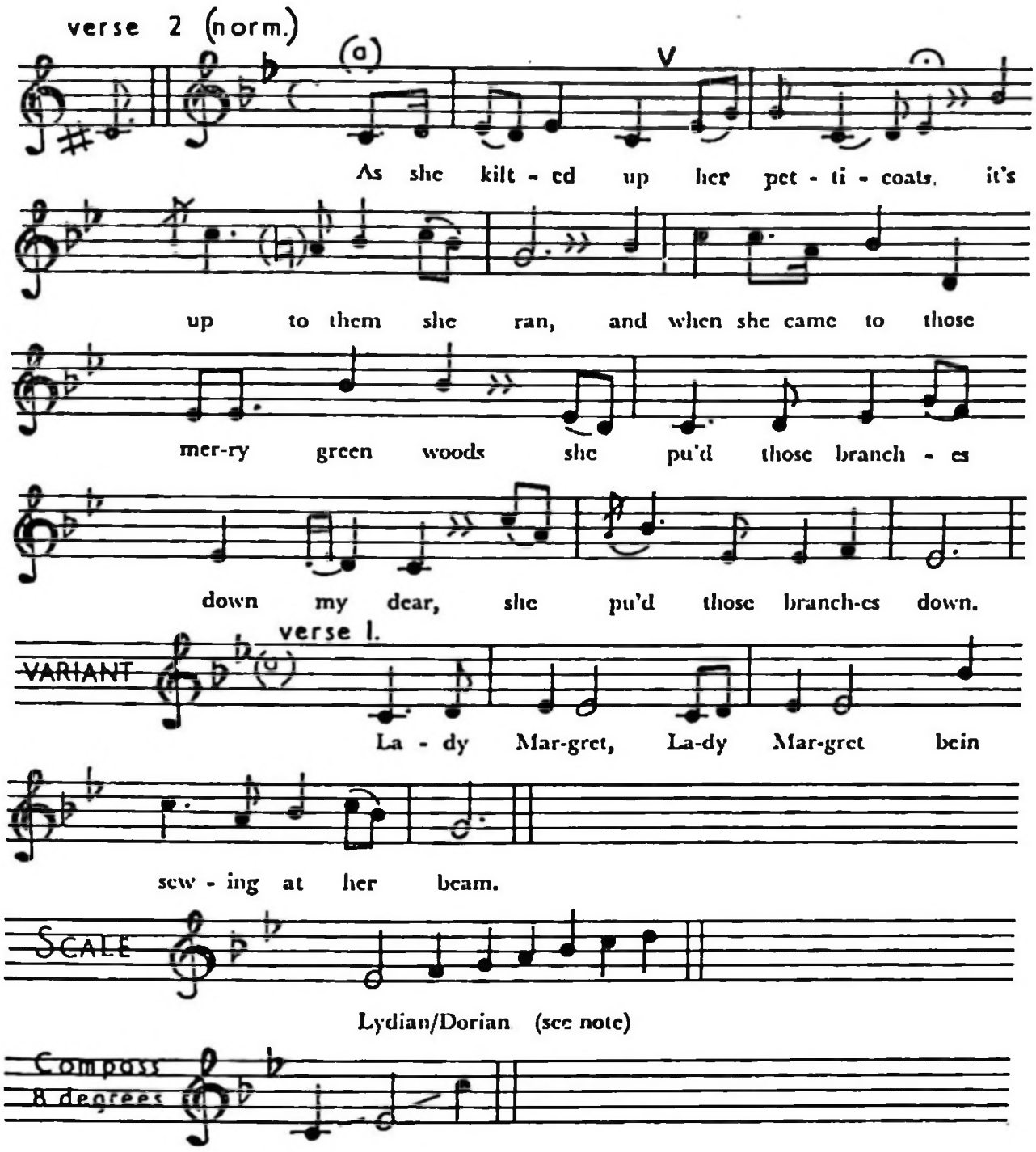
8. For the first will be is a black milk steed,
An' it's then you'll pass a white:
You'll hold him fast, you'll fear no ills,
He's the father of your child,
my dear,
He's the father of your child.

9. For the next it will be
Is into a snake so large;
You'll hold its head, you'll fear not ill,
He's the father of your child,
He's the father of your child.

10. For the next it will be
Is into a naked man;
You'll throw your mantle all around
And cry your win, my dear, your win,
You're the father of my child.

By the rule of the last note of the tune, the scale is that of the Lydian mode, extremely rare in folk-song (similar in intervals to the scale on the white notes of the piano commencing on F). Much of the melody, however, has the feeling

Bessie Johnstone: Tam Lin



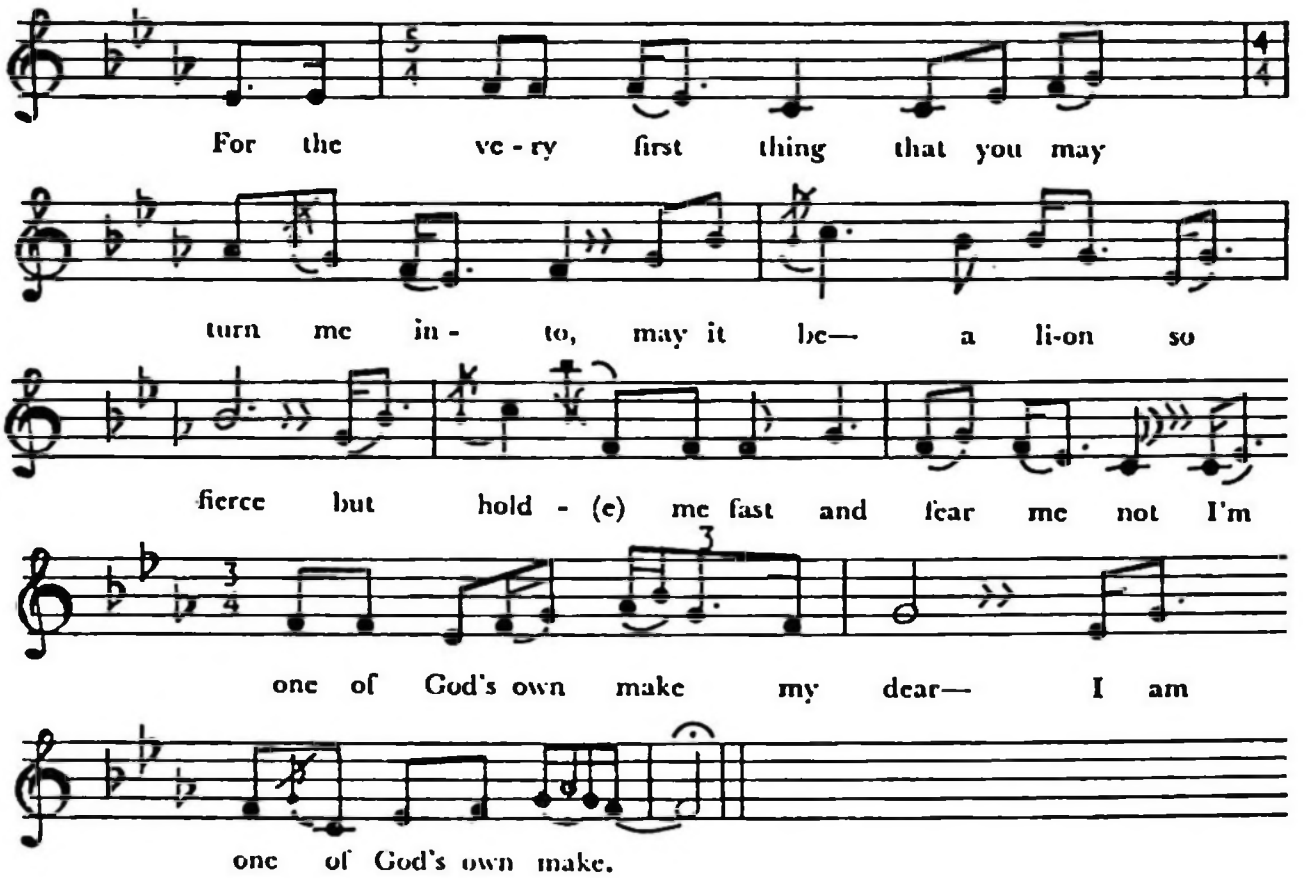
Form A, B^1, B^2, C, D.

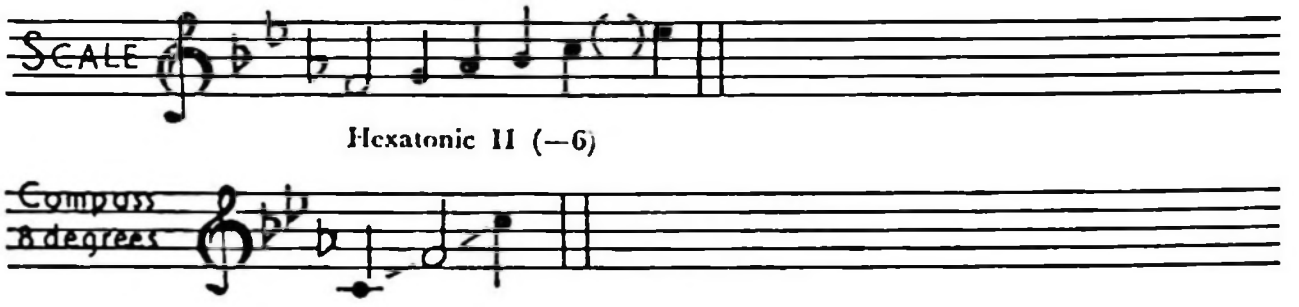
of a tonic on C which would give a Dorian scale. The tune brings the insistent lower "Dorian" part of the tune beginning on C into a relationship of a kind of relative minor to the Lydian mode beginning in E, which is both interesting and unusual.

Alternatively the last phrase could be regarded as a corrupted ending, in which case the scale would be a straightforward Dorian on C. For a parallel instance of such a corrupted ending see "The Grey Cock" in the *Penguin Book of English Folksong* (1959:52).

B

Willie Whyte: Tam Lin





Form ABCD¹D²

1. O for the sea may run dry, and the fishes fly,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun,
And if ever I prove false unto you,
It's my heart's blood it may run, my dear,
It's my heart's blood it may run.

2. When I am on the sea, O pray think of me,
When I'm far on the foreign shore.
For it's hold me fast, forget me not;
I'm the father of your child, my dear,
I'm the father of your child.

3. For the very first thing that you may turn me into,
May it be a lion so fierce;
But hold me fast and fear me not;
I'm one of God's own make, my dear,
I'm one of God's own make.

The singer, Willie Whyte, who was one of the links in the chain which led to Jeannie Robertson, got this version from his grandfather, Davie Whyte.

The wide intervals of the grace-notes are a remarkable feature of Willie's performance, and the grace-note in the fifth bar has been verified at slow speed to be actually the interval of an octave and a fourth above the principal note. See note on the air for "Little Sir Hugh" regarding the similarity of the airs for the two ballads.

C

The elfin queen'll gi'e a shout,
"Tam o Linn's awa'."

This fragment was recited by Adam Lamb, Fuarandearg, Braes of Glenlivet, in April 1956. Adam was not a singer.

CHILD 155. *Little Sir Hugh and the Jew's Daughter*

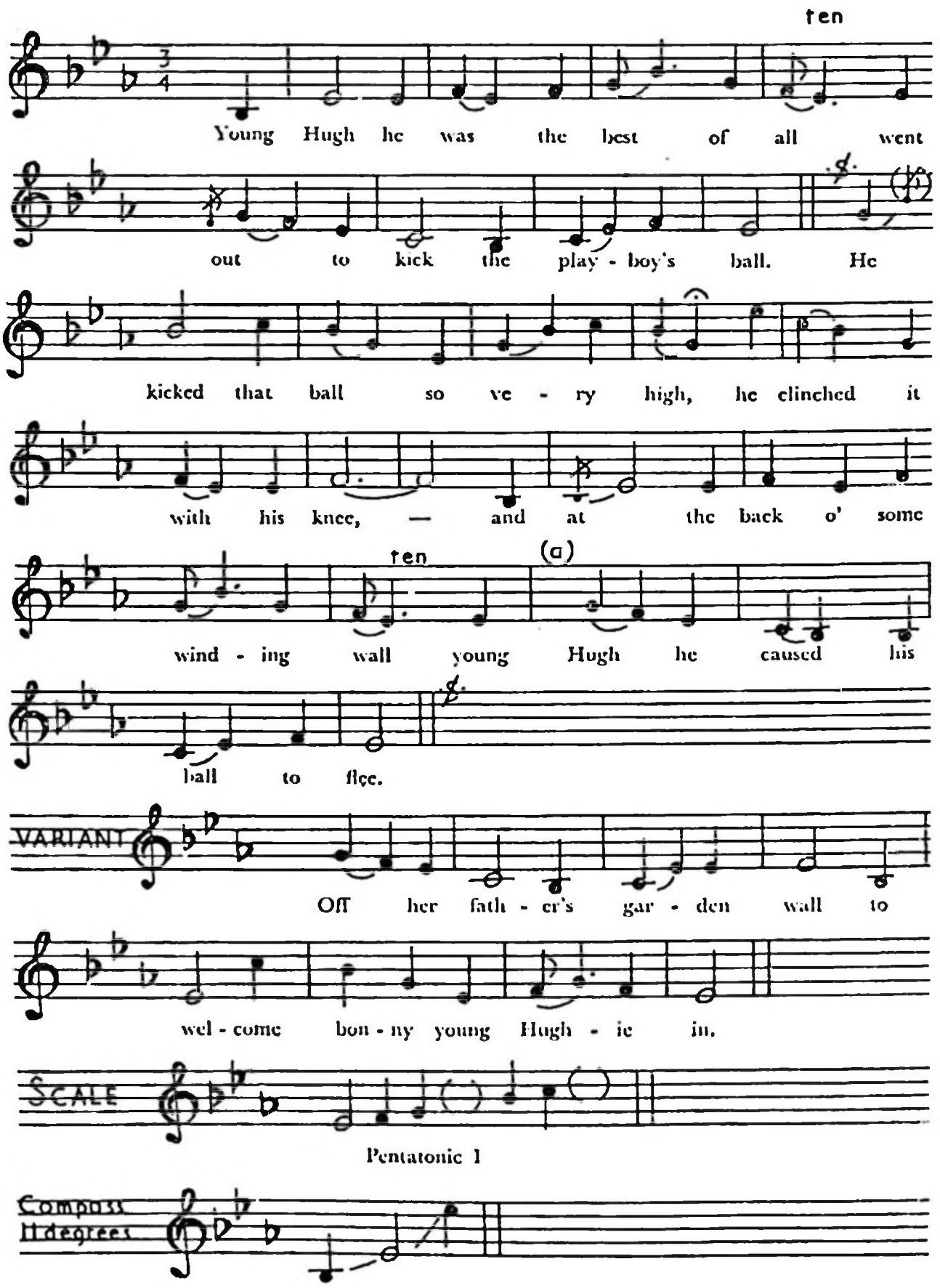
The sinister irrational fury of medieval anti-semitism is recaptured in this extraordinary ballad, which must itself have caused great suffering and hardship when performed among the credulous, in any area where the persecution of the Jews promised material returns of any value. For a very full description of the background of this madness, see Child I: 234-43. His conclusion bears repetition: "These pretended child-murders, with their horrible consequences, are only a part of a persecution which, with all moderation, may be rubricated as the most disgraceful chapter in the history of the human race."

Our A version was recorded by Mrs. Margaret Stewart in July 1954. Mrs. Stewart is an aunt of the renowned Aberdeen ballad-singer Jeannie Robertson; she earned her living as a street-singer for many years, and her versions of classical ballads used to be familiar to cinema queues in a number of towns and villages.

A

1. Young Hugh, he was the best of all,
Went out to kick the playboy's ball:
He kicked that ball so very high,
He clinched it with his knee.
And at the back o' some windin' wall,
Young Hugh he caused his ball to flee.

Maggie Stewart: Little Sir Hugh



2. Fling out my ball, fair maiden, he cried,
Fling out my playboy's ball.
I daur not fling out your ball, young Hugh,
It's till you came and talked to me.

3. I daurna came, I canna came,
Fling out my playboy's ball.
For she pulled an apple both red and green,
Off her father's garden wall,
To welcome bonnie young Hughie in.

4. She welcamet him in to one bedroom,
And she welcamet him intae two:
And she welcamet him intae her awn bedroom,
Where many a duke an' earl had dined.

5. Her little penknife bein' long and sharp,
She bid him take a sleep,
And she wrapped him up in a cake o' lead,
And put him intae yonder wall,
What's fifty faddams deep.

6. And at the back o' some windin' row
It's there it's my young Hugh shall sleep:
When cockle-shells growin silver bells,
It's therein me an' young Hugh shall meet.

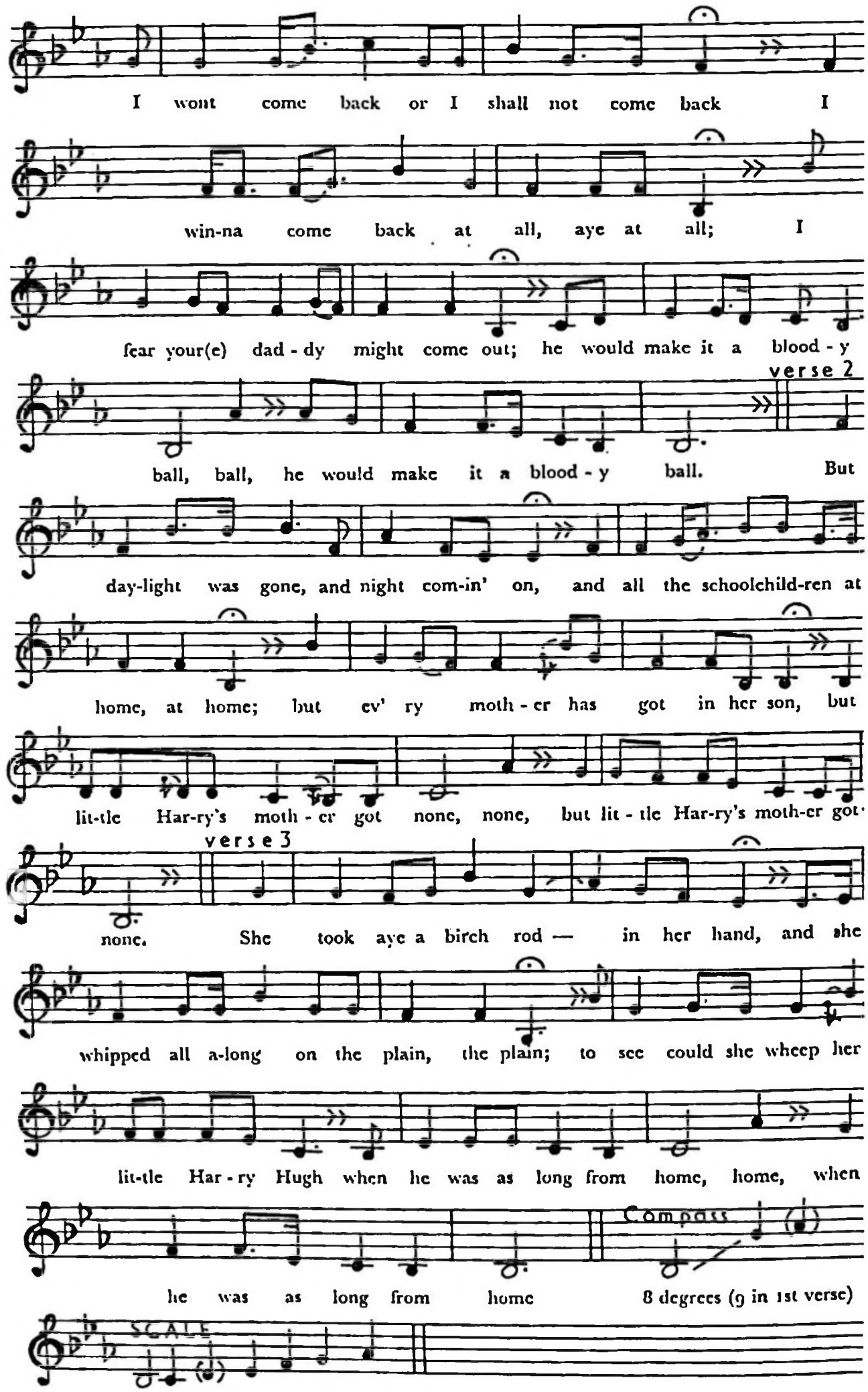
The tune is an interesting variation of the tune of "Ye Banks and Braes".

B

1. Little Harry Hugh and his school-fellows all
Went out to play the ball, the ball;
And . . . (indecipherable) . . . little Harry Hugh
He broke the Jew's windows all, all,
He broke the Jew's windows all.

2. Out then spak the Jew's dochter hersel,
And her all dressed on green, a' green,
Come back, come back, O little Harry Hugh,
And play your ball again, again,
And play your ball again.

Donald Whyte: Little Sir Hugh



Mixolydian: 3rd weak (the 3rd does not occur in all verses)

3. I won't come back, or I shall not come back;
I winna come back at all, aye, at all;
I fear your(e) daddy might come out—
He would make it a bloody ball, ball,
He would make it a bloody ball.

4. But daylight was gone, and night comin' on,
And all the school-children at home, at home;
But ev'ry mother has got in her son,
But little Harry's mother got none, none,
But little Harry's mother got none.

5. She took aye a birch rod in her hand,
And she whipped all along on the plain, the plain;
To see could she wheep her little Harry Hugh,
When he was as long from home, home,
When he was as long from home.

6. But God did direct her to this dry wall,
Was fifty faddom deep, o deep.
If you lie here, O little Harry Hugh,
As I hope in the Lord you're not, you're not;
If you lie here, O little Harry Hugh,
You can speak to your mother dear, dear,
You can speak to your mother dear.

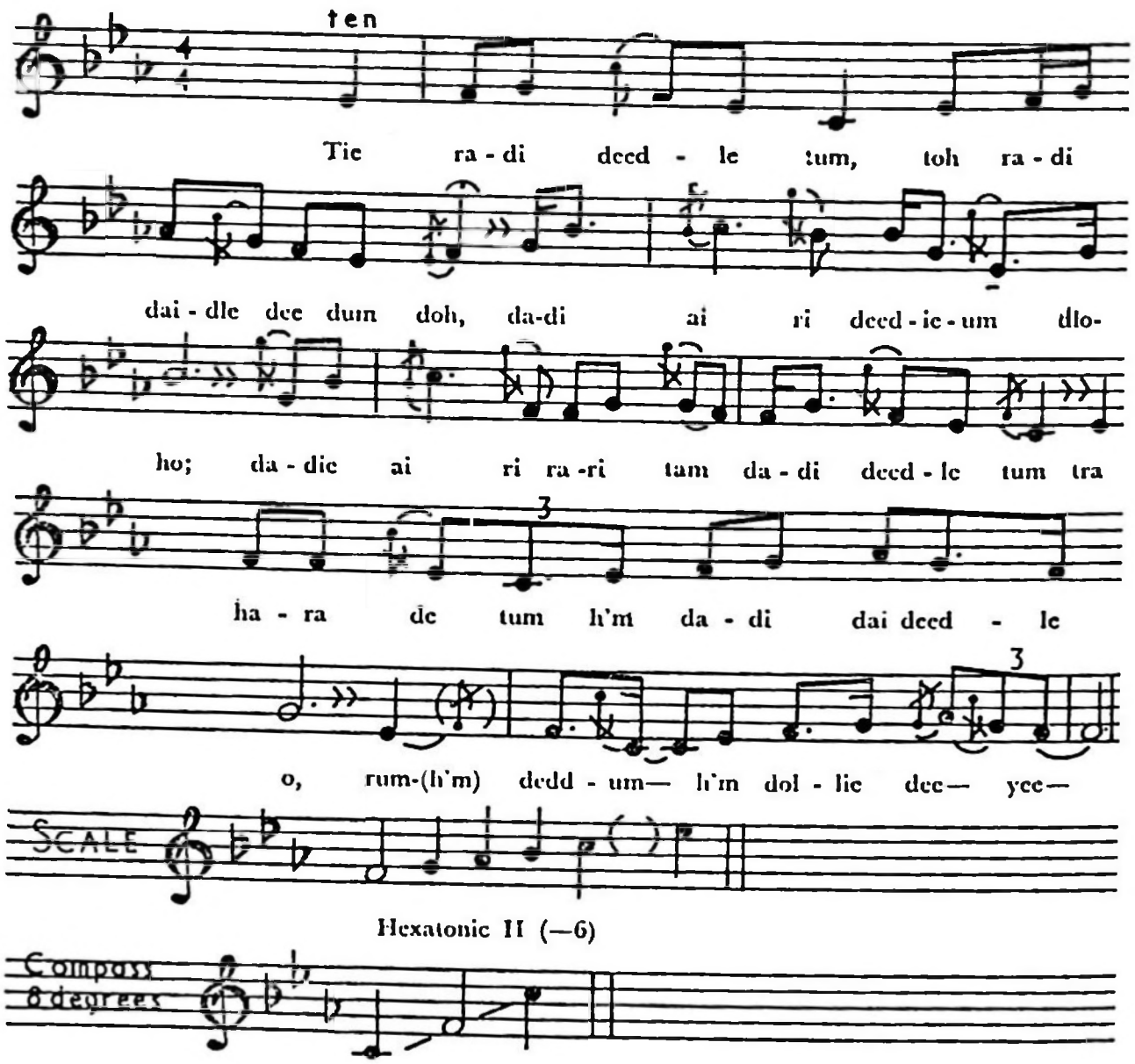
7. How could I speak to you, dear mother,
And me in such 'n a pain, a pain;
Your little pen-knife, it lies close to my heart.
The Jew's dochter, she has me slain, slain,
The Jew's dochter, she has me slain.

This version was recorded in 1961 from Donald Whyte, a 77-year-old Huntly tinker. Donald was born at Gartly; he first heard the ballad when he was 8 or 9 years of age. Owing to breathing difficulties, his enunciation was by no means clear, and there are a few undecipherable words in the first verse which may be due to the illiterate's garbling of an imperfectly understood text. In spite of this, "Little Harry Hugh" is a very forceful short re-telling of the macabre story. The nomenclature recalls Child's N version, which is from Newell's *Games and Songs of American Children*, p. 75, "as sung by a little girl in New York: derived, through her mother, from a grandmother born in Ireland".

The irregular nature of the tune will be clear from the three verses transcribed. It is a four-phrase tune, with varied repetition of the fourth phrase, making five phrases in all. The form is ABCD D.

C

Willie Whyte: Little Sir Hugh



Willie could not remember any of the words of the ballad, but he recorded the above tune for it. The form is A, B^1, B^2, C, C. The last phrase is extended by repetition to make a fifth phrase.

This is a "diddling" of the same air as that sung for "Tam Lin" by the same singer. It confirms a statement by John Leyden in his preliminary dissertation on "The Complaint of Scotland" that "the air of Tamlane is extremely similar to that of The Jew's Daughter", a statement which it has never been found possible to confirm until now.

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