SOME HEBRIDEAN FOLK DANCES

By J. F. and T. M. Flett

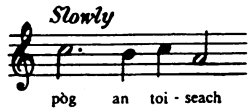
It is surprising that, although much work has been done on the folk songs of the Hebrides, practically nothing has been done on the dances of that region. The first account of them is that of Alexander Carmichael (4),[1] 1900. Here we find a description (incomplete) of one of them, "Cailleach an Dùdain", and the names of four others, "Cath nan coileach", "Turraban nan tunnag", "Ruidhleadh nan coileach dubha", and "Cath nan curaidh". Two other accounts, those of MacLagan (10), 1901, and MacDonald (8), 1901, add further names, but little fresh information. The most complete list of old Gaelic dances is that in MacLennan (12), 1953, where the dances are described as "now forgotten".

On a recent holiday in the Isles, we visited many old people, looking for the remains of these "forgotten" dances. To our surprise we found complete descriptions of four of the five dances named by Carmichael,[2] together with several others. MacLennan's remark, however, is nearly true. Only the Kissing Reel remains in general use, while the strange "Dannsa Mòr" and "Marbadh na béiste duibhe" are still performed on Eigg. The others remain only in the memories of the old people. We give below the results of our search, together with such further information as can be found in the literature.

THE KISSING REEL[3] (RUIDHLEADH NAM PÒG, WHITE COCKADE).

This is very much akin to the Cushion Dance. There are several descriptions of the dance in print,[4] but none which exactly corresponds to the version which we found in the Isles. The description which follows was noted from Mrs. Angus MacLellan, Hacklett, Benbecula (aged *ca.* 50).

"This was usually the last dance of the evening, and was always danced to the pipes. A young man, usually the M.C., takes his handkerchief in his hand, and walks clockwise round the room to the tune of 'The White Cockade'. He throws the handkerchief to the girl he selects, who joins him on the floor. As she does so, the piper breaks off the tune, and plays the phrase 'pòg an toiseach' ('kiss first') several times.



[1] The numbers in brackets refer to the list of references at the end.
[2] "Cath nan curaidh" being the exception.
[3] A dance similar to this was seen in Yugoslavia at the time of the I.F.M.C. Conference at Opatija in 1951. P.S.-S.
[4] MacIntosh (9); MacLagan (10).

At this the young man puts his arm round his partner and kisses her. The piper then resumes 'The White Cockade', when the couple link arms and walk on round the room. The girl then throws the handkerchief to another man, who falls in behind the first couple, and all three walk on round the floor. This second man throws the handkerchief to another girl, who joins him, is kissed to the accompaniment 'pòg an toiseach', and the new couple then fall in behind the first couple. This is repeated until all the couples are on the floor, or until the supply of men or girls runs out. The piper then changes to a reel, when the dancers split up into fours and dance a Foursome Reel. (There was no particular tune for this Reel.)

"Often the girls were shy, and when the handkerchief was thrown at one, she would quickly pass it on to a neighbour."

Exactly similar descriptions were given to us by Callum MacPherson of Eochar, S. Uist (aged *ca.* 65), and Hugh MacKinnon of Cliadale, Eigg (aged 59). The latter told us that the dance was last performed on Eigg about seven years ago, and not for a very considerable time before that.

The dance is still performed in Eochar, S. Uist, but has changed slightly from the version described above. John MacLeod of Eochar (now living in Glasgow) described the "modern" version as follows:—

"This is the last dance of the evening—usually at about 3 o'clock in the morning. One man closes the door and stands with his back to it. Then another man, usually the M.C., takes his handkerchief, and walks down the hall and gives it to a girl. She rises, links arms with him, and they walk together round the hall. She then gives the handkerchief to another man, who links arms with them, and so on, until all are on the floor. They then divide as in a Grand March, and dance a Strathspey and Reel of Tulloch. While they are sorting themselves into fours for this, the piper plays the phrase 'pòg an toiseach' several times. The bolder spirits kiss their partners, and all begin the Reel."

Mr. MacLeod said that this is done nowadays principally to find out which girls and boys are going together "because people are very close about that sort of thing in the Isles—much more so than on the mainland".

Three people, Angus MacLellan of Hacklett, Benbecula (aged 70), Angus MacMillan of Griminish, Benbecula (aged 79), and Flora MacLellan of Cliadale, Eigg (aged 82), remembered a fuller version of the Kissing Reel in which the first man, before walking round the room with his handkerchief, twisted it into a "rope", laid it on the floor and danced a few steps round it.[5] This was done about sixty years ago. We asked our three informants what the steps were like, and in which direction he moved round the handkerchief. In each case we were told that the steps were like those of Dannsadh Claidheamh (Sword Dance). Mr. MacLellan was not sure of the direction, but the other two were certain that it was clockwise—"the right way".

This last version is probably a relic of the custom referred to by Logan (6), 1831, of using the Highland Sword Dance Gille Callum "as a finale to a ball, in manner

[5] This is mentioned by MacIntosh (9).

of the 'bob at the bolster' of the Lowlands".[6] It is likely that what actually took place in Logan's day was that at the close of a ball a young man danced Gille Callum over a sword and scabbard laid crosswise on the floor with a bonnet at their intersection, and, when he had finished, picked up the bonnet, walked round the room and presented the bonnet to the lady of his choice, so beginning the Kissing Reel. Some support is lent to this theory by the fact that MacDonald (8), 1901, has recorded a version of the Kissing Reel (without the introductory Sword Dance) in which a bonnet was used instead of a handkerchief. The dance "Am Bonaid Ghorm" (The Blue Bonnet) noted by MacLagan (10) as "resembling the Sword Dance" may also be a relic of this custom. In this dance "two sticks were laid crossways and a bonnet placed at their intersection; in certain movements the performer lifted the bonnet and replaced it." The transition from sword to handkerchief is, of course, an easy one to make.[7]

If this theory is correct, then the tune of the Kissing Reel must once have been that of Gille Callum, and in this connection it is interesting to observe how well the words of the well known dance-song "Gille Callum dà pheiginn"[8] fit the actions of the Kissing Reel; much better, in fact, than they fit the solo sword dance Gille Callum. The change of the tune for the Kissing Reel to "The White Cockade" may well have come with the use of the white handkerchief in place of a sword.

CAILLEACH AN DÙDAIN (OLD WOMAN OF THE MILL-DUST).

This is the best known of the "forgotten" dances of the Isles, since it is the most striking.

So far as we have been able to trace, "Cailleach an Dùdain" is first mentioned by Alexander Campbell (3), 1804, as one of the dance-songs to which "Dannsa na Cailleach" (The Old Woman's Dance) was performed. Campbell's account probably refers to the Perthshire Highlands, *ca.* 1780. The dance itself is obviously of very great antiquity, but it does not seem to be mentioned in any of the works on the Hebrides prior to that of Carmichael (4). We suspect, however, that the version described by Carmichael has been "polished", either by a dancing teacher, or by

[6] The history of Gille Callum is obscure. The tune appears in Bremner's Collection of 1768 as "Keellum Kallum taa fein", but the earliest explicit reference to the dance known to us is that by Campbell (3), 1804, who says that "*Gille Callum da' pheigin* is generally danced by one man, who performs it with great address over a naked broadsword laid on the floor; . . . is sometimes danced by two, three, or four men . . ." Campbell lists it as one of the "national dances which are daily becoming more obsolete", but it was saved from this by John MacKay, who brought it to public notice by exhibiting it in 1832 and 1835 at the triennial Piping and Dancing Competitions held in Edinburgh by the Highland Society [Dalyell (5)]. By 1841 it was a regular part of these competitions.

It seems to have been performed originally over a sword with the *edge* of the blade uppermost (not the flat, as nowadays); this is clearly shown in the plate in Logan (7), 1848. The earliest complete description of the dance seems to be that of MacIntyre North (14), 1880, and in this version, which dates back at least to about 1850, the dancer moved clockwise round the swords, not anti-clockwise as at present. It is interesting to note that this earlier "clockwise" form lingered on in the Kissing Reel long after it was dead as a separate dance.

[7] Mr. Roderick MacPherson of Liniclett, Benbecula, told us that he had often seen Gille Callum performed over two handkerchiefs twisted into ropes.

[8] See MacDonald (8) or MacLennan (12); the latter gives an English translation.

Carmichael himself in writing it up for his book. Other descriptions are given by Alford and Gallop (1), and Milligan and MacLellan (13).

The best description of the dance which we have met is that in an unpublished MS. written by the late Father Allan MacDonald, now in the possession of the Right Reverend Kenneth Grant, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, to whom we are indebted for permission to reproduce it here. Father Allan's description, which probably refers to Eriskay in the late 19th century, is as follows:—

"There is a dance called 'Cailleach an durdain'—'The Carlin of the dust'. It is a Punch and Judy dance and has a special pipe tune for itself called 'Cailleach an Durdain'. Two take part in the dance—an old man and an old trembling shivering hag (a man dressed in punch attire does her part). The old hag comes in trembling and quivering with a stick in her hand and her husband similarly armed. They fight with the sticks—dancing all the time. Finally the old man thrusts his stick into her body and she falls down dead. The old man beats his hands and howls most atrociously as it occurs to him that he has murdered the old woman. The sudden change from anger and animosity to broken-heartedness for the loss of his partner in life is ridiculous. He bends down over her only to find out more surely that she is dead. The lamentation is heart-rending. Again and again he bends over her and again his sorrow is only intensified. He bends down and touches her boot and the foot rises a little and quivers away most singularly. The old man regains a little confidence. He bends down again and touches the other foot, and it too begins to shake incessantly. At these signs of returning life he bursts out into hysterical laughter. He touches the hands one by one. They too begin to quiver. The old carlin stretched out on the floor with her two feet and two hands quivering looks ridiculous to a degree and the spectators nearly drown the piper with their uproar. The old man then bends down and touches her hair and up she springs with renewed life and they both rush into each other's arms most gleefully."

The man-woman (here noted for the first time in this dance) and the death and resurrection connect the dance with the many similar ritual performances elsewhere.

We collected a degenerate version of this dance from Angus MacLellan of Hacklett, Benbecula, and here again the part of the cailleach is played by a man, wearing a coat and skirt and with a shawl round his head. The death and resurrection, however, have obviously been forgotten.

In this version of the dance the cailleach is supposed to be addicted to drink. It begins with the return of her husband from work, to find her missing—out drinking. She returns in a minute or two "trembling with fear and drink", and shuffles into the centre of the room while he dances round her, beating her with a stick. He then kicks her, she falls over, and he dances round her, kicking her and brandishing his stick at her. Finally, she staggers to her feet, and he kicks her from the room.

Mr. MacLellan had seen this performed, in his own home and elsewhere on Benbecula, about fifty-five years ago, his own father often being one of the dancers. It was performed at any time of the year, either in the kitchens of the houses or at dances in the schoolhouse. It was always danced to the tune of the same name, played on the pipes, and took 15-20 minutes.

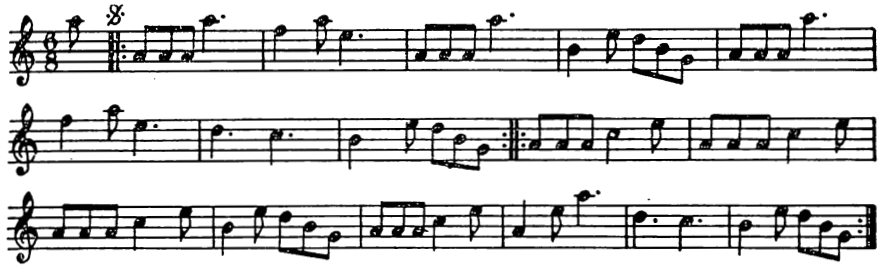
There were no elaborate steps, for "it was not a step dance". Mr. MacLellan showed us the step used by the husband while dancing round the cailleach, and this was as follows:—

Bar 1.	Count "and ONE"	Full step forward on right foot.
	"and"	Small step of about 3in. forward on left foot.
	"TWO"	A similar step forward on right foot.
Bar 2.		Repeat the "and TWO" of Bar 1 twice.
Bars 3, 4.		Repeat Bars 1 and 2 with opposite feet.

The right foot stays in front of the left foot during the whole of the first two bars, then the left foot stays in front of the right foot during the next two bars, and so on. The dancer leans slightly forward, and the knees are slightly bent.

The version of the tune played by Mr. MacLellan was noted for us by Ian MacLachlan of Creagorry, Benbecula, and is as follows:—

Tempo 60 bars per minute



Other versions of the tune are given in K. N. MacDonald's *Gesto Collection of Highland Music* (1895) (noted from Carmichael) and in Ross's *3rd Collection of Pipe Music* (*ca.* 1940). That above is nearer to MacDonald's version, but the latter is in 2/4 time.

The words of the song "Cailleach an Dùdain" given below are taken from Alexander Carmichael's MSS., now in the possession of Edinburgh University. We are indebted to the Librarian of Edinburgh University for permission to reproduce them here:—

Chailleach an dùdain,
Chailleach an dùdain,
Chailleach an dùdain,
Cum do dheireadh rium!

Chailleach an dùdain,
Chailleach an dùdain,
Cum do chùl rium,
Cum do cheathramh rium!

Chailleach an dùdain,
Chailleach an dùdain,
Null e! nall e!
Cum do cheathramh rium!

Chailleach an dùdain,
Chailleach an dùdain,
Sios e! suas e!
Nuas na beirearan!
Cum do chùl rium!
Cum do cheathramh rium!

(i.e. Carlin of the mill-dust (*thrice*), keep thy rear to me!
Carlin of the mill-dust (*twice*), keep thy back to me, keep thy quarter to me!
Carlin of the mill-dust (*twice*), over with it! back with it! keep thy quarter to me!
Carlin of the mill-dust (*twice*), down with it! up with it! let it not be brought down (?)! Keep thy back to me! Keep thy quarter to me!)

We also collected the first verse from Mrs. Monk of Creagorry, Benbecula, but she could not remember the rest.

These verses fit the version found by us on Benbecula (and, to a certain extent, Father Allan's version also)—they should obviously be sung by the man as he belabours the cailleach—but they do not fit at all the more mystical version described by Carmichael.[9]

We should add that a comic Dirk Dance, very similar to "Cailleach an Dùdain", was performed at the Edinburgh competitions in 1841.[10]

CATH NAN COILEACH (THE BICKERING OF THE COCKS).

This is one of the four dances named by Carmichael (4). We collected the version given below from an old piper, Neil MacNeil (aged 89), of Craigston, Barra. He told us that it was taught at a dancing-school held in Castlebay, Barra, by an old man called "Ronald-the-dancing-master", and that it was danced at gatherings all over the island. It has not been danced for about sixty years. It is intended to represent the bickering of fighting-cocks and the way in which they circle round each other.

Two couples take part. To begin the dance they stand in a square, diagonally opposite their partners with whom they join crossed hands (thus forming a cross). They remain in this formation for the whole of the dance.

The dance consists of two parts, the first at very slightly less than normal reel tempo, the second much faster.

First part. The four dancers dance round in a circle to the left while the first part of the tune is played through twice (16 bars). They then set on the spot (with hands still joined), using "any Reel steps", while the second part of the tune is played through twice (16 bars).

[9] This is one of our reasons for suspecting that Carmichael's version has been "polished".
[10] Dalyell (5).

Second part. The music now quickens. The dancers dance round in a circle to the left for 16 bars using the ordinary pivot turning step of the Reel of Tulloch, and then set on the spot for 16 bars, using the well known "backstep with a hop".[11]

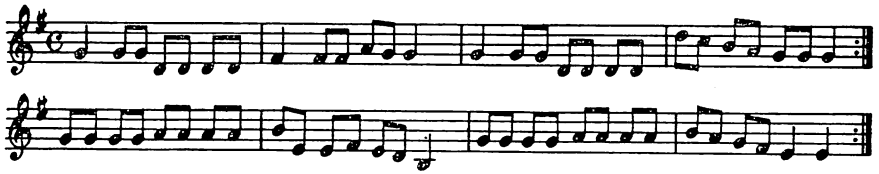
The whole dance is then repeated as often as desired.

Mr. MacNeil was unable to demonstrate any steps to us, so we had to demonstrate steps to him, and ask if they were ever used in the dance. In this way we discovered that the circling step in the first part was "something like" a chassé or a skip-change-of-step, and not a slipping step. The Reel steps used for setting in the first part were the usual ones used in the Foursome Reel.

The pipe reel "Cath nan coileach" was used for both parts of the dance. We were unfortunately not able to note this tune at the time, but hope to include it in a later number of the *Journal.*

RUIDHLEADH NAN COILEACH DUBHA (REEL OF THE BLACKCOCKS).

We collected this (another of the dances named by Carmichael) both as an adults' dance and as a children's dance. The adults' version was described to us by Neil MacNeil. It was another of the dances taught by "Ronald-the-dancing-master", and has not been danced on Barra for about sixty years. It was performed to the following reel, which bears the same name as the dance. This was noted for us by Ian MacLachlan of Creagorry, Benbecula, from the singing of Mrs. Monk, and is the same as a version sent to us by Miss Ethel Bassin (collected from Miss Annie Johnston of Castlebay, Barra).



The words which Mrs. Monk sang (which were also known to Mr. MacNeil) are given in MacDonald (8),[12] so we shall not reproduce them here. A rough translation of the first four lines is as follows:

Reeled the black cocks, and danced the ducks,
Reeled the black cocks, on the bank up there.

The dance is a Reel for two couples. To begin, the two couples face each other, the men on the left of their partners. The man and the lady of one couple go down on one knee while the other couple set to them with "any Reel steps" for 8 bars. Then the second couple kneel while the first couple rise to their feet and set to them for 8 bars. The second couple then rise and all four join hands in a ring and dance round to the left for 8 bars.[13] This was repeated as often as the dancers pleased.

[11] See e.g. MacLennan (12), p. 64. Peacock (15) describes this step as a "minor ceum-coisiche".
[12] MacDonald (8), p. 17, *the first two verses only.*
[13] The step used here was the same as that in the first part of "Cath nan coileach".

We believe that the miming which often forms a part of these old Gaelic dances was largely determined by the words of the appropriate dance-song, and this is a case in point. Here the ducks are represented by the kneeling couple, while the dancing couple are the blackcocks. There seems to have been a general convention that a duck may be represented by kneeling or by squatting on one's hunkers. In the children's version of "Ruidhleadh nan coileach dubha" it is the latter representation which is used.

We collected the children's version of the dance from Miss Rachel MacLeod of Castlebay, Barra (aged *ca.* 70). She danced it when she was young. Two boys and two girls took part, the boys playing the part of the cocks and the girls that of the ducks. The four children stood in couples facing each other. They then danced a continuous Reel of Four until they were exhausted. There was no setting. The boys danced with a normal travelling step, but the girls crouched on their hunkers, with hands held just in front of their mouths, palms together, to form the ducks' beaks. They waddled and hopped around, the "beaks" waggling from side to side.

DANNSA NA TUNNAG (THE DUCK'S DANCE).[14]

We presume that this is the same as the "Turraban nan Tunnag" (Waddling of the ducks) mentioned by Carmichael (4). It seems to be generally known in the Isles now as a children's game, in which the child gets down on its hunkers, clasps its hands under its thighs, and just hops round in a circle. It may be performed by one or more children. Older people, however, remember it as an adults' dance, of which we collected several different accounts. We presume that the tune was distinct from that of the preceding dance, but could not find anyone who remembered it.

Neil MacDonald of Cliadale, Eigg (aged 80), told us that he had seen this performed as a solo (by an adult) about seventy years ago. The dancer danced round the room on his hunkers, and used the kibby step. This sounds as though it may have been the same as the "Ruidhil nan tunnag" recorded by MacLagan (11) from Kintyre.

Callum MacCormack of Nunton, Benbecula (aged 83), said that he had seen "Dannsa na tunnag" danced by adults when he was twelve or thirteen, to the music of the pipes. He described the dance as a normal Foursome Reel begun in the side-by-side position, save that the setting step used by all four dancers consisted of dancing on the hunkers and shooting out a leg to the side. This version seems to correspond to the version recorded from Bernera by MacLagan (10).

Archie MacDougall of Liniclett, Benbecula (aged 85), and Angus MacMillan of Griminish, Benbecula (aged 79), both remembered a version "for as many as will". This was a follow-my-leader dance. A file of dancers, all down on their hunkers, with their hands clasped beneath their thighs, followed wherever the leader liked to lead. The dance was a test of endurance. It was danced everywhere on the island to a special tune (in reel tempo) played on the pipes. Mr. MacDougall told us that

[14] In Shetland I came across traces of a dance that must have been very like this, called "Cutty". It was performed entirely in a sitting-on-the-heels position. See *Journal,* Vol. V, No. 2 (1937). P.S.-S.

old people as well as young danced it. They pushed each other to make them fall over, but if dancers did fall over, they just rose and continued dancing; the only method of elimination was by lack of endurance. It sometimes lasted half an hour.

AN DANNSA MÒR (THE BIG DANCE).

There is a brief (and inaccurate) account of this dance in MacLennan (12), but apart from this we have not been able to find it mentioned in the literature. J. L. Campbell of Canna has recorded the verses, but does not appear to have published them. The dance is still performed on Eigg, and there are several people who know the verses. The following account of it was given to us by Hugh MacKinnon who often takes one of the principal parts.

Mr. MacKinnon told us that this dance originally belonged to Skye, and came to Eigg via the neighbouring island of Rhum. Some Eigg men who were working in Rhum learnt the dance there from some men from the Strathaird district of Skye, and brought it back with them when they returned to Eigg. A son[15] of one of these men, and the nephew[16] of another are still living, both aged about eighty, so we may say that the dance reached Eigg about 80-100 years ago.

The dance as now performed was described to us by Mr. MacKinnon as follows. It is danced by men only, as many as please taking part, to verses sung by two of the men, with a chorus at the end of each verse sung by all of the dancers.

The dancers join hands to form a ring, all facing inwards, the hands being held just below shoulder height, with arms straight. The two men who sing the verses, whom we shall call X and Y, start in diametrically opposite places in the ring. The first man, X, sings the first line of the verse, and, as he does so, both he and Y come inside the ring. The second man, Y, immediately follows with the second line of the verse, then X sings the third line, and so on. As they sing, X and Y walk backwards and forwards across the ring, watching each other all the time. The "walk" here is a light jaunty walk on the ball of the foot, arms swinging and elbows well bent, with a half "flirting", half arrogant inclination of the head as they watch each other. While X and Y are singing the verse, the other men continue to stand in the ring with hands joined, but leaving gaps for the two men X and Y. On the first line of the chorus, which is sung by all of the dancers, X and Y fall quickly into their places in the ring, joining hands as at the start, and the whole ring dances round to the left, moving slowly for the first half of the chorus, and then quickly until the chorus is finished. The two men, X and Y, then come into the centre and sing the next verse, and so on. During the chorus, the dancers hop round on the left foot, keeping their right legs extended towards the centre of the ring, with legs straight, and the feet about 18in. from the floor. They make four hops to a line of the chorus.[17]

[15] Neil MacDonald, son of Angus MacDonald.

[16] Lachlan Campbell, nephew of Duncan Campbell. Mr. MacKinnon remembers Duncan Campbell, who was old when he was a boy.

[17] To get back into their positions in the ring at the beginning of the chorus, the two men make a very quick whole turn to their right and spring into their positions in the ring, landing on the left foot and raising the right leg, ready to hop round as already described. Mr. MacKinnon himself used a rough pas de Basque (begun with the right foot) for this whole turn.

The only variation from this occurs in the verse beginning "Ùbh is ùbh". Here X portrays the Miller's daughter, and comes into the ring with hands covering his eyes and head shaking from side to side, and with body bowed down, as if sobbing. He sings his first four lines in this way, but on his fifth (i.e. the ninth line of the verse), he springs defiantly erect, swinging his right arm up as if warding off the other man with his forearm. During the whole of this verse, Y walks about quietly, with no swagger, singing his own lines, and watching X.

There is one other gesture which Mr. MacKinnon made quite unconsciously. On the line "Le sadach na muilne" of the last verse, he made a gesture as if he was throwing up two handfuls of dust to cover himself: "I can even dance covered with the mill-dust".

The verses sung at present are as follows. In recording these we were very materially assisted by the loan of a MS. version noted *ca.* 1932 from an old man on Eigg by the late Donald MacKay of Cliadale. We are indebted to Miss K. MacKay, sister of Donald MacKay, for permission to use this MS.[18] The song consists of two quite distinct parts, with a different chorus to each part. In the first part, the first verse consists of four lines, while the subsequent verses consist of eight lines, the last four of which are the same as the first verse.

First Part

Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Ùbh à uidil-an
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-uidil ùbh-an

Chorus

Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Ùbh à uidil-an
Ùbh uidil à thurabh à
Hal-dar-uidil ùbh-an
Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil
Hal-dar-al uidil-an
Si ùbh uidil uidil uidil
Hal-dar-uidil ùbh-an

Tha òr aig Coinneach a' Rudha,
'S gun òr aig a h-uile fear:
Tha òr aig Coinneach a' Rudha.
'S aig fear Rudha 'n Dùnain,
Ùbh uidil à etc.

Pòg do nighean a' Ghobha
'S gun phòg dha'n a h-uile té,
Pòg do nighean a' Ghobha
'S do ogha Mhic Lùcais.
Ùbh uidil à etc.

Bidh poll air osan nan toll,
'S tric air feadh nan nighean e;
Bidh poll air osan nan toll,
'S bidh e feadh na dùthcha.
Ùbh uidil à etc.

[18] In writing down the version recorded in his MS., Donald MacKay had omitted all repetitions, so it was not possible to compare it with the present day version.

Ciamar a ruitheas mi'n nighean,
'S dithis a's a' rathad orm?
Ciamar a ruitheas mi'n nighean,
'S ceathrar air an ùrlar?
Ùbh uidil à etc.

Second Part.[19] Here the second man, Y, repeats the same words "Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir" ("Said the daughter of the Miller") after each line sung by X. In the verses, therefore, we shall omit Y's lines and give only those sung by X.

Ùbh is ùbh is ùbh
Ùbh is ùbh is ùbh
Gu dé lochd a rinn mi?
Gu'n d'laigh mi le saighdear,
Nach iomadh té rinn e?

Chorus Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir Oig
Arsa nighean a' Mhuilleir. } 4 *times*

Mo ghaol a' Ministeir Buidhe,
Mo ghaol a' Ministeir Buidhe,
Cuide riut a dheanainn suidhe.
Anns a' ghàrradh 'm biodh na luibhean.

Cha téid mise chun a' stòil,
Cha téid mise chun a' stòil,
Gus am faigh mi gùn an t-sròl
Aparan buidhe gu bòsd.

Dhannsainn le trombaid,
Dhannsainn gun trombaid idir,
Dhannsainn le fìdhleir,
Dhannsainn gun fhìdhleir idir,
Le sadach na muilne.

The first verse and the chorus of the first part seem to be meaningless. The remaining verses and the chorus of the second part may be translated as follows:—

Kenneth of the Rudha (headland) has gold,/ And not every man has gold;/ Kenneth of the Rudha has gold,/ And so has the Goodman of Rudha an Dùnain.[20]

A kiss for the Smith's daughter,/ Without a kiss for every girl,/ A kiss for the Smith's daughter/ And for MacLucas' granddaughter.

There will be mud on the tattered hose,[21]/ Oft is he[22] among the girls;/ There will be mud on the tattered hose,/ And he will be ranging the country.[23]

How shall I chase the girl,/ When there are two in my way?/ How shall I chase the girl,/ When there are four on the floor?

[19] There is no pause in the dance here between these two parts.
[20] Mr. Matheson, who furnished the above translations, tells us that the best known Rudha an Dùnain is in Skye, that a family of MacAskills were tacksmen of it, and that the name Kenneth occurred among them.
[21] This can also be "leg of trousers".
[22] This might be "it".
[23] This might mean "The news will spread through the countryside".

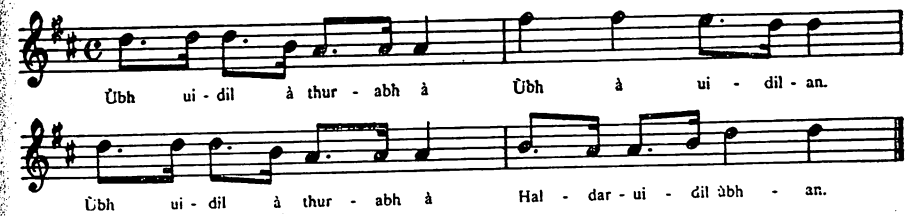
Second Part. Alas, alas, alas,/ Alas, alas, alas,/ What harm have I done?/ I lay with a soldier,/ Has not many a girl done it?

Chorus. Said the daughter of the young Miller,/ Said the daughter of the Miller.
My love is the yellow-haired Minister (*twice*)/ With thee I would sit/ In the garden of herbs.
I shall not go to the stool (*twice*)/ Till I get a satin gown,/ And a yellow apron for show.
I would dance to a trumpet,/ I would dance without a trumpet at all,/ I would dance to a fiddler,/ I would dance without a fiddler at all,/ With the mill-dust.

The first and second parts of the song have different tunes—as different, indeed, as the verses.

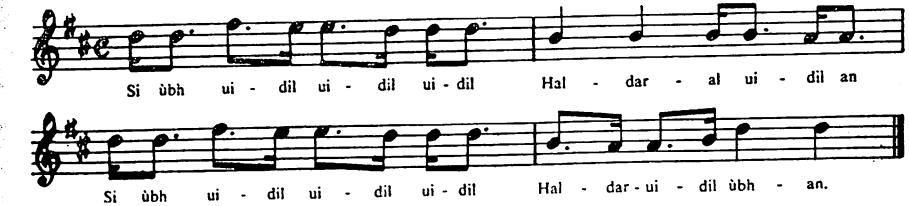
The music to which Dannsa Mòr is performed is as follows. We are indebted to Dr. H. T. L. MacLean of Eigg for noting this for us. Dr. MacLean also remarks that the steady monotonous rhythm of the second part is perhaps suggestive of the sound of the mill-wheel. Since the "chorus" figure of the dance is itself suggestive of a mill-wheel (particularly so if only eight or twelve men take part), it is possible that the dance originally consisted only of the present second part. If so, this dance would have been another instance of one where the movements mime the appropriate dance song.

A. First verse and last four lines of each subsequent verse, and first half of chorus, in first part.



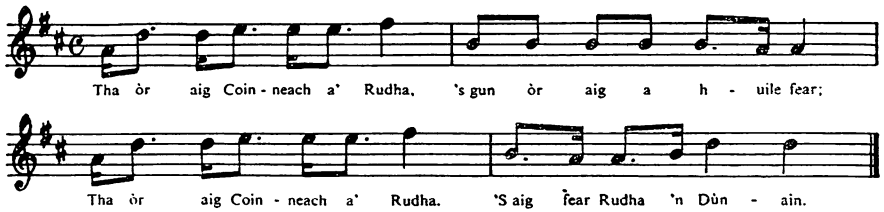
Tempo: The above four bars occupy seven seconds.

B. Second half of chorus in first part.



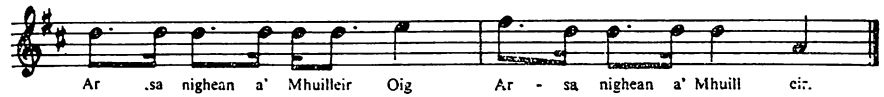
Tempo: Slightly faster: the above four bars occupy six seconds.

C. First four lines of each verse after the first in first part.



Tempo: The first and third bars are sung (by the performer X) rather slowly, but the second and fourth bars are sung (by Y) at the same *Tempo* as part A (into which they lead).

D. These two bars are repeated over and over for all verses and chorus of the second part.



Tempo: As for Part A.

The two parts of the song are quite clearly distinct, and it is probable either that one of them did not originally belong to the dance, or that they once belonged to two different dances of this type. In this connection, it is interesting to note that another verse, completely unrelated to the dance, is in the process of being added on to it at present.

The exact movements of the two dancers X and Y are not clearly prescribed. Mr. MacKinnon told us that two dancers whom he had seen take the principal parts used to make the dance much more violent. They "breenged" across the circle, and almost shouted the words at each other. It was probably a performance of this kind which led to the dance being mentioned in English newspapers as the "Eigg War Dance". Mr. MacKinnon was sure that this was not the correct way.

Neil MacDonald, son of one of the men who brought the dance to Eigg, told us that the dance should be performed by twelve men only.[24] In his youth, during the singing of the verse, all the men released hands, and X and Y walked back into diametrically opposite places anywhere in the ring; there was no "whole turn and spring into position in the ring".[25] While they were singing the verses, X and Y sometimes went outside the ring. During the chorus the dancers hopped round, hopping as high as they could, with the right leg held out horizontally. Both he and his wife were quite certain that the verses sung in the first part of the dance used to consist of the first four lines only of each of the second, third, fourth and fifth verses given above, the chorus being the same as at present.[26]

[24] This does not contradict the name of the dance. It would still be a "big" dance compared with a Reel for four.
[25] This was verified by Mrs. Flora MacLellan of Cliadale (aged 82).
[26] This sounds very likely; it would give a much more normal structure to the first part.

MARBHADH NA BÉISTE DUIBHE (THE KILLING OF THE OTTER).

In the Carmichael MSS. there is a note: " 'Marbadh na Béiste Duibhe', the killing of the black beast (otter), or 'Togradh an Dobhrain Duinn', the desire of the brown water-dog (otter), was the name of a dance containing much action". MacLennan (12) records that he saw the "dance" in 1911 on Eigg, but neither he nor Carmichael give any details. We obtained a complete description of the actions of this "dance" on Eigg, where it is still performed occasionally. It is a short mime, of rather a "slapstick" type, but although Carmichael, MacLennan and the islanders themselves refer to it as a "dance", we could not find anyone who remembered having seen it performed to music! Nonetheless, it is probable that it did once have a musical accompaniment, and that it was one of the dramatic interludes, partly or wholly performed to music, which formed a part of Scottish[27] folk-entertainments in bygone days.

We obtained the following description of it from Mr. MacKinnon, who told us that it was brought from Skye with An Dannsa Mòr.[28]

It is performed by two men. The otter is represented by a cushion for which one of the men provides the animation. The other man is the hunter and is armed with a stick or cudgel. The first man takes the cushion and, kneeling down behind the table (or other suitable piece of furniture), makes the otter poke its head (a corner of the cushion) out beyond the table leg, the head moving from side to side as the otter looks round for signs of danger. The hunter now stalks the otter, creeping along on all fours until he is within striking distance of it. He tries to hit it with the cudgel, but the otter draws back its head just in time. The otter now reappears, poking its head out from behind another piece of furniture, and again the hunter stalks it. But again the otter withdraws its head just as the cudgel descends. This goes on until eventually the hunter succeeds in stunning the otter, at which stage the first man retires. The hunter, thinking the otter dead, examines the "carcase" in great glee. Then, picking it up by the tail (the corner of the cushion opposite to its head), he swings it over his right shoulder and walks off. The otter, however, almost immediately comes to its senses, and "bites" him on the buttock. The hunter screams, drops the otter, clutches the painful portion of his anatomy, and falls backward—on the otter. He rises, and gives the otter several heavy blows on the head with his cudgel, really killing it. Then he swings it over his shoulder and walks off in triumph!

Neil MacDonald told us that, when he was young, the performers would fashion the otter out of an old sack stuffed with straw and fix a tail to it, and would often hide it beneath the ladies' long skirts. The whole performance lasted about half an hour.

COILLE BHARRACH (THE BARRA WOOD).

We learnt this, a variant of the Foursome Reel for as many as will, from the old piper, Neil MacNeil. Any number of dancers take hands and dance round in a ring, leaving one man in the centre. He chooses a lady from the ring, who goes into the centre with him and links her left arm in his right arm. He then chooses another

[27] They were not confined to the Highlands.
[28] It may well have lost its music on the way.

lady, who links up on his left arm, and then another man, who links up with the two ladies. The centre four now release arms and dance a Foursome Reel (Reel of four?) while the ring dances round them. At the end of the Reel these four take their places in the ring, and another man jumps into the centre to repeat the dance. There was a special tune for this, a pipe reel, which we were not able to obtain.

THE PIN REEL.

We obtained a version of this well known dance from Mr. and Mrs. Donald MacKay of Cuagach, Eigg. Mr. MacKay remembered this as danced about fifty-five years ago on S. Uist, where it was known as the Pin Reel. Mrs. MacKay rememered the same dance about fifty years ago in N. Uist, where it was called the Bachelor's Reel.

The dance was performed by any number of couples, who joined hands and danced round in a ring, with one odd lady, the "pin", in the centre. The music stopped, and the ladies stepped in front of their partners, joined hands in a ring, and, the music restarting, they danced round the "pin". When the music stopped for a second time, the ladies rushed for partners, the odd one out becoming the new "pin". This was repeated once or more times. The lady left without a partner on the last occasion then sat down, and a man took her place as "pin". The dance was then repeated as before, save that the men now formed the inner ring round the "pin". The step used while dancing in the ring here was the chassé or the "skip-change-of-step".

The old piper, Neil MacNeil, knew an even simpler version called Ruidhleadh nam Bantraichean (Widower's Reel) which was danced on Barra in his youth.

A version of the Pin Reel called "The Nine Pins" is given in Anderson (2). It is, however, more complicated than either of the versions we found.[29]

We should add that from the few available accounts of these old dances one tends to get an entirely false impression of dancing in the Isles. At least within the memories of our informants, these old dances took their places in the programmes alongside Reels, Quadrilles, and Country Dances. In addition, there were several solo dances, some clearly native to the Isles, and others imported from the mainland.[30]

In conclusion we wish to express our indebtedness to the many people who have helped us in our search. To Miss Ethel Bassin, J. L. Campbell of Canna, Dr. Arthur Geddes and Mr. Francis Collinson of Edinburgh University, and Mr. John MacLeod of Eochar, S. Uist, who told us of sources of information; to Mr. Angus Matheson of Glasgow University who sent us the extracts from the Carmichael MSS, corrected the Gaelic verses given above and furnished translations of them; to Father MacCormick of Benbecula who told us of the existence of Father Allan MacDonald's MSS.; and finally to the many people in the Isles who took us into their homes, and not only gave us information but also such delightful hospitality.

[29] The Pin Reel was also danced in Shetland. Cf. *Journal*, Vol. V, No. 2 (1937), p. 76.—P.S.-S.

[30] In view of the similarity of some of these dances with certain Shetland traditions I would suggest that they may be Norse rather than Celtic. Readers are referred to Miss Gilchrist's notes on some of the songs in the Tolmie Collection in *Folk Song Journal*, No. 16 (1911), especially those on pp. 192, 194-5 and 229.—P.S.-S.

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