X.—THE NORTHUMBRIAN BAG-PIPES.

By George V. B. Charlton.

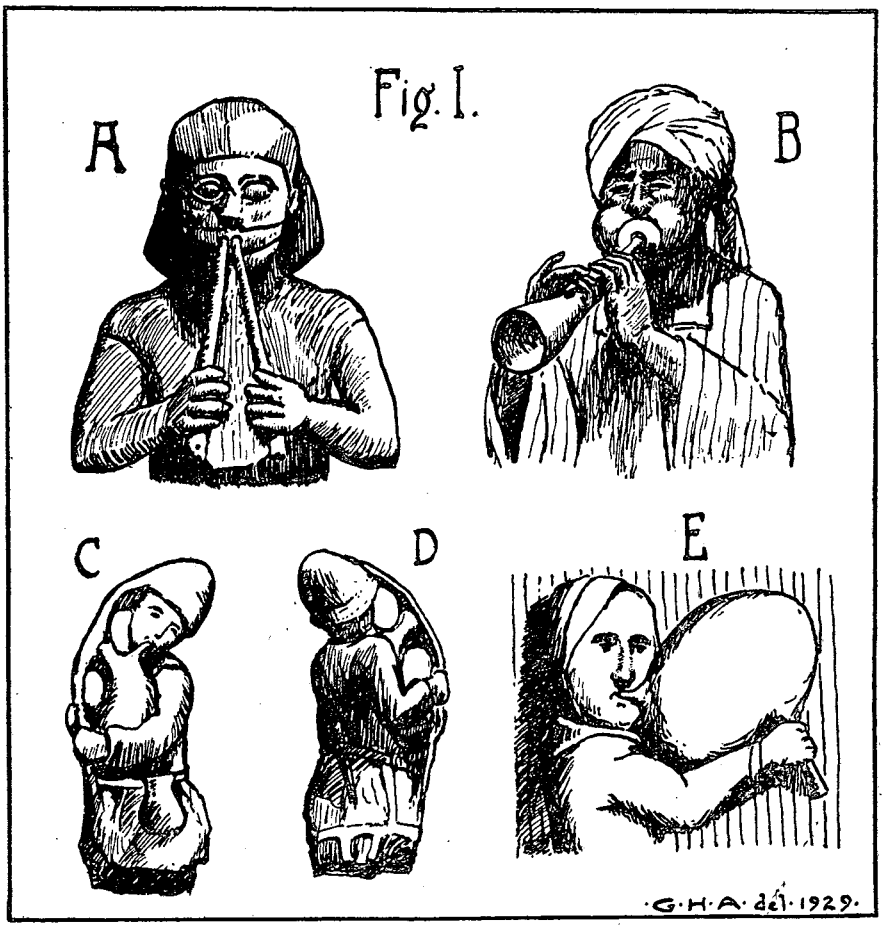
[Read on 25th May, 1927.]

It is a common idea that bag-pipes are peculiar to Scotland; but such is far from being the case, for they are found in nearly every country in Europe, as well as elsewhere. They have been discovered carved on the walls of buried cities, the history of which is lost in the mists of time. The *Oxford History of Music* states that professor Garstang discovered at Eyuk a Hittite slab which he dates at 1000 B.C., on which is sculptured a bag-pipe player. Again, the Cypriote statue (fig. 1, A), which is Graeco-Egyptian *circa* 600 B.C., shows a piper wearing the *capistrum* or headstock to support the cheeks whilst blowing the pipes.

Bag-pipes are mentioned in the book of Genesis (Lutheran version 4th chapter 21st verse), and in the third book of Daniel we are told that one of the musical instruments in Nebuchadnezzar's band was a *sumphonia*. Although this word is translated "dulcimer" in the English Bible, Biblical scholars are of opinion that the word meant bag-pipe; and the name of the musical form known as symphony is an echo of the old word which in the middle ages meant pipe music.

No doubt pipes were originally only a hollow reed blown directly from the mouth producing one note. Holes in the side of the reed were found to produce additional notes, and the blower's cheeks formed the wind-bag. The Soudanese piper (fig. 1, B) exemplifies this early form of the instrument. Later, a skin bag was added to hold a reserve of wind, and so the idea of bag-pipes developed.

We know that the Romans had bag-pipes, and we are fortunate in possessing a record in *Munimenta Antiqua* of a sculptured bronze figure of a Roman piper (fig. 1, C and D). This may have been the handle of a vessel,



or a harness-trapping, and was found at Richborough in Kent, a Roman fort dating from the first century. Great efforts have been made to trace the present whereabouts of this early evidence of the bag-pipes, but so far without

success. It is, of course, quite possible that the pipes were introduced to Britain by Celtic invaders, long before the Romans appeared off our shores.

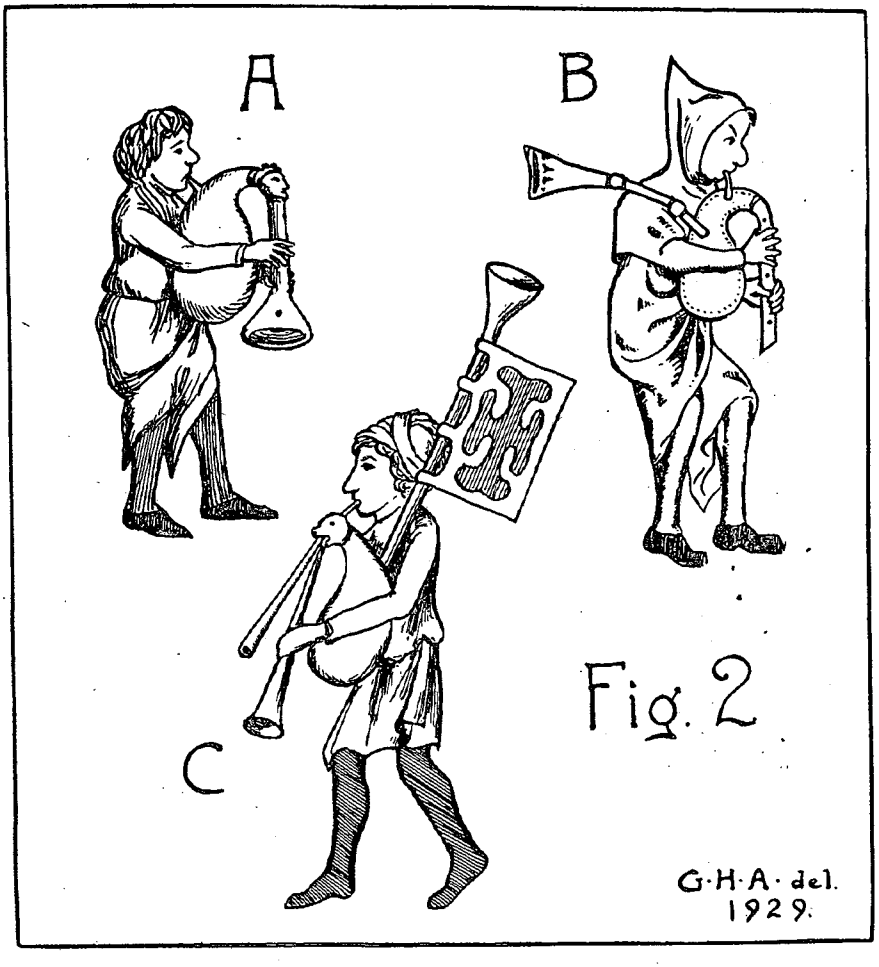


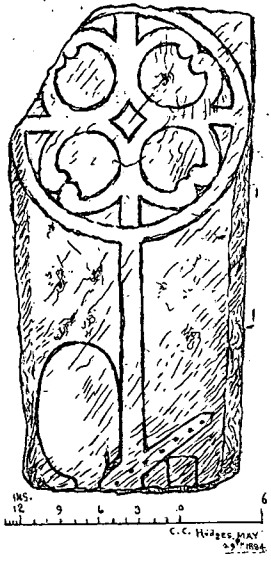
Fig. 2

Another possible evidence of the Roman bag-pipe in this country is the carved stone monument of a piper found at Stanwix, and referred to in Dr. Bruce's *Handbook to the Roman Wall.* (Plate XXIX, fig. 1.) This

figure is now preserved in Tullie House museum, Carlisle, but is thought by some antiquaries to be mediæval.

Through the middle ages, contemporary drawings preserved in the British museum and elsewhere, and many carvings in stone in pre-reformation churches all over England, as at Beverley, Durham, Christchurch, Boston, Exeter, Gloucester, Manchester, Hull, Hexham, and others, are the links in the chain of bag-pipe history.

The piper shown in fig. 1, E, appears in the frieze in Adderbury church, Oxfordshire; he is depicted playing a very simple droneless mouth-blown pipe. In the church of Ford, Northumberland, is the larger portion of a grave-cover, on which, in addition to the usual floriated cross, is sculptured the bag and chanter of a primitive set of pipes. This dates from the thirteenth century, and is probably the earliest known representation of the bag-pipe in the British Isles other than Roman. The three figures in fig. 2 illustrate the development of the instrument. The first, (A), who has a bag-pipe without drones, is from a thirteenth century manuscript, reproduced in Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*. The second, (B), from *The Gorleston Psalter* (early fourteenth century) has one drone to his pipes, and the third, (C), from the *Romance of the Grail* (thirteenth century), plays a set of pipes equipped either with a double chanter or a tenor drone in addition to the bass drone carrying the banner, probably the latter.



Sculptured pipers are to be found in Beverley Minster, and that shown on plate XXX, fig. 1, is in the north aisle

of the nave, dating from 1340. A similar figure (plate XXX, fig. 2) is included amongst the carved grotesques on prior Leschman's tomb in Hexham abbey. We of Northumberland are particularly fortunate in possessing such early evidence as this and the one on the tomb in Ford church previously mentioned.

The mediæval craftsmen who decorated the *miserere* seats of churches frequently satirized the bag-pipes, and one such carving in Beverley minster shows a monkey holding a dog under its arm as a piper holds his pipes, and biting the dog's tail to produce the simulation of pipe-music. In the church of Boston, Lincolnshire, a similar carving shows two fools holding cats like bag-pipes and biting their tails to make the music. In the same church, as well as in those of Manchester, Richmond, Durham and Ripon, there are *miserere* seats showing pigs and other animals playing pipes, but in St. Katherine's hospital, Regent's Park, London, some wood-carver with more sympathy for the instrument has depicted, on a *miserere* seat, a charming little figure of an angel playing a one-droned bag-pipe. (Plate XXIX, fig. 2.)

Pipers are mentioned by Chaucer, who says of his miller, "A bag-pipe well could he blow and sound," and in Edward III's accounts for 1360-61, five pipers were included amongst the royal musicians, Hankin Fitzlibekin, Hernekin, Oyle, William Harding and Gerard.

The ancient arms of Winchester school display an angel playing the pipes, and in 1403 William of Wykeham presented a magnificent crosier to New College, Oxford, which can be seen in the chapel there; on it is an angel bag-piper.

In the accounts of the lord high treasurer of Scotland in 1489 and 1506, there is mention of payments having been made to the "English piper." Henry VII and Henry VIII are both known to have employed pipers, and one Richard Woodward, who died in 1569, was retained as royal piper to each of the children of the latter monarch in turn. Shakespeare refers to the bag-

pipes in several places, and in "Henry IV," Act 1, Scene 2, makes Falstaff compare a lover's melancholy to the "drone of a Lincolnshire bag-pipe." The Rutland Papers state that pipers from Nottingham were paid at Belvoir in 1590, 1594, and 1603, and again in 1636-40.

Bag-pipes consist of five principal parts:

(*a*) The chanter, on which the melody is played.

(*b*) The drones, which supply the accompanying harmony.

(*c*) The bag, which holds the wind.

(*d*) The reeds, which are fitted into chanter and drones.

(*e*) The mouth-piece or bellows, by which the wind is provided.

The Highland pipes are mouth blown, and the Lowland, Irish Uilleann, and Northumbrian pipes are bellows blown, a small bellows being strapped round the player's waist and worked by the arm opposite to that controlling the bag.

There are four known kinds of Northumbrian pipes: the small-pipes, the shuttle pipes, the half-longs and another variety known as the great war or gathering pipes, possibly mouth blown; these latter are mentioned by old writers, but up to the present no example of them has been found. They were probably identical with the form in common use in Scotland and several parts of Europe.

Of the shuttle pipes only two examples are known, the earlier of which is dated 1695. They differ from the small-pipes in the design of the drones, which are all fitted into one cylinder of similar length to the chanter, being brought into small space by the doubling of the tubes within this cylinder, which is provided with sliding stops, or shuttles, for tuning the drones.

Until some time in the early eighteenth century, the small-pipes consisted of an open-ended chanter of nine notes, with three drones only. There are examples extant,

of ivory, as old as 1700. When the end of the chanter was closed, it gave the performer the ability to play in the manner known as staccato, a characteristic of the small-pipes which is found in no other known form of the instrument.

On November 17, 1857, William Green, piper to the duke of Northumberland, wrote: "I played at Edinburgh near forty-seven years since. I had no keys, they were not in use at that time," i.e., 1810.

A Newcastle piper named John Peacock, working in conjunction with the most famous maker of Northumberland pipes, Robert Reid of North Shields, an umbrella maker, conceived the idea of adding keys to the chanter. They at first put on four keys, D, E, F sharp and A, and the number of keys was gradually increased, until at the present time a full-size small-pipe chanter has seventeen keys, giving a chromatic scale of twenty-five notes, i.e., from B below middle C to B in alt. With the old closed chanter of eight holes, the player could only play in the scale of G major, but the seventeen-keyed chanter permits of playing in the keys of G major and minor, D, A and C.

An interesting old set of small-pipes having five keys of the original square-ended pattern, was presented to the Northumberland Boy Scouts pipes fund by Miss Taylor of Chipchase castle. It was made for R. C. Toshach in 1811, and is now in the collection of Mr. W. A. Cocks.

The pipes illustrated on plate XXXI, fig. 1, have a seven-keyed chanter of Reid's make, whilst the drones are by John Dunn of Newcastle. The plate also shows an old-fashioned open-ended chanter of ivory, and a modern seventeen-keyed chanter of Mr. Cocks' manufacture.

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the small-pipes were in general use all over Northumberland, but about that time the country was flooded with cheap German concertinas, and the playing of the Northumberland pipes gradually became more and more rare. In 1921 Mr. James Spencer of the Birks, Bellingham, whose

father, the late Mr. Seymour Spencer, was a highly-skilled amateur turner of pipe parts, presented a silver cup, to be known as the Northumberland Pipes cup, for perpetual competition at the North Tyndale and Redesdale agricultural show at Bellingham. Ever since, this show has been the occasion for a constantly increasing annual gathering of pipers and lovers of the pipes; and many sets of small-pipes, long laid aside, have been brought out and put once more into playing order. For the encouragement of young pipers, dies for silver medals have been given by prominent Northumbrian families, and these medals are competed for, annually, at the various contests held throughout the county. The donors of the medals, and the designs thereof, are fully enumerated in the society's *Proceedings*, vol. IV, 4th ser., pp. 17-18.

So once more, it is hoped, the "sweet small pipes" will be heard in every valley of Northumberland. The motto of the old Northumberland Small Pipes Society was

> "Still linger in our northern clime
> Some remnants of the good old time."

Long may such sentiment remain.

There have been many famous players of the Northumbrian pipes, but probably the most famous was James Allan, whose life was published by Mackenzie at Newcastle in 1818. He was born at Hepple in 1734 and was the son of another famous piper, Will. Allan, at one time of Bellingham. His life is a record of most surprising adventures; he was a bad lot, but a fine piper. He is shown on plate XXXIII playing the small-pipes and wearing the Percy badge on his right arm. He was piper to the duchess of Northumberland from about 1766 to at least 1777.

Before his time, we know that the post of piper at Alnwick castle was held by Joseph Turnbull of Newburn in 1756.

Only three pipers have filled the honourable post of piper to the dukes of Northumberland during the past

one hundred and twenty-three years. William Green held the position from 1806 to 1849, and died on March 13, 1860, aged eighty-six. Together with William Lamshaw senior, another piper of note, he played the Northumbrian pipes in the American war. He was succeeded by his son, William Thomas Green, who was piper from 1849 to 1892; he was born in 1825 and died in 1898, and on his retiring in 1892 he was succeeded by James Hall, the duke's present piper.

The third sort of pipes we have in Northumberland are the large or half-long pipes, which, after being silent for nearly fifty years, have been re-modelled on an old set which belonged to Muckle Jock Milburn of Bellingham and later to his great-great-granddaughter, Mrs. Stoddart of Ashington (plate XXXI, fig. 2), and on drones which belonged to Mr. James Hall (plate XXXII, fig. 1). Both these sets are now in Mr. Cocks' collection. The re-modelled half-long pipes, which are illustrated in plate XXXII, fig. 2, have been adopted by certain troops of Boy Scouts in the county, as well as by the local Officers' Training Corps. The compass of the chanter is similar to that of the Highland and Lowland pipes, but the drone harmony differs inasmuch as whilst the tenor drones of the latter are tuned in unison with the low A of the chanter and the bass drone an octave lower, the drones of the half-long pipes are a tenor in unison with the chanter low A, a baritone a fourth lower, and a bass drone a fifth lower still, or an octave below the tenor.

There are many evidences of the existence of large pipes in Northumberland in the past. They are mentioned in Wight's *Life of James Allan*, published in 1818, in which it is stated that the true Northumbrian raising and gathering pipes are known as the "great pipes" to distinguish them from "the common sweet small ones now sinking fast out of sight." In Thomson's *Life of Allan*, published in 1828, Allan is mentioned as playing well on the Northumberland gathering pipes. These pipes are also referred to in Bruce and Stokoe's *North-*

umbrian Minstrelsy as the "large pipes," and are mentioned in Manson's *Highland Bag-pipe* and in Dr. Duncan Fraser's *The Bag-pipe*.

On December 7, 1857, James Reid of North Shields, son of the most famous maker of Northumberland small-pipes, wrote to Mr. Kell of Gateshead: "About the Northumberland big pipes, I have heard my father say that Jimmy Allan played the big Northumberland pipes when they rid [*sic*] the fairs, and also that George Young

FIG. 3.—FROM AN EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BROADSIDE

and James Young his son, of Alnwick, were celebrated makers of the big pipes. I also have a pair of big Northumberland pipes which belonged to my grandfather, of Young's make."

In the correspondence between the late Joseph Crawhall and Charles Keene there are references to the large Northumberland pipes which he hopes to be able to buy from Reid. Again, Dr. Bruce in his lecture on Northumberland pipes on November 6, 1876 (see *Newcastle Journal* of November 7, 1876) said, "I am now speaking

of what was lately in vogue amongst us, the Northumberland martial music and the Northumberland large pipes on which it was performed, having in a great measure passed away." A more recent reference occurs in a letter of Mr. James Hall, the duke's piper, to Mr. W. A. Cocks, which states, "The half-long chanter is less in bore than the Highland chanter. I hope you will be able to bring them back again," and "The half-long chanter has a bell end not so big as a Highland chanter. I have a set of drones."

Certain early nineteenth century illustrators portray both half-long and mouth-blown large pipes: a political squib of the period shows the duke of Northumberland's piper, mounted, playing the half-long pipes, and the illustrations to various accounts of James Allan's life and adventures, some by Cruickshank, also show them.

Whilst the small-pipes are most admirably suited for indoors, the fireside, and the camp fire, the half-long pipes are better for the open, and it is thought by those interested in piping that the revival of the large pipes will encourage piping generally in Northumberland, and that many beginners will take up the more difficult but sweeter small-pipes. It is hoped that the day is dawning when the lord mayor of Newcastle will once more have his official piper, and the corporation pipers re-established under their charter of 1677 (see Brand's *History of Newcastle*) to play at banquets, official occasions and times of rejoicing, and that the Northumbrian regiments, both regular and territorial, will adopt the pipes which belong to the county whose name they bear.

The thanks of all Northumbrians and lovers of our national folk music are due to Algernon, the fourth duke of Northumberland, for his action in calling together a body of representative Northumbrian gentlemen to take steps to preserve the music of Northumberland; to Dr. J. Collingwood Bruce, the historian of the Roman wall, who gave much valuable time to lecturing on the Northumberland pipes between 1877 and 1892; to the

Northumberland Small Pipes Society, who from 1893 onwards for some years did splendid work in keeping the pipers together; and to the North of England Musical Tournament, who for the past few years have offered prizes to players of the Northumbrian pipes. An equal debt of gratitude is due to the long succession of pipers who up to the present day have carried on, often under great difficulties, the traditional music of our pipes, and particularly to the family of Clough of Newsham, who have been first-class pipers for generations.

The passions sing, they do not speak, and on that truth national music is built. It is the poetry of sound, and in these materialistic days we can in no better way combat the forces that work against the welfare of our country than by the encouragement of local patriotism. In the music and minstrelsy of our country we have a priceless jewel which all should join in safeguarding.

The appeal is to the lads and lasses of Northumberland to take up the learning of the pipes, and to

> "All ye whom music's charms inspire,
> Who skilful minstrels do admire,
> All ye whom bag-pipe lilts can fire,
> 'Twixt Wear and Tweed."

My very grateful thanks are due to Mr. W. A. Cocks of Ryton for the photographs of objects in his collection, which he readily supplied to me for illustrating this article; to Mr. John Gibson, F.S.A., of Hexham, for the photograph of the carving on prior Leschman's tomb; and to the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society for the loan of the engraving of the Roman piper found at Stanwix. Acknowledgments are also due to Mr. Gilbert Askew, the honorary secretary of the Northumbrian Pipers' Society, for his drawings for figs. 1 and 2, and for his assistance in preparing this article for publication.

FIG. 1. BAG-PIPER—TULLIE HOUSE MUSEUM.

FIG. 2. MISERERE IN ST. KATHERINE CHAPEL, REGENTS PARK.

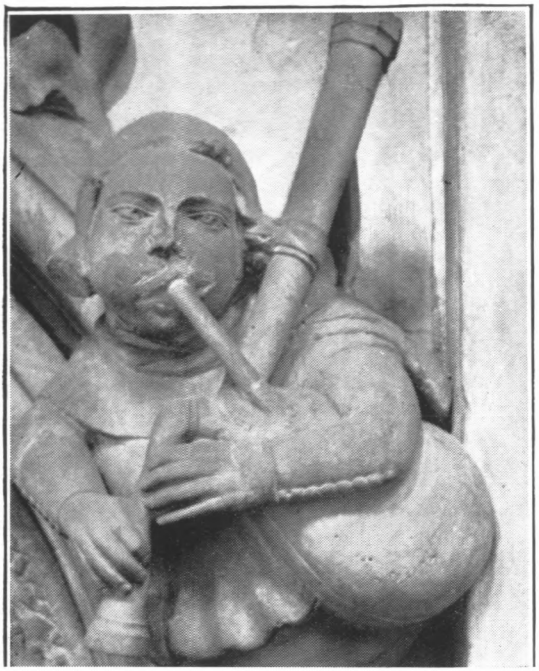


FIG. 1. AT BEVERLEY MINSTER.

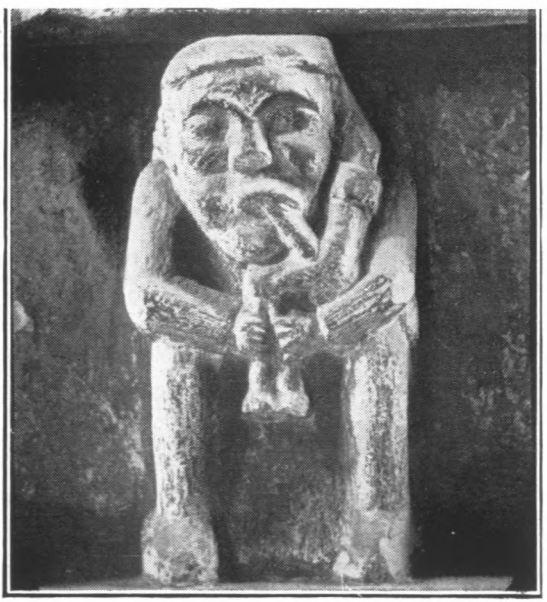


FIG. 2. AT HEXHAM ABBEY.

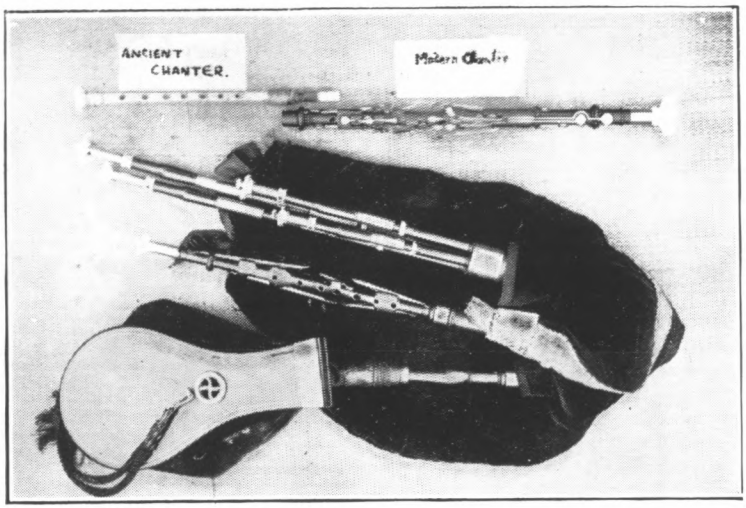


FIG. 1.
SMALL PIPES.

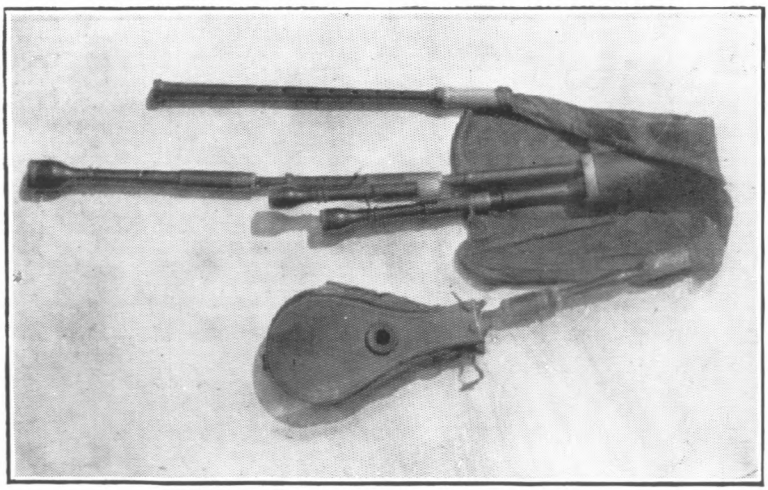


FIG. 2.
THE MILBURN HALF-LONG PIPES.

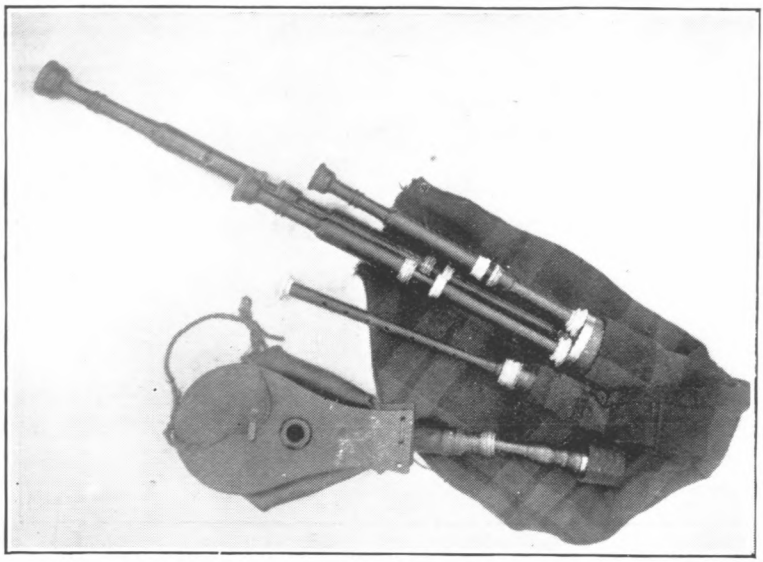


FIG. 1. THE HALL HALF-LONG PIPES.

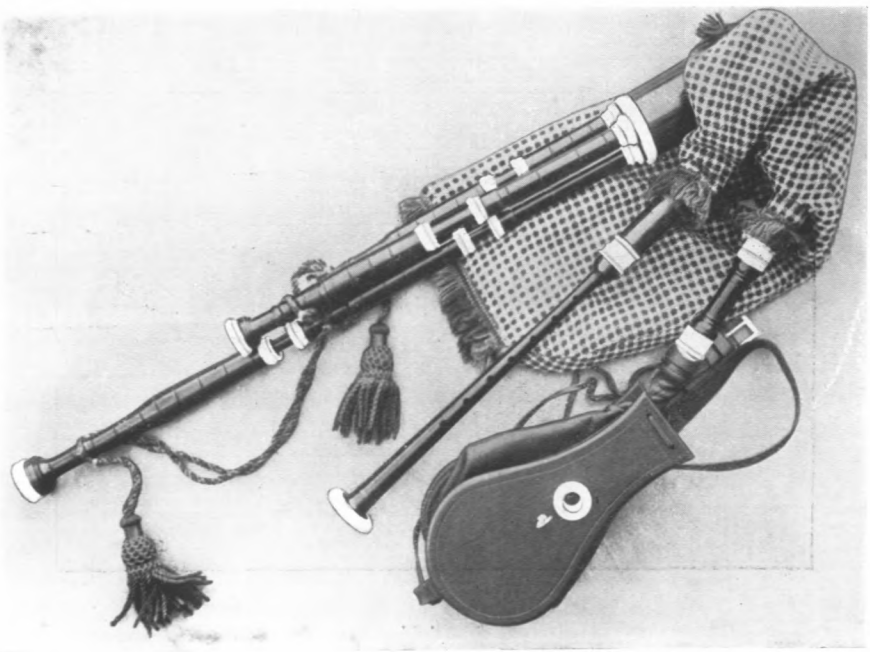


FIG. 2. MODERN HALF-LONG PIPES.

JAMES ALLAN,
PIPER TO THE DUCHESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND, *c.* 1769-77.