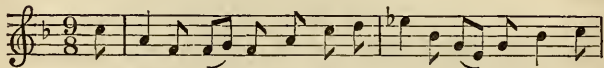
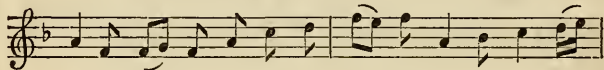


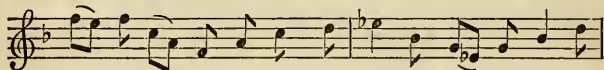
## RATTLIN' ROARIN' WILLIE.



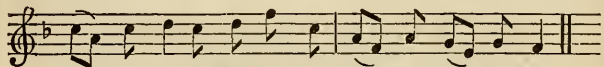
O rattlin' roar-in' Wil-lie, O he held to the fair, And



for to sell his fid-dle, And buy some oth-er ware. But,



part-ing wi' his fid-dle, The saut tear blin't his e'e; And



ratt-lin' roar-in' Wil-lie, Ye're wel-come hame to me.

O rattlin' roarin' Willie,  
O he held to the fair,  
And for to sell his fiddle,  
And buy some other ware.  
But, parting wi' his fiddle,  
The saut tear blin't his e'e;  
And rattlin' roarin' Willie,  
Ye're welcome hame to me.

O, Willie, come sell your fiddle,  
 O sell your fiddle sae fine ;  
 O, Willie, come sell your fiddle,  
 And buy a pint o' wine.  
 If I should sell my fiddle  
 The warld wad think I was mad,  
 For mony a rantin' day  
 My fiddle and I hae had.

This song, which seems to have appeared for the first time in Johnson's *Musical Museum*, 1788, has little intelligence in it—little more than rant—and yet, from the hint it gives of a mirthful *insouciant* character, and a certain pathos regarding the fiddle—with which the hero has so come to intercommunicate himself, that he speaks as if it had been a living thing which partook of his merriment—we should not like to part with it. So also had felt Robert Burns, who communicated it to the *Museum*, along with the original air. The bard, on coming to Edinburgh, found his way to a certain club of good fellows taking to themselves the name of the Crochallan Fencibles, from the name of a Highland song wherewith their host, Daniel Douglas, used to regale them. Among these merry men, the face of one named Willie Dunbar—in daylight, a respectable 'writer' (that is, solicitor)—shone out with extraordinary lustre, seeming to the rustic bard a perfect realisation of the Rantin' Roarin' Willie of the old song. Hereupon the muse of Kyle broke out in an additional stanza, descriptive of Dunbar's appearance in the presidentship of the Crochallan Fencibles :

As I cam by Crochallan,  
 I cannily keekit ben :  
 Rattlin' roarin' Willie  
 Was sittin' at yon board-en',  
 Sittin' at yon board-en',  
 Amang guid companie ;  
 Rattlin' roarin' Willie,  
 Ye're welcome hame to me !

Burns felt peculiarly sorry, on leaving Edinburgh, for his

parting with Willie Dunbar, and wrote to him: 'I have a strong fancy that, in some future eccentric planet, the comet of happier systems than any with which astronomy is yet acquainted, you and I, among the harum-scarum sons of imagination and whim, with a hearty shake of a hand, a metaphor, and a laugh, shall recognise old acquaintance.'

After these particulars, it is curious to learn that the simple little ballad relating to Rattlin' Roarin' Willie and his fiddle must have been kept alive on the breath of tradition for a century before the days of Burns. *Rantin' Roarin' Willie* is mentioned as a *tune* in the *Tea-table Miscellany*, 1724, being in all likelihood that of the song which Burns preserved. We learn, however, from Sir Walter Scott that Rattlin' (or Rantin') Roarin' Willie was a real person, of whom it may be assumed that he probably lived in the seventeenth century, being a musician well known on the Border, and who, having the misfortune to murder a brother in trade who passed by the name of *Sweet Milk*, was executed at Jedburgh. One cannot suppose that so gay a man as Willie could commit deliberate murder. We may charitably surmise that the act was one of manslaughter or chance-medley only, in the course of one of those tavern brawls which used to be attended occasionally with bloody results in an age when all men wore weapons, and were continually getting into conditions under which a reckless use of them became nearly unavoidable. A contemporary ballad jested with the unfortunate minstrel on his condemnation to an ignominious death, saying :

Drink maun be dear wi' Willie,  
When Sweet Milk gars him die.

There is another snatch of traditionary song to the tune of *Rattlin' Roarin' Willie*, which presents the hero in an amatory light :

Rattlin' roarin' Willie,  
Where have ye been sae late?  
I've been to see my Peggy,  
Sae weel as I ken the gate !

Sae weel as I ken the gate,  
And the tirlin' o' the pin ;  
And, gang I late or ear',  
She 'll rise and let me in !<sup>1</sup>

In Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes*, we find a fragment of *Rattlin' Roarin' Willie* reduced to a nursery ditty.<sup>2</sup>