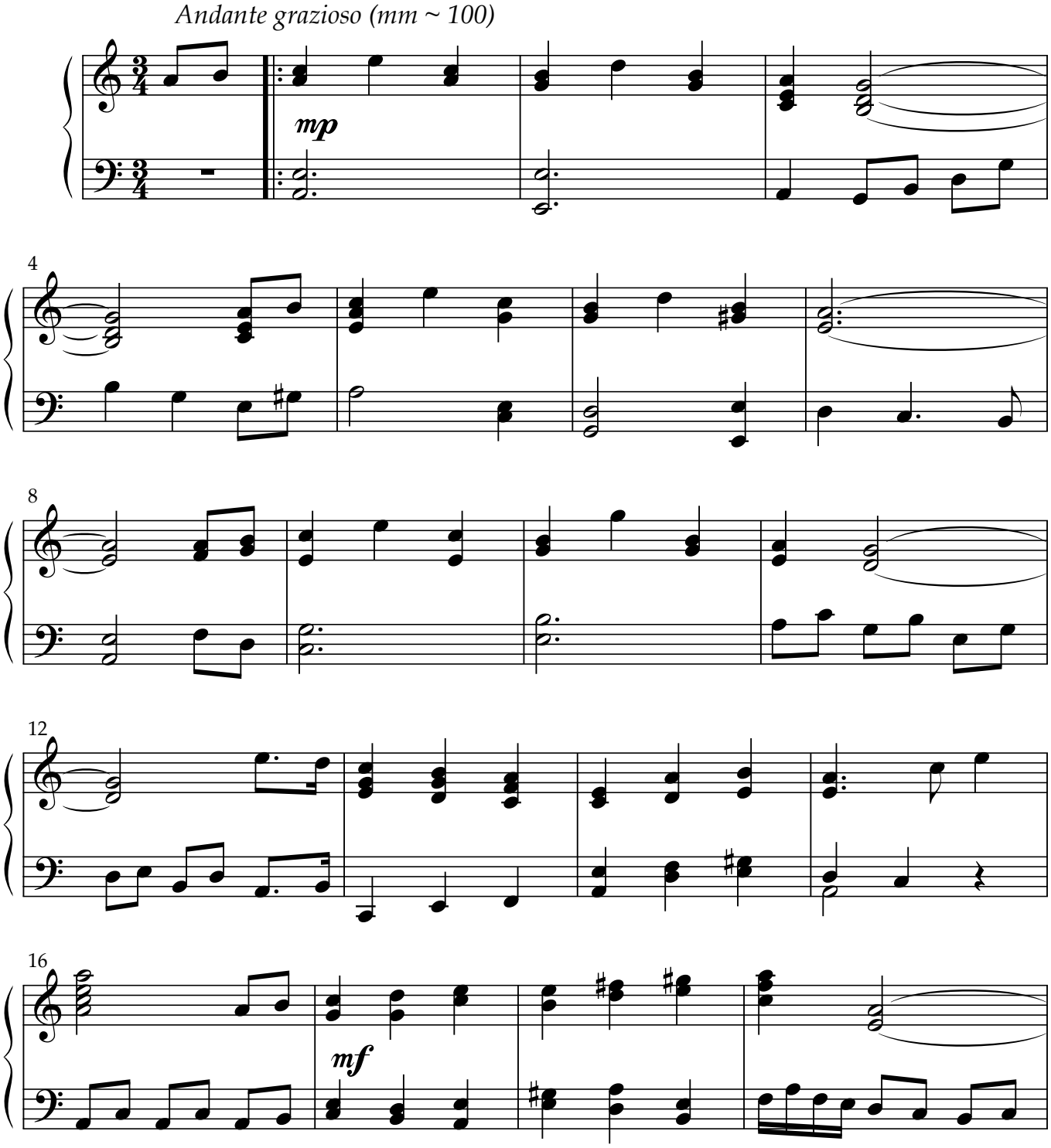
PRETTY GIRL MILKING HER COW

An Cailín Deas Cruidhe na mBo

Bunting collection



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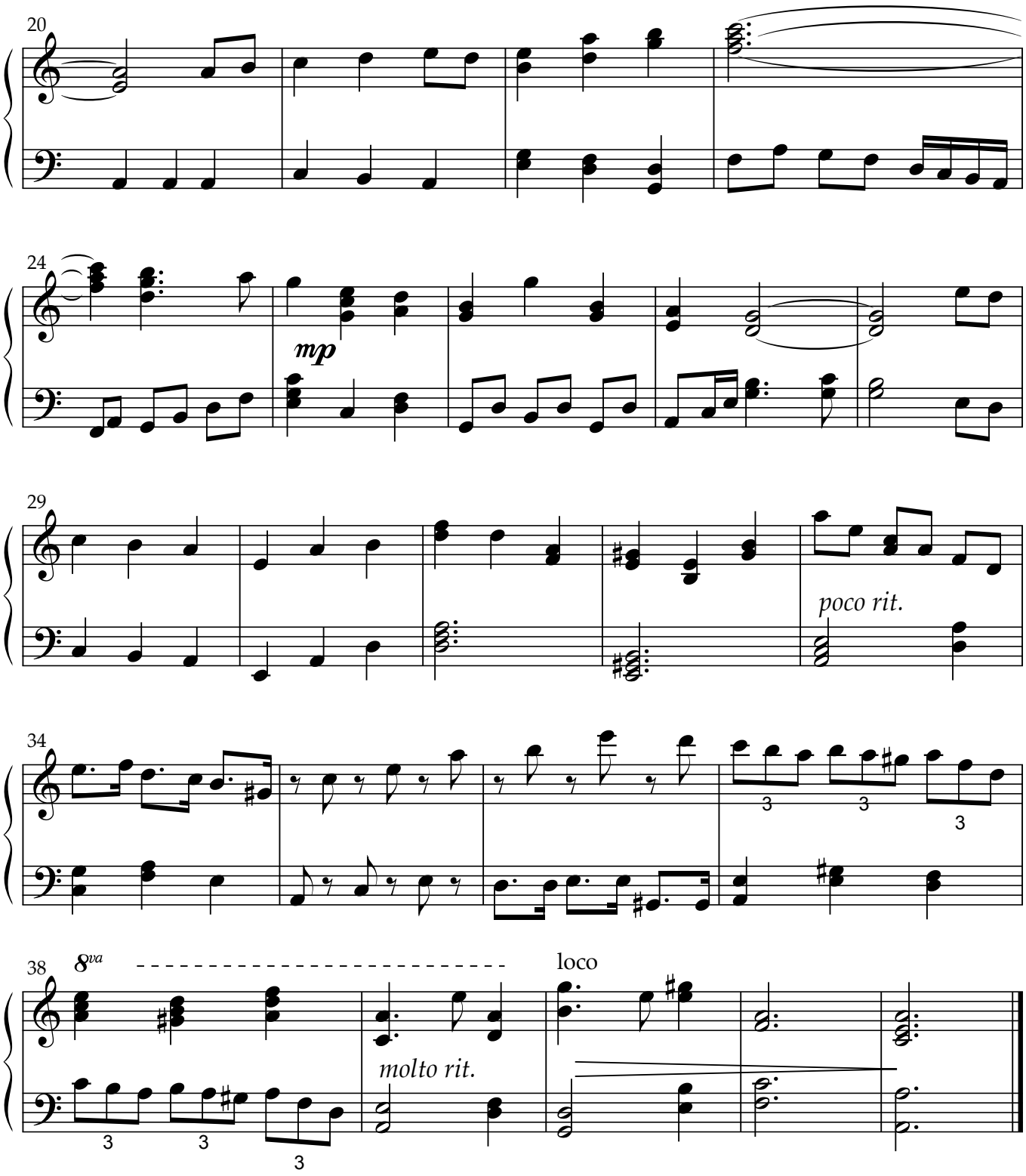

PRETTY GIRL MILKING HER COW

This tune is one of the better-known items collected by Edward Bunting at the 1792 Belfast harpers' meeting. No composer is mentioned.

The tune appears in various guises in Ireland, Scotland, America, and Wales and according to "Fiddler's Companion" was even used as a retreat call (at the end of the camp working day) by the Union Army during the Civil War.

It exemplifies a genre known as "milkmaid songs," in the course of a discussion of which the following interesting point is made by Chief O'Neill (who grew up on a farm in West Cork and should know whereof he speaks):

"Without assuming that all cattle are influenced by music, we are certain that some are keenly alive to its attractions, and will even follow it, with evident delight, until restrained by the limits of their enclosure."

There are several sets of unexceptional lyrics that have been set to this melody. Thomas Moore used the melody for his song "The Valley Lay Smiling Before Me", but I would venture to say that it is not one of his better-known pieces.

The Irish title for this piece is "Cailín Deas Cruidhe [or "Cruidte"] na mBo" but I have not come across a full set of Irish lyrics for it.