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EDITORIAL

You will notice that this issue of The Thistle is a little larger than usual. The main reason for this is that we have now covered our past losses (old readers will remember that for the first three years The Thistle was printed instead of being duplicated : this proved to be too expensive) and now need only break even. We have also recently reduced our charges for Xeroxing pages of out-of-print Thistles. The charge used to be 25¢ per page because that was the price charged by the Xerox machine available to us. We bore the costs of postage and handling. We can now use a 10¢ machine : we have set a price of 15¢ per page : the extra covers the postage and handling.

THE THISTLE

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OUR DANCES NO. 49: FIGHT ABOUT THE FIRESIDE

This was a fairly popular dance in the nineteenth century. It was first described in Gow's "Five favourite country dances for 1822", was included in the ball-room manuals by Mozart Allan and David Anderson, and survived into the twentieth century, to be collected by the Scottish Country Dance Society and included in their Book number 1.

The description in 1822 is rather early : most of the dances popular through the nineteenth century first appeared in The Ball-room (1827) or later. And the dance itself shows signs of being an early type : the standard finish for a dance like this (after the set to and turn corners) would be reel of three at the sides. The "set twice to partners and turn to own sides" is a development of an earlier figure which commonly followed set to and turn corners in the eighteenth century, namely "lead out sides". And indeed Gow's description of the dance is as follows:-

Down the middle-up again - the lady reel across with the first couple - the gentleman with the second - set to corners - the lady leads out the two highest gentlemen and the gentleman the two highest ladies with their backs to each other.

(The other four dances in Gow's pamphlet are Kenilworth, Blue bonnets over the border (both waltzes), The pirate, and Kenmure's on and awa').

OUR DANCES NO. 50: GASSY JACK'S EIGHTSOME. By Mary Brandon

Music: 64 bars strathspey, 64 bars reel. (Suitable recording: 'Schiehallion' on More Sounds of Scotland by Jim McLeod).

Formation: Four couples in a square, numbered clockwise.

Strathspey

1- 8 The first couple with the third, and the second with the fourth, dance ladies' chain across the dance and back again. Ladies finish with backs to the centre facing partners, who return to place.

The first and third couples begin on bar 1, making an extra half turn on bar 8 to turn the ladies into the centre. The second and fourth commence on bar 3. This means they do not complete their figure, but on bars 7 and 8 the second and fourth women merely pass right shoulder in the centre, and remain in the centre, facing outwards towards their own partners.

9-16 Eight-bar setting. Any suitable steps may be used. The men move slightly to their left on bar 8, to finish as in diagram 1.

17-24 Half a grand chain in "star" formation, begin by giving right hand to partner, men dancing anti-clockwise, ladies clockwise, with two steps to each hand hold. Note that

this is not a circle but should have a definite "in-out" formation: endeavour to keep the "star" shape. Continue the chain until facing partners half way round; the women will be facing out, the men facing in.

25-32 All half-turn partners with right hand, to face anti-clockwise with allemande hold (2 bars). Note that the women should dance out towards their partners so that the half-turn is actually made on the perimeter of the circle. All promenade half round back to original places.

33-64 Repeat bars 1-32, except that in bars 1-8, the first and third MEN begin the chaining movement across the dance, the second and fourth men beginning on bar 3. The men finish with their back to the centre, facing partners, ready for the eight-bar setting. Note that when the ladies begin the turn prior to turning the opposite men, they make a circular movement to their left, anti-clockwise, in order to make a smooth turn with the left hand. In bars 25-32, the promenade is clockwise, back to place.

Reel

- 1- 4 The first lady and the third man cross in front of the fourth couple, passing each other by the left; they dance behind the fourth couple, passing each other by the right; and they finish with the first lady on the fourth man's left, the third man on the fourth lady's right with promenade hold, in a straight line.
- At the same time, the first man and the third lady cross in front of the second couple by the left, behind the second couple passing right, and finish in a straight line, promenade hold, the first man with the second lady, and the third lady with the second man.
- 5- 8 In two lines of four, advance towards the centre of the set, with two skip-change steps, and immediately, without dropping the promenade hold, turn to face outwards. Return to side lines with two skip-change steps; and finish facing the centre of the set.
- 9-16 Starting from the side lines, the first and third couples dance left-hands-across in the centre and back with right hands, returning to the side lines.
- 17-20 With nearer hands joined, in two lines of four, all set once with balance-and-pas-de-basque.
- 21-24 The two lines advance to the centre with two skip-change steps. The first and third couples turn partners, using a crossed-hand hold, into their original places, while the second and fourth couples, turning inwards towards partners, face out and return to places with two skip-change steps.
- 25-32 Eight hands round and back.

33-64 Repeat bars 1-32 with the second and fourth couples commencing, dancing round the first and third couples, for the pick up.

Note: The square for the strathspey part of the dance should be widely spaced. At the end of the strathspey, as all four couples return to places in the promenade, it is better for the size of the square to be reduced slightly so that the reel movements may be performed more easily.

About the dance:

Vancouver, British Columbia, was named after Captain George Vancouver, a famous explorer of the eighteenth century. However, before being given this distinguished name, the small settlement at the mouth of the Fraser River, was known as Gastown - named after a well-known local character, Gassy Jack Dayton, who operated a trading store. To honour Canada's Centennial and to commemorate Vancouver's colourful and historical past, this dance was devised by Mary Brandon of the Los Angeles Branch of the R.S.C.D.S., the music specially composed by her brother, Murray Shoolbraid, of Vancouver. The dance was first performed by the Vancouver Branch demonstration team on the occasion of Miss Jean Milligan's visit to Vancouver in October, 1965.

- CORRESPONDENCE -

From a letter from Bob Campbell, Belleville, Ontario.

I naturally got a copy of Peter White's record and, although not inclined to give it as high a rating as The Thistle, I think it is generally a first class production. The strathspeys are top flight. Cairn Edward has become a prime favourite with one of the teenage groups in Toronto. No trouble at all in adjusting to the 6-bar phrasing. Although we haven't danced The Black Craig I have used the music for my own The Australian Ladies and it is the only recording I have found which suits the dance.

Speaking of records, I was quite impressed with Ian Powrie's Farewell to Scotland even though it is not all for dancing. The Middleton Medley arrangement is very good. Perhaps more intriguing is the 8x32 reel starting with The Tushker (what is a Tushker?) We used it at a party early in the year and one couple, a Dane and his Icelandic wife, were thrilled with the second tune, St. Ann's. They tell me it is a very old Scandinavian air and they used to sing it back home many years ago. Dancing the Baby, the last tune sounds quite odd to me. A very compelling rhythm - but what is it? Doesn't sound in the least Scottish. At least to my untrained ear.

From a letter from Archie Dudgeon, Ponoka, Alberta.

Under the instruction of Mr. and Mrs. David Noel, the Ponoka Reel Club had a very successful and indeed joyous season 1967-68. A club team danced at a crippled children benefit concert, also at Old Folks homes as entertainment for the Senior Citizens.

As club entertainment, two function were organized, one, a highly successful Burns Night, in which the ladies did all the ceremonials, one lady, Mrs. B. Backus, even coming to the rescue, made the haggis; a haggis, well worthy of the longest grace. As a finale, an outdoor party was held at the farm of Dr. B. Backus, June 9th. It should be added that membership in the club increased almost one hundred per cent.

From a letter from Dave Bridgham, Boston, U.S.A.

Am enjoying your articles on contras. If you write any more, would like to see you mention Ralph's stunt of converting an ordinary 'called' contra into a wordless one, by gradually dropping out the words of the call until people are dancing to the music alone. You have probably seen this yourself, and noted how it sharpens up one's sense of phrasing, and gets people to listen to the music instead of just the words of the call.

He does this without any announcement that he's going to; and of course it takes at least a semi-capable group.

[Editors' note: The "Ralph" referred to is Ralph Page, of Keene, New Hampshire.]

BOOK REVIEW

The Whetherly Book of Scottish Country Dances. By John W. Mitchell (Published by Wallace Mitchell & Co., 52 Shirley Drive, Hove BN3 6UF, England. Price 5/-)

This book contains seventeen dances at various levels, but more complicated ones than simple ones. Some of them have clearly been inspired by existing dances (e.g. "The Martlet's reel" contains the unorthodox reel of six from "The flight of the sand-martins"; and you can probably guess the parents of "Mairi Carron") and can perhaps be looked on as "further exercises". Those keen dancers who would like a substantial helping of new material to work on will find that this book suits their purpose admirably.

** NEWS FROM SCOTLAND **

The dancers were "reeling" at a ball held recently in Oban's Corran Halls. And the reason, say the organisers, was that the floor was too slippery. In a letter of complaint to Oban Town Council, members of the society have asked that something should be done to prevent this happening at future dances. Provost E.T.F. Spence said there was one solution

which he hoped the council would sternly discourage and that was putting Vim on the soles of one's shoes.

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The programme for this year's Argyllshire Gathering includes the following country dances:- Duke of Perth, (twice), Scottish Reform, Hamilton House, (twice), Reel of the 51st Division, Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and the Waltz Country Dance. Speed the Plough will be an extra.

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- REVIEW -

The Scottish Country Dance : its origins and development.
By J.F. and T.M. Flett.

This is not a book, but an article in a magazine. To get it, order from your bookseller volume II (1967) of Scottish Studies, published by the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh.

In the first part of the article the Fletts trace the early history of the country dance in Scotland, quoting seventeenth-century condemnations of dancing by the Presbyterian church (who regarded it as sinful) to explain why it did not reach Scotland until the eighteenth century, describing its slow rise in popularity throughout that century, and citing early Scottish dance-descriptions.

The second part consists largely of a detailed analysis of these descriptions : particularly effective are side-by-side comparisons of descriptions of the same dance in different documents. The Fletts identify all the common figures in these dances, and reconstruct the phrasing (which turns out to have changed twice in the course of the century). And they have found the answer to one peculiarly baffling problem : why did John Walsh label some of his dances "Scotch"?

The obvious answer is "because they were Scottish", and in fact the R.S.C.D.S. has reconstructed and included in their books several of these dances (including Red House and Dainty Davy). However, the dances that Walsh labelled Scotch do not show any particularly Scottish characteristics. Moreover, some of them were reprinted from an earlier book where there was no pretence that these were Scottish. And, although some of them did have Scottish-sounding names, the ones labelled Scotch also included "Boscombe bucks", "Blowzabella" and "Meillionen". Now if Walsh had simply labelled the whole lot Scotch, the most likely explanation is that he was cashing-in on the popularity of things Scottish at that time (the court was Jacobite from 1660 to 1714) but this would not account for certain dances being singled out as Scottish. The answer turns out to be that Walsh inserted the words "Scotch country dance" whenever the layout of the description on the printed page left plenty of room! (If you have ever wondered why research workers insist on using the original documents and not typed copies, here is the reason).

COMPARISON CORNER

New England contra-dances, part III.

This will be the longest article we have had in our comparison corner, and there is a good reason for this : of all non-Scottish dances, these are the ones which are most like Scottish country-dances, with the result that not only are there many interesting points of contrast (as there are with many types of foreign dances) but there are also cogent and interesting points of resemblance.

One point of resemblance is the way that they have been handed down. A large number - forming the traditional repertoire - have come down by word of mouth. But, just as in Scotland, there were produced during the nineteenth century a number of pocket-sized handbooks, in which many of these dances were described, the most popular ones several times. These are the American equivalents of Scottish manuals like those by Mozart Allan and David Anderson. Two that have been reprinted and can be bought to-day are "The prompter's handbook" by J.A. French, and "The ballroom manual of contra-dances and social cotillions, with remarks on the Quadrilles and the Spanish dance", a thirty-two page book measuring about three inches by an inch and a half, published in 1866. They contain respectively 34 and 57 contra-dances. To give an idea of the dances that were popular, we list those that are in both books:

Chorus jig	Money Musk	Fisher's hornpipe
Durang's hornpipe	College hornpipe	Hull's victory
Lady's triumph	Speed the plough	Twin sisters
Cheat the lady	Irish washerwoman	Roy's wife
The girl I left	Maid in the pump-	Virginia reel
behind me	room	Soldiers' joy
Lady of the	Boston fancy	Sackett's harbor
lake	Tempest	
Portland fancy		

("Sackett's harbor" being called "Steamboat quickstep" in the book by French). You will notice that, just as for our country-dances, all or nearly all of the names are names of tunes.

It is also true that, just as in Scotland, there were many earlier books and manuscripts but of a rather different type. Dances tended to be printed and to disappear and rather few from before 1800 took their place in the traditional repertoire. The best-known one to do so in Scotland is The Duke of Perth : the best-known one to do so in America is "Money Musk". Since "Monymusk" is danced today in some Scottish groups, we should perhaps explain that it did not survive traditionally. It was reconstructed in 1934 from an old book dated 1786 (in which, incidentally, the title was spelled "Money Musk", just as it is today in New England). An interesting and valuable comparison can be made between the traditional and resurrected versions; we shall return to this in the fourth part of the article.

America is the land of the square-dance caller, and it is not surprising that contra-dances were called, too : probably from about 1860 or so onwards, to judge from the dates of those manuals that give "calls" instead of, or as well as, descriptions of the figures. Calling a contra is basically like prompting a quadrille, but experienced and imaginative callers will not simply say the same words over each time : they will bring in impromptu or semi-promptu phrases, and may chant or even sing the call in unison or harmony with a snatch of the tune. And as readers of our correspondence column will know, the call can be, and sometimes is, dispensed with on suitable occasions.

Another resemblance between contra-dances and ours is that they are nearly all 32 bars long. There are three or four 48's, three or four 24's; no genuine 40s (one appears to be, but is in fact a 32-bar dance plus 8-bar progression, like our Waltz country dance); no really long or really short ones.

Although most contra-dances had their own tunes originally, there are some which every contra dancer feels must go to their own song, and some which no-one minds dancing to any good contra tune. The ones whose proper tunes are always used include "Money Musk", "Arkansas traveller", "Chorus jig" and "Hull's victory".

Like our traditional dances, most of the contras are largely (and some are entirely) built up out of a standard repertoire of figures. The New England repertoire consists of star [i.e. hands across], circle [hands round], right and left, ladies' chain, half-promenade, down the middle and up, down the outsides and up, forward and back [advance and retire], turn contra corners, sashay [chassé]. Some of these need no description, some we described earlier. For the rest, the right and left is like one of the traditional Scottish rights and lefts (version III, page 238 in the Fletts' book) except that the "left" part of it is like the turn used to cast-off at the end of a contra-style down the middle and up. Ladies' chain is also like the Scottish one (except that when the man turns his partner he helps her round with his right arm round her waist). Sashay is like the "slip across" in our "La Tempête" : the traditional version, with a ballroom hold, not the more formal version with a two-hand hold.

There is yet one more way in which contra dances are like ours. Just as we have our Circassian circle, Dashing white sergeant, and La Tempête - dances built on the same principle of progression as country-dances, but in different formation, so the Americans have some variations on the contra theme. Corresponding to our "Circassian circle" the Americans have a "Sicilian circle" (neither dance, of course, has any connection with Circassia or Sicily), and there are one or two more in this formation, including a waltz country dance under the name "Spanish dance". There are a few "three facing three" and at one time "Highland reel" itself was danced over here, and was described in two of the manuals. Four-facing-four dances include the attractive and popular "Portland fancy". The most interesting and - to the contra traditionalist - the greatest favourite is undoubtedly "The tempest" (from Vermont), not to be confused with La Tempête (though some writers have confused it).

This has a most ingenious formation. Two couples stand side by side facing the foot of the room : these are the head couples. On each side of them, facing the sides of the room, stands a side couple. (So far we have what would be just half of a sixteensome reel). The column is built up of units like this.

In the next part we shall describe some individual dances.

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ST. ANDREWS, 1968. By Hugh Foss.

In her introductory talk for the second fortnight, Miss Milligan recalled that when she and Mrs. Stewart founded the Society their highest ambition was to make Scotland a dancing nation again. Now our dances had spread all over the world.

Summer School has a sameness and a difference each year. Miss Milligan was at the top of her form again: Book 24 was easier than Book 23. There were many dancers from abroad: last year the largest contingent was of Belgian beginners - this year it was of French experts. The Ceilidh items were varied and enjoyable: this year we had more good singers than usual and a surprising siffleur, from Germany, who whistled duets with himself.

There had been a delay in printing Book 24, which made it difficult for slow-studiers who gain more from reading than from practising in a class. Still, the dances were simple ones so it did not matter much. The Hollin Buss (Holly Bush) promises to be a favourite and several of the others looked as if they might belong to that rare type, dances that are simple without being dull. Tape users will be interested to know that the Society hopes to have piano-recordings of Book 24 on tape before the end of the year.

Ideally (but there are practical difficulties) every student at St. Andrews should go to every class to see how each teacher deals with each grade of class. As things are, I can only speak of Mrs. McLaren, Mrs. Hill and Bill Ireland. Mrs. McLaren is an inspiring teacher with the art of making every dancer want to produce his best and with helpful hints on how: e.g. in a Grand Chain make loops on the inside and when on the outside go straight. This prevents the chain from spreading. Bill Ireland drove us hard, but we enjoyed it: in the Grand Chain in Miss Mary Douglas try to get more than half way round in four bars and keep two bars for the final left hand. Mrs. Hill's classes were less orthodox and some dancers considered them irrelevant, but I enjoyed two exercises in instant composition that she gave us. We were divided into sets and given a tune. Each set had to compose a dance and then dance it. Time: about ten to fifteen minutes. On the first occasion we were given bits and pieces: pas de basque, skip-change, slip-steps, Hullachan turns. On the second each set was given a different theme: relationships, changes of track, phrasing, and so forth. The new and interesting dances and figures produced at short notice showed that, even with nearly 1000 current published dances and who knows how many more unpublished, the sea is still full of fish.

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--- HINTS ON BETTER DANCING ---

In any dancing-class only a certain amount of time is available; and the teacher has to decide how much time to spend on each of the items to be taught. To some extent the way the time is proportioned depends on what the teacher likes, what the class likes, and how difficult they find each item, but there is one quite important factor that often seems to be neglected, namely how important is each item? It is only common sense to spend most of the time instilling those virtues that are really important. Let us then, divide the virtues into primary and secondary virtues. If you are in doubt whether a virtue is primary or secondary, one useful hint is this : ask yourself "is the virtue peculiar to Scottish country-dancing, or is it a general virtue in many types of dancing?" If it is general, it is almost certainly a primary virtue : if it is peculiar to Scottish country-dancing, it is likely to be secondary (and all the more so if it is peculiar to one particular style of Scottish country dancing). For example, the ability to move one's feet accurately in rhythm with the music is universally a virtue (yet how many teachers do in fact spend much time on this point with pupils who find it difficult?) Another universal virtue is balance, not only the obvious fact that a dancer should normally be poised correctly on his own feet and able to move off in the next direction smoothly and easily; but the less obvious (but equally true) fact that when dancers take hands in a turn or a hands-across or a hands-round, they should be well balanced against each other. This is particularly obvious in a one-handed strathspey turn. In a group in which the dancers are used to balancing each other by giving just the right amount of pull such a turn feels delightful, the lift or hop on beat four, when the couple is balanced for an instant in the air, adding to the pleasurable sensation; whereas in a group in which this has been neglected the turn is all too often pathetically uncomfortable. By contrast, the ability to point one's toes or to turn one's feet out is a very secondary virtue (that is, in those styles of dancing in which it is considered correct. In those styles in which it is not correct, it is, of course, not a virtue at all). And, indeed, there are very few styles of dancing in which pointed toes and turned-out feet are called for : Norwegian, Polish, Irish, Austrian, Serbian, Romanian, Greek, Tahitian, Amerindian ... all these dances and many others are performed with natural foot positions.

A virtue whose degree of importance is not at first sight obvious is the ability to keep straight lines. It is of course essential that formation is reasonably accurately kept - and this applies generally : a square-caller will call "square your sets" if the sets seem so untidy that dancing will suffer. But we all know the Scottish teacher whose constant call is "keep your lines straight" because he (or, more often, she) wants them as accurate as Guards on parade. It is true that geometrically straight lines do look impressive, but the difference between reasonably straight and dead straight is a very secondary virtue. And, again, other nations do not worry about it : in Irish dancing, English dancing, quadrilles, square-dancing etc. the continual call of "straighten

your lines" is not heard. It is, of course, obvious why lines should be reasonably straight - the dancers have to be able to see clearly where to go, and to get naturally and easily the right distance from the dancers they are going to set to or to turn. For exactly the same reason, accurate sideways spacing is important : it is in fact no more and no less important than accurate rectilinearity. The teacher who lays equal stress on both has his priorities correct : the teacher who continually calls "straighten your lines" and scarcely mentions spacing has got them wrong.

One supremely unimportant point over which it seems a pity to waste time, is the question of exactly how to "move up" : for example, when the first couple have danced away from their positions and the second couple have to move up to the top corners of the set. It is, of course, important that they do move up; and it is sometimes important when; but such details as whether they face across the set or turn to face the way they are going, or whether they move on the toes, on the ball of the foot, or with an ordinary walking movement are of little or no importance. And again this is confirmed by the fact that dancers generally do not bother about these details in such situations : in American square-dancing, for example, when head couples have to move in to allow the side couples to promenade round behind them, they move in naturally with a walking step; in English country dancing or Irish ceilidh dancing, when a couple who are at the opposite sides of the set have to take hold for a swing or a polka round, they just step towards each other naturally without any fuss; and so on.

We suggest then, if you are teacher, that you should give some thought to the question "are the things I spend most time on the things that are really important", and if the honest answer is "no" the remedy is obvious. If you are a member of a dancing class you can of course ask yourself "are the things my teacher spends time on the things that are really important", but if the answer is "no" we leave it to you to decide what to do about it, if anything.

??? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ???

- Q. (a) I have seen "The Ship of Grace" danced in two ways. In bars 25-32 sometimes the couples make arches to change places, sometimes the couples slip sideways past each other. Which is correct?
(b) Who composed this dance?

- A. (a) Arches. (b) Jean McAdam. The dance is one of a pair, known as the lifeboat dances, the other being the Montrose reel. The Ship of Grace is dedicated to the crews of the lifeboats, and proceeds from the sale of the dances go to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.