



THE

THISTLE

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OUR DANCES NO. 57: The Princess Royal

The most striking thing about this dance is the length of its tune: 28 bars. The rule in country dancing (not only Scottish, but English and American also) is for all tunes to consist of eight-bar phrases. The first part of The Princess Royal is quite orthodox: it is one eight-bar phrase repeated. But the second half is a twelve-bar phrase, which can be divided mentally into three fours or into eight plus four, but cannot possibly be divided into eights. The "coda"-like effect of the odd four bars gives the tune a piquancy which many listeners find most attractive.

A structure of this kind is quite common in Irish dance-music. A number of tunes (of which "St. Patrick's day" is the best-known) have a regular first half and an irregular second half. They are known as "set tunes" and are used for solo "set dances", each dance being a set sequence of foot-movements which precisely fits the tune. About half of these set tunes are hornpipes (though St. Patrick's day is a jig) and The Princess Royal is also a hornpipe, indeed a very typical one, and melodically very similar to some of the Irish ones.

The dance Princess Royal is made up of fairly typical figures common in the nineteenth century. The only one that is worth commenting on is the half-diamond that starts it. The "cutting the diamond" belongs, of course, to Petronella; but it did find its way into one or two other dances, of which The Princess Royal is one. (Another is "La Flora". See The Thistle no. 30). It first appeared in print in Lowe's Selection of Popular Country Dances, by Joseph Lowe, published in Edinburgh about 1840-1850.

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OUR DANCES NO. 58: The Braes o' Mar by Hugh Thurston

Music: The Braes o' Mar (strathspey)

The first man and the first woman change places before the dance starts.

Bars

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| 1 - | 2 | The two men set to one another, and so do the two women. |
| 3 - | 4 | They dance hands-round half-way. |
| 5 - | 8 | The second man casts off one, and the first man casts up one, and they continue dancing towards the centre of the set. They finish beside one another, left shoulders almost touching, each man facing his own partner. (Thus they are in the standard position for starting a diagonal reel of four, except that the men are side-by-side instead of back-to-back). |
| 9 - | 12 | They dance half a reel of four, except that the two men, instead of finishing in the middle, use the last step to dance to their original places. |

13-14 Partners dance towards each other. Each man takes his partner's right hand in his own left, and raises it over her head as they pass (she turns clockwise under the raised hands)

15-16 They dance hands-round half-way.

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-- THE BACKGROUND -- (continued)

After a certain amount of theorizing and classifying it would be good to get down to some practical details. Not much can be done about the "collected in so-and-so" dances. I should like to be able to show you some of the villagers in Scotland performing these in the traditional way, but alas they are three thousand miles and thirty years away. However, if you have back numbers of the Society's Bulletin, you will find in one a picture of a group of dancers from the Border country (where, as I pointed out, most of the dances of this type were found). The men, you will notice, are wearing boots and trousers, so the details of their steps and style would be very different from ours -- but they represent one source -- and a very important one -- of our dancing.

We can do more about the "manual" dances -- you can, in fact, look at the manuals, in any big library in Scotland, in many libraries in England, and even in some over here -- the library of Congress, for example, or Harvard College Library. For those who haven't the time (and it is very interesting if you have) here follows a description of one of the more important -- The Ballroom. If you look at the footnotes in Scottish Country Dance Book no. 1 you will find that many of the dances therein are referred to it (too many in fact, for Circassian Circle is referred to it, whereas it does not occur in it. If you ever do any research on Scottish dances, about the first thing you will have to do is to correct various slips like this, or they will constantly be getting in your hair).

This book is, as a matter of fact, not easy to get hold of; the British Museum's copy was destroyed during the war, and the National Library of Scotland doesn't have it. But Mrs. Stewart, (co-founder of the Society) kindly lent me hers, so I have probably seen the actual one which the society used.

The book is a convenient pocket-size and the title-page runs: The Ballroom, or the Juvenile pupil's assistant; containing the most fashionable Quadrilles with Les Lanciers of sixteen as danced in the Public and Private Assemblies in Paris, by Mons. J.P. Boulogne, French teacher of dancing, Royal Saloon, Queen St. Glasgow. Printed by Edward Krull & Son, 1827.

The preface is called the "address". In it, the author writes "I have been careful to select those dances that are just now the most admired in these great Circles of Fashion and taste, London and Paris . . ." and goes on to say that he hopes the book will be useful to those who find it impossible to remember all the fashionable dances.

Most of the book is full of Quadrilles of various sorts, amongst which are a couple of odd dances -- a "gymnastic Morris dance, with sticks" and "Italian war dance". I didn't note the

description of these when I borrowed the book, for I was interested only in the country dances, but I cannot help wondering what they were like!

Right at the end comes what interests us most: two lists of country dances as follows:-

ENGLISH COUNTRY DANCES

✓ Dashing White Sergeant	✓ Petronelle	✓ Meg Mirrilees
✓ The Nut	✓ Kenmore	Tom Thumb
✓ Calvar Lodge	✓ The Lady of the Lake	John of Paris
✓ Persian dance	✓ Jessie's hornpipe	Triumph

SCOTCH COUNTRY DANCES

✓ Duke of Perth, or Keep the country bonny lassie	
✓ Merry Lads of Ayr	✓ Lord M'Donall's reel
✓ Clydeside lasses	✓ I'll gang nae mair to yon town
✓ Mrs. M'Leod	✓ I'll make you be fain to follow me
	✓ Cameronian rant

One thing which you probably noticed about the dances in the Ballroom -- it is certainly very striking -- is that all of the Scottish Country dances are three-couple dances and in fact, all end the same way: set to and turn corners, and reel of three at the sides. It won't be easy to spot anything about the English dances unless you guessed that "Petronelle" is in fact our "Petronella", and "Calvar Lodge" is our "Calver Lodge", and "Meg Mirrilees" is our "Meg Merrilees" (with a slight difference). "The Nut", of course, is well known (it's in Book I); "The Dashing White Sergeant" and "Jessie's Hornpipe", however, are not the dances we know but quite different ones which happen to have the same names (and this, of course, simply means that they have the same tunes, for a country dance is almost always called after its tune). Anyway, they are all two-couple dances (except "Meg Mirrilees" which has a couple of lines of three at the sides for one figure), and all of them (again with the exception of "Meg Mirrilees") have a poussette. In fact, nearly half of them end with down the middle and up and poussette.

Of course, we must not run away with the idea that every hundred per cent Scottish country dance ends with set and turn and reel. "Fight about the Fireside" does not. It just happens that the book contains only nine, and all of them do. But it does happen to be true that every dance which ends in set to and turn corners and reels of three at the sides is Scottish. The English, Irish, Welsh, and New Englanders just have never had this sequence, or for that matter, reels danced in this particular way. And this is about the only figure which is Scotland's private property. Pretty well every other figure which occurs in Scottish country dancing can be found at some date in English and American dances. (I think the only other exception is the rather special Scottish "allemande". However, this does not come in "manual" dances). So if ever you want to show someone a country dance which is really characteristic of Scotland, one of these would be a good choice. (And, incidentally, a good second choice would be a real traditional strathspey such as "The Haughs of Cromdale" or "The Braes of Busby" with a highland schottische step).

I rather think the set and turn and reel type of sequence comes into Scottish country dancing from Scottish reels. A sequence of this type is the main figure of Ninesome Reel (which was popular a little earlier than the date we are talking about), and plays a prominent part in the Eightsome, which is said to have been reconstructed about 1870 from dim memories of a dance of about 1800.

A second thing about the "Ballroom" dances which you could not be expected to spot unless you have studied these things is that the English dances all appear for the first time in the book with only one exception (Triumph). However, at least three of the Scottish ones (Duke of Perth, Lord MacDonald's Reel, and I'll Make You be Fain to Follow Me) are known to have appeared earlier. So it looks as though either M. Boulogne preferred to choose novel-ties for his English dances or the turnover in English dances at this date was quicker than in Scottish ones. "The Dashing White Sergeant" was even a brand-new tune: it was a light opera song, composed by Sir Henry Rowley Bishop in 1826. Later it was to be used for the well-known three-facing-three Scottish dance which is where we know it best.

"Petronella" and "Petronelle" are proper names: the first is an Italianate form and the second is French. They seem to stand in much the same relation to Peter as Wilhelmine and Wilhelmina do to William. Petronella first became prominent in Elizabethan madrigal days, together with Amaryllis, Clorinda, and all the other Italianate shepherdesses. "Pearce did dance with Petronella" is the first madrigal that comes to my mind with this name in it. There are three dances of this name in "The Ballroom". One is an English Quadrille, another is a "Spanish Dance", and the third is the country dance we have been talking about.

To keep things straight, I ought to explain that at this date "Spanish Dance", "Swedish Dance", and so forth, did not imply that the dances came from Spain or Sweden. It was rather like "French cricket" or "German measles". A "Spanish Dance" was a couple-facing-couple dance (like our "Waltz Country Dance") and a "Swedish Dance" was three-facing-three. All three "Petronellas" used the cutting-the-diamond figure, and presumably the same tune (though as "The Ballroom" does not give tunes, we cannot be quite sure about this). The linking of a particular figure to a particular tune happened also to "Triumph" -- there have been umpteen "Triumph"s in England, Scotland, and New England; they all have much the same tune, and they all include somewhere the "coming up in Triumph" figure.

[to be continued].

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???? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED ????

Q. Where is Hamilton house and how did the dance come to be named after it?

A. There are a number of houses called "Hamilton house", and nobody knows for certain which of them the dance is named after, or why. The dance simply appeared in one of the very many

collections of country-dances published throughout the 18th century, with no "background notes" -- just the tune and the figures, as is normal. But even though there is a Hamilton House in London (it happens to be the headquarters of the Ling Society), where the dance was published, we feel that the most likely candidate is the famous Hamilton house at Prestonpans (the one to which the wounded Highlanders were taken after the battle of Prestonpans). It was built in the early 1600s by Sir John Hamilton, a Senator of the College of Justice and is at present the home of the historian of the Scottish National Trust. (Some people jump to the conclusion that the dance is named after the abode of the Duke of Hamilton in Hamilton, but this is in fact Hamilton Palace, not Hamilton House. And there is no truth in the rumour that the "set to second woman and turn the third" figure has some connection with the flirtatious character of the contemporary Duke -- the figure was quite a common one at the date at which "Hamilton house" was published and occurred in several dances).

-- HISTORICAL QUOTATIONS --

Reels (1775)

Besides minuets and country-dances they in general dance reels in separate parts of the room, which is a dance that everyone is acquainted with, but none but a native of Scotland can execute to perfection. Their great agility, vivacity, and variety of hornpipe steps render it to them a most entertaining dance; but to a stranger the sameness of the figure makes it trifling and insipid, though you are employed during the whole time of its operation; which indeed is the reason why it is so peculiarly adapted to the Scotch, who are little acquainted with the attitude of standing still.

(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

The widespread reel (1811)

The old Scotch threesome and foursome reels have for a number of years been a very favourite species of dancing not only with the English but also with the Irish and Scotch, and particularly with the latter, from whom they derived their origin. They have likewise been introduced into most of the foreign courts of Europe, and are universally practised in all our extensive colonies.

(From Thomas Wilson's "Analysis of country dancing").

Early Scottish step-dancing (1775)

The dancing-masters enliven their entertainment by introducing between the minuets their High dances (which is a kind of double hornpipe) in the execution of which they excel perhaps the rest of the world. I wish I had it in my power to describe to you the variety of figures and steps they put into it. Besides all those common to the hornpipe they have a number of their own which I never before saw or heard of and their neatness and quickness in the performance of them is incredible. The motion of the feet is the only thing that is considered in these dances as they rather neglect the other parts of the body.

(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

**** Short description of the Gaelic language ****

Scottish Gaelic is closely related to Irish and Manx; these three languages form one branch of the Celtic family (the other branch consisting of languages like Welsh). It is a fairly typical Indo-European language, much more so than English or French, which have lost their case-endings and have an almost regular method of forming plurals. In fact, the grammar of Gaelic will remind an English speaker of Latin or German grammar.

Here is an example of the kind of thing that happens:-

an lamh	:	the hand
leis an laimh	:	with the hand
na lamhan	:	the hands
na laimhe	:	of the hand

The ending -an in the plural is like the case-endings in Latin or German. For that matter it is like the -s ending in English or French, except that different Gaelic nouns have different endings: the plural of cathair (chair) is cathrichean; that of caora (sheep) is caoraich. The internal vowel-change, which gives laimh from lamh, is not completely unfamiliar: it comes in German fairly often, and after all, in English the difference between goose and geese or woman and women is a vowel-change. However, Celtic languages do have one unusual type of change, namely, a change in the initial consonant. For example, the Gaelic for "large" applied to a masculine noun is "mor". In the feminine, the initial "m" sound becomes a "v" sound. As far as the spoken language goes, this is simple enough; but a slight complication sets in when we deal with the written language. Welsh simply spells feminines phonetically -- the Welsh for large is "mawr" (as in Bryn Mawr) in the masculine, and becomes "fawr" (as in Dinas vawr) in the feminine. However, the Gaelic languages prefer to show the structure of the word (their spelling is grammatical rather than phonetic), and Irish does this by putting a dot over the changed consonant. Thus the Irish for "large" in the feminine is spelt "mor" with a dot over the "m", and is pronounced "vor". However the Scots use no dots -- they insert a letter h: thus a large Scots woman is "bean mhor", in which mh is pronounced "v". The fact that an "m" sound plus an "h" sound does not yield a "v" sound should not be too difficult for English speakers: after all, they are used to pronouncing the "ch" in "chicken" in a way which does not consist of a "c" sound followed by an "h" sound.

Other sounds besides m undergo this modification, and thus we get the following combinations which one needs to learn before one can read Gaelic.

bh	pronounced like	v
ch		ch in loch
dh		gh in "ugh" or like y
fh	silent	
gh	pronounced like	gh in "ugh" or like y
mh		v
ph		f
sh		h
th		h

[l, n, r undergo negligible change in pronunciation and none in spelling. There are only these 12 consonants in written Gaelic].

You will notice the two pronunciations for dh and for gh. This brings us to another interesting point about Gaelic spelling. Just as in English (or French) the letter c is pronounced k before a, o or u, but s before e or i; so in Gaelic certain consonants change their pronunciation according to the vowel which they contact. They are as follows: the pronunciation when contacting a, o or u is given first.

d	pronounced	d	or	j
dh		gh		y
gh		gh		y
s		s		sh
t		t		ch

(In addition, there is quite an audible change in the pronunciation of l, which becomes very thick when contacting a, o, u; but no notice is taken of this in the spelling). The interesting feature of Gaelic is that the same thing happens even if the vowel comes before the consonant: for example, cruit (heart) is pronounced "crootch", because the t contacts an i. Because of this, no consonant can follow one of the three vowels a o u and also be followed by e or i; or vice versa. For example, a word like abhinn could not possibly be good Gaelic, though abhainn is (and means "river"). This rule is the fundamental "Gaelic spelling rule".

We end with a few words -- the numbers in any language are interesting, and some of the others will be familiar, in heavily Anglicised form, in Scottish (and Canadian) place-names.

Aon	one	Loch	lake
Da	two	Baile	town
Tri	three	Gorm	blue or green
Ceithir	four	Dubh	black
Coig	five	Mor	large
Sia	six	Beinn	mountain
Seachd	seven	Strath	valley
Ochd	eight	Ruadh	red
Naci	nine	Geal	white
Deug	ten	Beag	small

--- INDEX TO THE THISTLE ---

<u>Historical Notes etc.</u>	Issue
Chassis step, the	5
Country dance steps up to 1752	6
Some early Highland dancing competitions, Flett	7
History of country dancing in Vancouver	8
The games and diversions of Argyllshire, MacLagan 1901	9
Comments on dancing around 1900, Ritchie	10
Burns and dancing, Ian Ross, pt. 1	11
pt. 2	12

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