



The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS.

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EDITORIAL

The news of the serious accident which has befallen Mrs. Bingham has come as a great shock to us all. And our admiration has been aroused by the fortitude and resilience which she has shown in adversity. Scottish Country Dancing in Vancouver owes an incalculable debt to the hard work put in by Mrs. Bingham over a period of many years. And it was most unfortunate that her accident should have prevented her from attending the Workshop held in connection with Miss Milligan's visit. All who know her and who have derived benefit from her guidance and teaching will wish her a complete return to health and further years of useful service to Scottish Country dancing in B.C.

OUR DANCES, NO. 14: The lad with the plaidie.

Here is another two-couple strathspey: simple, but not too simple. It proved quite a favorite at the open-air dances in Stanley Park this summer.

- Bars 1 - 4 Set to partners with a highland scottische step.
- 5 - 8 Dance back-to-back with partners.
- 9 - 16 The first couple dance down-the-middle-and-up.
- 17 - 24 Allemande.

The recommended tune is, of course, 'The lad with the plaidie'. Those who use the gramophone will find this tune included in the medley for "Jenny's bawbee" on Jimmy Shand's "Step we gaily".

LOCAL NEWS

Miss Milligan's visit was the success which we all expected it to be. She taught classes one morning and two afternoons, and was an inspiring presence at the Saturday evening party. All dancers, at whatever level, gained immeasurably from her visit.

This year the watch-word is "urge". Miss Milligan also emphasized that dancing should be gay (and told us the story of the Royal visit to R.S.C.D.S. Headquarters, in which the Queen made it clear that she, too, liked gay dances). Technique is but a means to an end - dancing cannot be gay unless reasonably well done.

In the skip-change step the foot must be raised so high on beat 4 that the toe comes back as it takes the floor on the succeeding beat 1. Both this step and the strathspey travelling step must be danced low on the balls of the feet. The rhythm of the pas-de-basque can be taught to beginners by the catch-word "daffodil"; and the most important movement in this step is that on beat 2.

Leading is now done with nearer hands, instead of right hands as heretofore, except in certain figures like down-the-middle-and-up. Hands should be given firmly and helpfully but with a simple direct motion.

We were lucky to have Stewart Smith come from San Francisco with Miss Milligan. Miss Milligan, Stewart, and two of our own teachers made it a very pleasant and valuable "workshop" week-end.

NEWS FROM ST. ANDREWS (by courtesy of Hugh Foss)

The Summer School at St. Andrews seems to get better each year. Miss Milligan was in great form again presiding over, looking after and obviously caring for every single one of, her 'family' of 240, which, in the first fortnight, included dancers from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A., Switzerland, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Germany.

NEWS FROM ST. ANDREWS (cont'd.)

Again this year Miss Milligan stressed the importance of listening to the music: dancing should come from the soul, not merely from the feet. But, dealing with the latter, it was important to keep the travelling-steps smooth. In the skip-change the front foot should never be lifted more than an inch or two from the ground or the effect of patting it down on the first beat would interfere with the flow. The step on the third beat should be a long one, especially in strathspey travelling. Those demonstrating this step to her satisfaction showed the top halves of their bodies moving as if on wheels.

Miss Milligan introduced her class (fully certificated and 'very advanced') to Book 22, full of exciting new dances. There were also 'intermediate' and 'advanced' classes, classes for Highland dancing, male and female, and the intense 'certificate' classes.

Each Friday evening there was a Ceilidh instead of the usual social dancing, with dancers, singers and reciters from Canada, U.S.A. and France, Kitty McLaughlin playing Chopin, teams demonstrating Book 22 and Highland soloists such as Vera Seddon, Debbie Alcock and, as bubbling as ever, Bobby Watson.

The high spot of the fortnight was a special Ball to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Society. Jim Nicholson's Band, from Edinburgh, gave their services. The leader excels both as a dancer and a musician and the combination of a superlative band and expert dancers made the evening unforgettable (though perhaps one senior member of the staff may wish to forget going hopelessly wrong in Cauld Kail within ten feet of where Miss Milligan was sitting).

At the dinner before the Ball Bobby Watson, in a speech, made some reference to the teaching certificate. Miss Milligan replied, "I hang my head. I have no certificate." This seemed wrong, so at the next Ceilidh Miss Ross presented her with a special certificate — a replica many times the normal size — stating that in the opinion of this Summer School Miss Milligan was fully qualified to teach Scottish Country Dancing.

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

During this summer's Edinburgh Festival, Yehudi Menuhin and Indian artistes were talking about Indian music when someone mentioned the bagpipes. Mr. Menuhin remarked that he would like to hear a piobaireachd, whereupon he and Mrs. Menuhin were invited home by Pipe-Major John MacLellan, who played them "The unjust incarceration" and explained the structure of the piece. According to the Oban Times, Mr. Menuhin was "obviously impressed by the volume of sound, fine tuning, and the skill and feeling which were put into the playing and also by the variety of music which has been composed for the bagpipe to suit all the moods, themes and pursuits of life".

The Orkney Islands of Gairsay, Sweyn Holm, and Holm of Roray were recently put up for sale. In the eleventh century, Gairsay was the home of the last of the Vikings — the Norse chieftain Sweyn Asliefsen.

NEWS FROM BRITAIN

Shrewsbury, Oct. 1963

The Welsh Tourist and Holidays Board has recommended two alterations in the traditional Welsh costume: the hemline is to be raised four inches and stockings are to be of nylon instead of wool. However, they refused to "bring the costume into line with modern fashions" in spite of criticism that the costume is "ugly and unbecoming".

NORTHERN JUNKET

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page, 117 Washington St., Keene, N.H., U.S.A.

Each issue brings you interesting articles on all phases of dancing: squares, contras, folk-dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional recipes, too, for hungry dancers.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

Last summer the Oban Times (which, you will gather, your Editors read assiduously) published a query about the "Road to Isles". Dunoon folk apparently claim that the tune was composed by Pipe-major John MacLennan, a native of Dunoon, who died in 1949; he called it "The Bens of Jura"; and at the time was serving in the H.L.I. However, the history of the H.L.I., "Proud heritage" says that the tune was composed by Pipe-Sergeant Ross of the first battalion, under the name "The highland brigade's march to Heilbron". Can someone, they asked, solve the puzzle?

Now it is fairly well known that the tune was called "The burning sands of Egypt" before Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser put it in her collection "Songs of the Hebrides" with words by Rev. Dr. Kenneth McLeod, and so launched it on its road to fame. A letter from Angus MacVicar of Campbeltown gave some details of how this happened:-

"In his lifetime, Kenneth often told me how it (the song) came into being. During the first world war he happened to be in Edinburgh and one evening foregathered with some Gaels at a friend's house. Amongst them were the late Mrs. Kennedy Fraser, and Malcolm Johnston, of Barra. In the course of the ceilidh, Malcolm played a tune on the chanter which he called "The white (or burning) sands of Egypt". Afterwards Mrs. Kennedy Fraser turned to Kenneth and said 'If only we could get words to that tune, wouldn't it be grand for the troops to march to!'"

The letter goes on to describe how, some days later, inspiration came in a flash to Dr. McLeod as he walked by Lock Etiveside in the gloaming, and he wrote down the words in one sitting.

Another letter adds yet one more title. Mr. Hugh Matheson, writing from the Cowal Highland gathering, says "I believe the original of "The road to the isles" was "The 71st Farewell to Dover" (Pipe-Major John MacLellan, D.C.M., Dunoon) . . . Sometime later MacLellan changed the name of the tune to "The Bens of Jura".

However, Mr. James E. Scott, of Inverness, felt confident enough to write "The question of who composed the tune was settled years ago in the columns of The Oban Times, long before Pipe-Major MacLellan died. This tune he composed as a young man and is among his first efforts in that direction. In time the tune bore several alternative titles".

Mr. Scott also had a theory to explain the large number of titles. "It was a common practice in older days", he wrote "for pipe-majors to take for special occasions an old tune, rename it to suit and say "composed for the occasion". . . A classic instance occurred when Queen Victoria visited Inverness in 1874. The band played "Queen Victoria's welcome to Inverness" "specially composed". The pipe-major's little subterfuge did not deceive one reporter at least - what the band actually played was "Clunie's reel", in print since 1759, and better known to us to-day as

"The Smith's a gallant Fireman". Those who doubt the truth of this can consult the files of the local papers of the date".

HINTS ON BETTER DANCING

Most of the time you are dancing, very clearly, with your partner. However, there is one common figure where it seems as though the set splits into two separate halves - namely into two reels of three, as in bars 25 - 32 of The Duke of Perth, for instance. It is quite easy to link the two reels together, not physically but, shall we say, psychologically. Let us consider the first couple. At the instant when the reel is about to start, (i.e. the start of bar 25 in the case of The Duke of Perth) they are both in the side-lines, facing slightly inwards (ready to pass the first corners left-shoulders). It is easy, (and soon becomes very natural) for them to glance across (even smile) at each other. They can do the same three bars later when, having completed one half of the reel, they are back in the same spots. Three bars later, still having completed the reel, they can do so again.

Corners can do the same, but there is one subtle point for them to notice. They are in phase not with partners but with opposite corners. In The Duke of Perth, for instance, the first two corners come into the middle spots (about a bar after the reel has started), then the two second corners, and then, of course, the leading couple come into this position, having finished half the reel. This pleasant and sociable action has a useful side-effect; it reduces the temptation which the corners might have to "cover off" incorrectly. If, for instance, the third man (who is a second corner) were to cover off his partner (who is a first corner) throughout the figure, he would pull the reel out of shape, because he should pass through the middle spot of his reel after the third man, whereas his partner should pass through the middle spot before the second woman.

Some reels across the dance can be treated in the same way (e.g. in Fight about the Fireside and The Montgomeries' rant).

NEWS ITEM

The U.S. Navy Squadron based on Holy Loch is to adopt a tartan of its own. According to The Observer, the Lord Lyon King of Arms' comment was "We don't record tartans for submarines. It's all nonsense. It is entirely a matter for the American government if they want a tartan. We would not recognize it."

The tartan was devised by Alexander MacIntyre of Strone. Like so many recent tartans (and very definitely unlike any old ones) it is representational: navy blue represents the naval uniform, dark green represents the ocean depths, and so on. Since 650 American wives arrived at Holy Loch, business has been brisk, so the whole affair is in the best commercial Scottish traditions, if not in the best heraldic traditions.

We notice that someone in Seattle has invented a "Century 21" tartan and described it as "official". Presumably Lord Lyon would say "We don't record tartans for space-needles". We have also seen, in a shop-window in Vancouver, tartans labelled Corvair, Corvette, and Jaguar. Where, we wonder, will it all end?

GRAND MARCH (Quatrains)

Walk up. The Reel Club in the wheel of night
Has thrown a Ball and gambled on its flight
And lo! The piper of the North has drawn
Enchanted rats into a flood of light.

Dreaming when Dawn's left wing had organised
No light relief, no bogey exorcised,
I heard a voice within me cry, "Come, dance
Or e'er your limbs and mind be paralysed.

Terpsichore, were now some seekers found
Enraptured by the pipes' fire-flickering sound
Would we not line them up in couples, then
March them to right and left and round and round?

Come, follow Angus in and leave outside
The fears today's depression magnified.
Tomorrow — why tomorrow they'll be gone.
Or won't they? Never mind now. Let them bide.

First comes the joyful Eightsome's radiant wheel
With braggart Foursome, bright as polished steel.
Scottish Reform inducts you to the chase
Of breathless Lady Susan Stewart's Reel.

Let Broun's perfection waft you to the sky
And Petronella's grace bewitch the eye.
Then let the music of The New Rigged Ship
Lighten your feet and give them wings to fly.

Unroll the Glasgow Highlanders' design.
Let Hamilton House transform your blood to wine.

Spend all your energy, but save some breath
To reach the final note of Auld Lang Syne.

You, experts, you who have no effort spared,
At whose perfection lesser folks have stared,
Unfold each movement and imprint each step
As exquisitely as if others cared.

You, happy hoppers, also join the throng.
Lightness of heart will carry you along.
Fear not to join the most exclusive set.
When others know the dance you won't go wrong.

You, earnest tyros, rub off in the press
The swathing mantle of self-consciousness.
Fear not lest adepts mock your froglike hops.
They're busy dancing. They could not care less.

And you, dumb strangers, pals in embryo,
To frantic 'This way's darting to and fro,
You'll find the natives friendly. Pitch your tents.
You'll soon recover from your vertigo.

You, ancient rocks, join in with fancy free,
Though still perplexed about the reel of three,
And skip like rams. Seek not to imitate
The elephant except in memory.

The March is done. The dancers have been lined
Up for the Eightsome. I must give my mind
To putting into words a brilliant thought —

.....
On with the dance. Let joy be unconfined.

Hugh R. Fos

DISTRICT CHECKS

Wearing a check tweed of the district became popular in the last century on various large Scottish estates, especially where the landlord had no tartan of his own. The idea spread from districts to regiments, and from Scotland to the North of England. The following list of district checks was compiled by S. Redmayne and sons, Wigton, Cumberland. They were woven by the Kirkburn Mills.

Balmoral	Ballindalloch	Cairnamount	Erchless	Fannich
Glenferrie	Glenegarber	Glenshaw	Glenkinnon	Green Mhor
Guisachan	Glenmuick	Glenbirse	Glenbirmie	Glenbreck
Cairloch	Glenmead	Glenholm	Inveraray	Kinlochewe
Lammermoor	Russell	Scots Guard	Welch Guards	Seaforth shepherd