

JOHN MACLEOD late of EOCHAR, ISLE OF S. UIST

(Aged 4

At present Mr Macleod is Assistant Manager of the Great Eastern Hotel, Duke St Glasgow. (Tel. No. Bell 1904).

The Hebridean Dances. Mr Macleod knows five of these dances namely Tullochgon Highland Lachie, Over the Water to Charlie, The First of August and Blue Bonnets. He was taught them by the late Archie MacPherson, also of Eochar. The latter learnt them from Ewen MacLachlan - known as Ewen-of-the-short-arms on account of having deformed arms.

This Ewen MacLachlan was sent by his parents to study for the priesthood at the Scots College at Douai in France. Owing to his short arms, however, he was unable to carry out certain of the duties in taking Mass, and so was not ordained. He returned to Scotland, and after some time on the mainland, he eventually settled at Eochar in S. Uist, where he earned a living by assisting the priest and teaching dancing.

Archie MacPherson was not actually a pupil of Ewen MacLachlan's, but he was only 11 year old when Ewen MacLachlan held his last classes, and so was too young to be a member of the class. He did, attend, however, and watched the old pupils practising their steps, and then went away and practised them. When the end of the session came, Ewen MacLachlan gave a "dancing-master's ball", when the best pupils showed off their paces, and, having guessed what the youngster was doing, insisted on Archie MacPherson performing one or two of the dances.

The dances were revived about 1925, and a special competition was arranged in S. Uist for teachers capable of performing these dances. There were two competitors Archie MacPherson, and a Donald MacDonald, the former being adjudged the winner. Mr Macleod said that this MacDonald was a "comedian" who had concocted these dances from fragments.

These dances were noted by D. G. MacLennan from Archie MacPherson but Mr

† Mrs Buchanan, aged about 80, of Kinloch, Benbecula, told us that young men and women attended Ewen MacLachlan's classes. Her father and mother were in service in the priest's house in Eochar at that time, and were attended the classes.

‡ D. G. MacLennan was one of the judges. In the course of a telephone conversation, he told us that Donald MacDonald admitted to him that his versions were not authentic.

§ Miss Jessie MacDonald, of Arisaig, formerly a well known Highland dancer, was taught some of these dances by Donald MacDonald. She told us they were very different from those danced by John Mac. In some of them the dances danced successive halves of each step facing in opposite directions. A. 15

Macleod says that the dances described in D.G. Macneenan's book are quite different from those he was taught by Archie MacPherson.

At the request of the priest in Barra, John Macleod taught these dances to some girls in Barra. He claims that Farquhar MacNeill, who demonstrated these dances at the E.F.D.S.S. Festival at the Albert Hall in 1935, learnt these from his pupils. Farquhar MacNeill himself claims to have learnt them from his grandfather.

The five dances known to John Macleod were usually danced to the pipes, though occasionally to the fiddle or accordion. He had never heard them given Gaelic names, nor was "pint-a-pent" ever sung to them so far as he knew. All but the "First of August" were danced to the tune having the same name as the dance, and the "First of August" was danced to "The White Cockade". He had never heard the tune "The Grosvenor First of August" before, nor did he know which "First of August" was referred to in the title of the dance.

Archie MacPherson also knew "The Fionner of Edinburgh", and would have taught him this, but John Macleod was not keen on learning it as he found it too difficult. It contained a double treble, done simultaneously with both feet and a step in which the dancer drops on one knee. But this is all he knows of it. He said that D.G. Macneenan should know it. Also "Gilleann an eilidh", the name in the title.

He had never heard of "Over the Hills and Far Away", nor "Tacky Tar", nor seen MacDonald's "concoction" "Mrs Forbes", and heard of Farquhar MacNeill dancing "Acadonian dances", but didn't know where it came from.

Apart from the obvious reels, John Macleod knew nothing of any "cat" dances in the Isles. He had never heard of the Hebridean Wearing hat till he saw it danced recently on the E.F.D.S.S. Now had he heard the tune either.

He had danced "Dansa na Tunnaig". It is a children's dance often a solo done at home, in which the child gets aboard on its hunkers, with its hands clasped under its thighs, and dances round in a circle.

In support of John Macleod, it should be mentioned that Faranna MacNeill knows only the same five steps of "Over the Water" as does John Macleod. Yet Archie MacPherson told John Macleod that the dance had ten steps originally, but that he could only remember those five. Mrs MacPherson, former wife, Carrisay told us that her daughter who was John Macleod's step-pupil, used to practice with Farquhar MacNeill in her infancy — before the war when it was

The White Cockade. This was the last dance[†] of the evening - usually about 3% in the morning. One man went behind the door and put his back to it. Then another man, "somebody prominent, often the M.C. [some-one with a bit of brass, a devil-may-care]", took his handkerchief, and walked down the hall, and gave it to a girl. She rose, linked arms with him, and they walked together round the hall. Then she gave the handkerchief to another man, who came and linked arm with them, and so on, until all were on the floor. The girls were often shy and tried to avoid the handkerchief or to pass it on to their neighbours. Some of it thrown to them. Old men would often give it to a small girl. When all were on the floor, they divided as in a Grand March, and danced a Strathspey and Reel of Tuloch. While they were sorting themselves into towns the pipes would play the phrase "pog-an-toiseach" several times. The boldest spirit then kissed their partners, and all began the reel.

He said that this is still done, mainly to find out who are going ~~to~~ together because in the Isles people are very "close" about that sort of thing - much more so than in the towns on the mainland.