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Dramatic Jigs in Scotland

By J. F. and T. M. Flett

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THE folk dances of Scotland have received comparatively little attention from either the folk-lorist or the student of dancing. Among the few folk dances recorded by folk-lorists, however, there is evident a strong dramatic element which is largely absent from the folk dances of England. We may mention here particularly the famous " Cailleach an Dùdain " (" The Old Woman of the Mill-dust "), recorded by several writers, which is a short dramatic interlude performed to music. A number of such dances are mentioned in early nineteenth century books on Scotland, but none of these have come to the notice of modern writers. Since such dances were clearly once a prominent feature of folk-entertainments in Scotland, it seems worth while to collect such information as we have about them, and this is the principal purpose of this paper.

It is well known that it is difficult in unsophisticated societies to draw a precise line between drama and dance. This is very much the case in this field, and we do not attempt to discriminate too precisely. The examples which we give therefore range from dances in which miming plays a very small part to purely dramatic interludes without music or dance.

For want of a recognised name, we shall call these dances and interludes dramatic jigs ; the reasons for this choice of name will appear later.

Most of the known Scottish examples of dramatic jigs come from the Highlands and Islands, and here there are two different types of jig. The first type is that where the jig is primarily a social dance in which miming occurs. The miming here would probably only occur where the dance was being performed to a dance-song, the actions of the dancers being suited to the words of the song. This relation of mime to the use of dance-song is very clearly described by Adam Smith, the author of *The Wealth of Nations*, in an essay published posthumously in 1795 :[1]

" In the country it frequently happens, that a company of young people take a fancy to dance, though they have neither fiddler nor piper to dance to. A lady undertakes to sing while the rest of the company dance : in most cases she sings the notes only, without the words, and

[1] *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, London, 1795.

then the voice being little more than a musical instrument, the dance is performed in the usual way, without any imitation. But if she sings the words, and if in those words there happens to be somewhat more than ordinary spirit and humour, immediately all the company, especially all the best dancers, and all those who dance most at their ease, become more or less pantomimes, and by their gestures and motions express, as well as they can, the meaning and story of the song. This would be still more the case, if the same person both danced and sung."

Adam Smith was born in Kirkcaldy in Fife in 1723, but it is not clear from the context of this passage whether it refers to his native Lowlands or to the Highlands. It seems probable, however, that it would hold wherever dance-songs were used.

It is unlikely that many jigs of this type can have come down to us traditionally, because the miming would obviously have been impromptu. We do, however, have a few dances which seem to be of this type. Two of them were performed to a well known dance-song " Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha " (" The Reel of the Blackcocks "), a rough translation of the first verse being

> " Reeled the blackcocks, and danced the ducks
> Reeled the blackcocks, on the bank up there."[2]

One of these two dances is a Reel for two couples which we recovered from an old piper of 88 in Barra.[3] To begin, the two couples face each other, the men on the left of their partners. The man and the lady of one couple go down on one knee, while the other couple set to them with any Reel steps. Then the second couple kneel while the first couple rise to their feet and dance Reel steps. The second couple then rise, and all four join hands in a ring and dance round. This whole sequence is then repeated as often as the dancers please.

Here the miming is of the simplest kind. The kneeling couple represent the ducks, while the couple dancing opposite them are the blackcocks ; and the dance itself is a Reel of the very simplest form.

The second dance performed to this song, also recorded from Barra,[4] is now a children's game, but, like most children's games, was probably once performed by adults. This is a Reel, danced by two boys and two girls. The girls represent the ducks, and crouch on their hunkers, with hands held just in front of their mouths, palms together, to form the

[2] The Gaelic verses are given by MacDonald, *Puirt-a-Beul*, Glasgow, 1901, p. 17. We have given the air in our paper " Some Hebridean Folk Dances ", *J.E.F.D.S.S.*, 7 (1953), 112–27. In the sequel we shall refer to this paper simply as HFD.

[3] A precise description of this dance may be found in HFD, p. 118.

[4] HFD, p. 119.

ducks' beaks. They waddle and hop along, the " beaks " waggling from side to side. The boys, more fortunate, represent the blackcocks, and dance with normal steps.

There seems to have been a convention that a duck may be represented by kneeling or squatting on one's hunkers. We found this again in a version of " Dannsa na Tunnag " (" The Duck's Dance ") which we recorded from Benbecula.[5] This was simply a Foursome Reel in which the setting step used by all four dancers consisted of squatting on the hunkers and shooting out a leg to the side.

Another dance of this type, " The Black Swan "[6] has been collected by Mrs Mary MacNab of Vancouver from the descendants of Scottish emigrants to Canada. This is somewhat similar to the children's version of " Ruidhleadh nan Coileach Dubha " mentioned above. Here the dancers peck each other with their " beaks ", and waggle their tails.

The second type of jig is that which is primarily for the entertainment of onlookers. Several jigs of this type are described by Alexander Campbell,[7] well known for his collection of Highland music published under the title of *Albyn's Anthology*. Campbell was born in 1764 near Loch Lubnaig in Perthshire, and his account probably refers to the Perthshire Highlands *ca.* 1780–90.

Of the jigs described by Campbell, most seem to have had their appropriate dance-song, the miming being suited to the words of the song. Sometimes the dancer both sang and danced. This was for instance the case in " a' Chreig Léith " (" The Grey Rock ") which was performed by a man dressed as a rustic labourer, carrying a flaughter spade (the spade used for removing the turf from the peat-bed). As he danced, he sang of how he fared in his day's work. Two verses of this song have been preserved :[8]

" Siòr-bhuain cùlaig,
Siòr-bhuain cùlaig,
Siòr-bhuain cùlaig,
Air a' Chreig Léith.

Thusa 'g a gearradh,
Mise 'g a rùsgadh,
Siòr-bhuain cùlaig,
Air a' Chreig Léith."

[5] HFD, p. 119. A similar dance was recorded from Bernera by MacLagan, *The Games and Diversions of Argyleshire*, London, 1901, p. 102.
[6] This is the translation of the original Gaelic name given to us by Mrs. MacNab.
[7] *The Grampians Desolate*, Edinburgh, 1804, pp. 257–70.
[8] Sinton, *The Poetry of Badenoch*, Inverness, 1906, pp. 4, 360. There is also a tune entitled " The Flaughter Spade " in the MacFarlan MSS., *ca.* 1740.

Dr Sinton has rendered the verses in English :

Aye cutting hearth-turf,[9]
Well cutting hearth-turf,
Aye cutting hearth-turf,
On the Grey Rock.

You at the cutting,
I at the turning,
Aye cutting hearth-turf,
On the Grey Rock.

The Grey Rock referred to here has been identified by Dr Sinton as one near Kinloch-laggan.

Similar mimes were performed by women, portraying the characters described in various dance-songs. One of the dance-songs named by Campbell as having been used for this type of dance was " An t' sean Ruga Mhòr " (" The big old termagant "). This song belongs to Strathardle, and the story which it told has been preserved.[10]

The " heroine " was a huge muscular half-witted dame of the Fergussons of Dounie. Having heard that some of her kinsfolk in Glenshee had been ill-treated by some of their neighbours, led by a man M'Combie from Dalmunzie, she set off by Dounie Burn, past Ashintully Castle, and up the glen to the great hill and pass of Burroch. Descending on Glenshee, she reached Dalmunzie, and took M'Combie unawares. She caught him and handled him so roughly that she nearly shook the life out of him, finally leaving him senseless in a pool of dirty water on his own farm midden. When he recovered, he left the district, and made his home in Aberdeenshire.

It is easy to visualise the miming here—the old Ruga Mhòr striding up the Burroch, and then catching the offending M'Combie.

Another of the characters assumed was that of a housekeeper. Campbell describes the performance as follows :

" The person who dances is dressed in a very grotesque stile, having a huge bunch of keys hanging by her apron-string, and a staff to support her, for she affects to be very stiff, and lame of one leg. When the tune strikes up, she appears hardly able to hobble on the floor ; by degrees, however, she gets on a bit, and as she begins to warm, she feels new

[9] The hearth-turf was a large piece of poor quality peat placed at the back of the fire.

[10] Fergusson, " Sketches of the early history, legends, and traditions of Strathardle and its glens", *Trans. Gaelic Soc. Inverness*, 21 (1896–7), 69–105. Fergusson gives a few of the Gaelic verses of the song, but most of the verses were too indelicate to be published.

animation, and capers away at a great rate, striking her pockets, and making her keys rattle; then affecting great importance as keeper of the good things of the store-room, ambry, and dairy."

Another jig described by Campbell is " Dannsa an Chleoca " (" The Cloak Dance "). This

" is performed by one person (supposed to be a young gentleman who is returned from his travels abroad) attended by his manservant. The young laird comes in, as if newly arrived, looks round the company with seeming wonder, and after rambling through the apartment while the tune is playing, he all at once stops, throws off his mantle, plaid, or cloak, and away his staff, affecting at the same time considerable emotion; his servant, who is by, picks up the cloak and staff, and puts on the one, and places the other in his hand, endeavouring at the same time to quiet his master, who seems to be pacified, and foots it away again to the same tune, till he tires, and throws away his mantle and staff again; which his man takes up, and presents them as before; repeating the same several times, till at last the servant recollecting that he has a letter, he pulls it out of his pocket, and offers it to his young master, who says he is unable to read, owing to a phlegmon on his posteriors, which marvellously affects his eyesight! and that * * * "

The miming of this interlude now seems rather pointless, but the audience doubtless knew the full story and could fill in the gaps.

The remaining jig mentioned by Campbell, " Crait an Dreathan " (" The Wren's Croft ") is somewhat different in structure, being in the form of a narrative interspersed with dancing. The performer tells the audience of his struggles to work his farm. " I was formerly the farmer of the Wren's Croft; and if I was, indeed it was very difficult to labour; it was wild, balky, stony, cairney, and the furrow ill to clear; yet difficult as it was, I laboured it."[11] At the end of this passage he turns with an imperative " Strike up! " to the piper or fiddler, and dances a step to the appropriate tune. Then he continues his story of how he was conscripted into the army and taken to the battle of Bothwell Brig, but avoided the battle by hiding in a thorn tree. At appropriate points of his story he commands the musician to strike up, and performs another step of the dance. Finally he tells of his return home. " When I came home, my own brunette Flora made this tartan here; and she put the red into the heart of the blue, and the blue into the heart of the green, and a clue of black at the end, and I wear it as you now see " (here displaying his plaid, hose, etc.).

Such miming as was present in this was of the very simplest character. The jig is of interest, however, in showing how dance was associated

[11] Campbell gives the original Gaelic, with an English translation.

even with plain narrative. Some indication of the age of this example is furnished by the reference to the battle of Bothwell Brig, which took place in 1679.

Jigs of this second type, designed for the entertainment of onlookers, were not confined to the Highlands, two having been recorded from the Lowlands. The first reference to these two jigs, " The Wooing of the Maiden " and " Auld Glenae ", occurs in a note written by Riddell of Glenriddell in his copy of the *Scots Musical Museum*. " I have seen an interlude (acted at a wedding) to this tune [' Galloway Tam '] called ' The Wooing of the Maiden '. These entertainments are now much worn out in this part of Scotland. Two are still retained in Nithsdale, viz.: ' Silly pure auld Glenae ' and this one, ' The wooing of the maiden '."[12]

It is clear from this remark that such dramatic interludes were once a popular entertainment at festive gatherings in the Border countryside.

We know nothing further about " The Wooing of the Maiden ", but we have two excellent descriptions of " Auld Glenae ", one in a note in Cromek's *Reliques*,[13] the other in *Blackwood's Magazine*.[14]

" Auld Glenae "[15] was supposed to be an old beggar. He appeared in the middle of the festivities at a kirn or a wedding, asking for shelter for the night. He was dressed in a ragged plaid or overcoat, a straw rope for a belt. His face was disguised to simulate wretched old age, and his grey hair—a wig of carded tow—flowed from beneath his ancient bonnet. He walked with the aid of a staff, and was bent almost double with the load of his years.

The owner of the house asked him what he could do in return for a

[12] Dick, *The Songs of Robert Burns*, London, 1903, p. 421. Riddell's copy of the *Museum* was interleaved, and on these interleaved pages Burns, Riddell, and others, wrote a number of notes on the songs in the collection. Cromek printed these notes in his *Reliques of Robert Burns*, London, 1808, attributing them all to Burns, and sometimes garbling them. In addition, Cromek printed a number of notes, which he attributed to Burns, but which are not in the interleaved *Museum* at all. These were probably supplied by Allan Cunningham. Shortly after the publication of Cromek's *Reliques*, the interleaved *Museum* disappeared, and was not recovered until 1902. The notes printed by Cromek as being the work of Burns have consequently been accepted as genuine by all nineteenth-century editors of Burns' works.

[13] *Reliques*, p. 253. This is one of the spurious notes not in the interleaved *Museum* (see Dick, *Notes on Scottish Song by Robert Burns*, London, 1908).

[14] *Blackwood's Magazine*, 8 (1820–1), 405–11. The account given here is taken mainly from this, one or two details having been filled in from the note in the *Reliques*. " Auld Glenae " is also mentioned in Cromek's *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song*, London, 1810, pp. 121–2, and in a poem " The Harvest Home " in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 9 (1821), 318–28.

[15] Glenae is the valley of the River Ae, which runs into the Annan between Lockerbie and Dumfries.

night's lodgings. A variety of tasks was offered, but each was turned down for some reason or other. Could he comb wool, for instance? But "Auld Glenae" had sworn not to touch wool since "only for touching some ance or twice, in my daffin, the hem o' an woollen garment, I had to endure . . . rebuke and scorn afore a hale congregation".

After every task offered had been rejected in similar vein, "Auld Glenae" was told that he must do something to purchase his supper. He thereupon offered to sing; the fiddler struck up the appropriate tune, and, laying aside his bonnet, the old beggar began to sing:

"I am a silly auld man, gaun hirpling over a tree;
And fain would I wooe a young lass, gin the kirk would let me be.
For if a' my duds would grow into cozie hawslock[16] claithing,
O, I could wooe a young lass as weel as the wisest breathing."[17]

As he proceeded with his song,

"his voice, at first trembling and weak, and interrupted by painful coughing, waxed stronger and stronger; and ere it reached the third verse, it was as loud and sonorous as the note of a Cameronian precentor, when three acres of believers, on a hill side, call for his deepest and fullest note. Kindling too, as it seemed, with the progress of the rhyme, and the instrumental accompaniments, and forgetting the infirmities of years, he proceeded to dance a wild kind of hornpipe . . . some powerful punch, ministered by a willing maiden or two; and which he imbibed without any manifest interruption to his labours, seemed completely to intoxicate the dramatist; in the last verse, he reeled and fell, and extended as he was on the floor, his heels, and staff, and head, beat audible time, and the song was completed amid inextinguishable laughter."

We know of only three traditional jigs of this second type which still survive today, one of them in an incomplete form. All belong to the Highlands.

One, "The Fiery Cross", has been collected by Mrs MacNab of Vancouver from an emigrant from the Highlands. We know only a rough outline of this, but it seems of considerable interest. Three people take part, two men and a boy. One of the men is supposed to belong to a clan which is being attacked, and he is taking the fiery cross round

[16] That is, made from the wool on the neck of a sheep, which gives the finest and softest yarn.

[17] Various versions of this song "Gin the Kirk wad let me be", are known, the earliest being that in Herd's collection of 1776 (ii, p. 224). A tune of this name occurs in the Guthrie MS. of *ca.* 1670, and in many later collections. It was used for the ballad "Fy, let us a' to the bridal" in *Orpheus Caledonius*, 1725, and is better known today under this name. It also appears in the first volume of Walsh's *Caledonian Country Dances*, London, 1733, under the name of "Silly old man", a title which seems appropriate to the character of "Auld Glenae".

the countryside to rouse his kinsfolk. He is accompanied by the boy, supposed to be his son. On the way they meet the second man, who is a member of the attacking party. The father passes the fiery cross behind his back to his son, who runs off with it. He then goes up to the enemy, and tells him that he is an itinerant dancing-teacher. He shows off his most elaborate steps in front of the man, finally convinces him, and is allowed to pass. As soon as he is past, he draws his dirk and attacks the enemy. There is a fight, and the enemy is killed.

The " fiery cross " which the father carried was described to us by Mrs MacNab as having the shape of a sword, about two feet long, with a simple cross-piece for a hilt, not as big as a broadsword, and bigger than a dirk. It is interesting to compare this description with that of the fiery cross which Simon Lovat sent round his clan during the '45.[18]

The second jig which still survives is the famous " Cailleach an Dùdain " (" The Old Woman of the Mill-dust "). There are various accounts of this dance, but perhaps the best is that in a MS. written by the late Father Allan MacDonald,[19] now in the possession of the Right Reverend Kenneth Grant, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, to whom we are indebted for permission to reproduce it here. Father Allan's description, which probably refers to Eriskay in the late nineteenth century, is as follows :

" Two take part in the dance—an old man and an old trembling shivering hag (a man dressed in punch attire does her part). The old hag comes in trembling and quivering with a stick in her hand and her husband similarly armed. They fight with the sticks—dancing all the time. Finally the old man thrusts his stick into her body and she falls down dead. The old man beats his hands and howls most atrociously as it occurs to him that he has murdered the old woman. The sudden change from anger and animosity to broken-heartedness for the loss of his partner in life is ridiculous. He bends down over her only to find

[18] This description does not seem to be well known, and it may therefore be worth while to give the passage in full : " . . . it was a long stick, with some sticks across the end ; which cross sticks were fired at each end, and then extinguished : . . . a man carried the fiery cross, from the place where it was made, to the next house or town, and delivered it to another, mentioning the place from whence he came ; that that other delivered to a third ; and so it was conveyed from place to place round the whole lands : And that by this it was understood, that all the men in the different places through which the fiery cross passed, were to assemble directly at the place it came from, without asking question." Testimony of Hugh Fraser younger of Dunballoch at the trial of Simon Lovat, *Scots Magazine*, 9 (1747), 109. Hugh Fraser actually saw the cross carried through his father's lands.

[19] First published in HFD, p. 115. Other descriptions are given by Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, i, p. 208 ; Neil Munro, *Children of the Tempest*, Edinburgh, 1923, p. 20 ; Alford and Gallop, *The Traditional Dance*, London, 1935, p. 35 ; Milligan and MacLennan, *Dances of Scotland*, London, 1950, p. 8.

out more surely that she is dead. The lamentation is heartrending. Again and again he bends over her and again his sorrow is only intensified. He bends down again and touches her boot and the foot rises a little and quivers away most singularly. The old man regains a little confidence. He bends down again and touches the other foot, and it too begins to shake incessantly. At these signs of returning life he bursts out into hysterical laughter. He touches the hands one by one. They too begin to quiver. The old carlin stretched out on the floor with her two feet and two hands quivering looks ridiculous to a degree and the spectators nearly drown the piper with their uproar. The old man then bends down and touches her hair and up she springs with renewed life and they both rush into each other's arms most gleefully."

The dance seems normally to have been performed to the pipes, but there was also a dance-song which could be used—evidently to be sung by the husband as he belabours his wife :[20]

Chailleach an dùdain, cum do dheireadh rium!
[Old woman of the mill-dust, keep thy rear to me!]

There is a ritual element in this jig which makes it unique among all the Scottish dramatic jigs of which we have a record. The man-woman, and the death and resurrection, are features of many ritual performances elsewhere. The reference to mill-dust is an indication that at one time the cailleach may have been disguised by blackening her face. For the mill-dust, or *dùdain*, is the dark dust from a small variety of oats which now seems to be grown only in the Isles. When these oats are threshed with the flail, this dust makes the thresher's face quite black. In spite of the ritual element, however, the dance seems (at least latterly) to have been for entertainment only.

This jig was the only one of the old Gaelic dances which we had strong hopes of recovering when we visited the Isles in 1953, for we felt that its ritual element might make it more likely to be preserved than a social dance.[21] Surely enough, we found that it was not forgotten, and

[20] See HFD, p. 116.

[21] It might perhaps be of interest to mention how we came to search for these old Gaelic dances. When we made our first visit to the Isles, we had already spent a considerable time researching into the history of Scotland's dances. In various books we had encountered a number of names of dances, once common in the Highlands and Islands, but now (according to the writers concerned) " forgotten ". Such descriptions of the dances as were given in these books were too brief to be of any real value, and in many cases only the names were mentioned. We hoped during our visit to discover whether any traces of these " forgotten " dances still existed. We found in fact that although the dances were long out of use, they were by no means forgotten, and, once we had discovered this, we spent every moment of our visit seeking out the older people and questioning them about dances. Here our list of " forgotten " dances, the product of our earlier research, was absolutely invaluable in stirring the memories

although we obtained only an incomplete version, we were able to learn the simple step used, and to record the tune.

We recovered it from Angus John MacLellan, a 70–year–old crofter in Benbecula.[22] Mr MacLellan had often seen his father (a noted source of old lore) and a friend perform it in the kitchen of his own home. In his version, which " is not a dance really, but a sort of a play ", the death and resurrection have been forgotten. Two men dance it, one dressed as a cailleach, with a coat and skirt, and wearing a shawl round her head, the other representing the cailleach's husband. The cailleach is extremely fond of whisky, and her husband often comes home from work only to find her missing—out drinking in some inn. The dance portrays such an occasion.

The husband comes into the kitchen, stick in hand, and dances round, seeking his wife. The cailleach now enters, leaning on a stick and " shaking all over with fear and the effects of drink ", and her enraged husband dances round her, beating her with his stick. She makes no attempt to defend herself, and finally he kicks her on her posterior, and she falls over. She lies on the floor, shaking all over, while her husband dances round her. Finally he kicks her to her feet, and chases her from the room.

Although the death and resurrection have here been forgotten, the peculiar quivering of the cailleach when she is lying on the floor has still been retained. Whilst he was telling us of the dance, Mr MacLellan leant back in his chair and demonstrated this to us; a memorable moment to see the cailleach resurrected after fifty-five years of sleep!

Traditionally the dance seems to belong to N. and S. Uist, Benbecula, and (possibly) Eriskay. We have not met anyone on Barra who has ever heard of it.

In spite of the striking nature of this jig, it seems to have escaped notice until about 1900. The tune " Cailleach an dùdain " was recorded very early, and is in the MacFarlan MS. of *ca.* 1740. We should mention also that in 1841, at almost the last of the great Highland piping and dancing competitions held in Edinburgh by the Highland Society, two

of people who had last seen or performed these dances over fifty years ago. Without this list, our task would have been very much more difficult.

In spite of their obvious interest to the folk-lorist and the student of Scotland's dances, very little attempt seems to have been made to collect these old dances, and indeed we seem to have been the first people ever to try to do so.

[22] As an indication of how little interest is shown in these dances today, we may mention that Mr. MacLellan's wife had never heard him talk of " Cailleach an Dùdain ", and in fact had never heard of it until we asked him about it in her presence.

men performed a comic Dirk Dance. The only essential difference between this dance and " Cailleach an Dùdain " was the absence of a disguise. The fight, the death, and the curious quivering resurrection, are all present. The two men were John MacBeth, piper to the Highland Society of London, and John Thomson, piper to MacAlister of Torrisdale (in Kintyre).[23] Unfortunately we do not know whether either dancer belonged to the Isles.

The third surviving jig is " Marbhadh na Béiste Duibhe " (" The Killing of the Otter "). This is purely dramatic with neither music nor dance. We first found it on the Isle of Eigg, where, as far as we know, it is still performed. The Eigg version is as follows :[24]

It is performed by two men. The otter is represented by a cushion for which one of the men provides the animation. The other man is the hunter and is armed with a stick or cudgel. The first man takes the cushion and, kneeling down behind the table (or other suitable piece of furniture), makes the otter poke its head (a corner of the cushion) out beyond the table leg, the head turning from side to side as the otter looks round for signs of danger. The hunter now stalks the otter, creeping along on all fours until he is within striking distance of it. He tries to hit it with the cudgel, but the otter draws back its head just in time. The otter now reappears, poking its head out from behind another piece of furniture, and again the hunter stalks it. But again the otter withdraws its head just as the cudgel descends. This goes on until eventually the hunter succeeds in stunning the otter, at which stage the first man retires. The hunter, thinking the otter dead, examines the " carcase " in great glee. Then, picking it up by the tail (the corner of the cushion opposite to its head), he swings it over his right shoulder and walks off. The otter, however, almost immediately comes to its senses, and " bites " him on the buttock. The hunter screams, drops the otter, clutches the painful portion of his anatomy, and falls backward —on the otter. He rises, and gives the otter several heavy blows on the head with his cudgel, really killing it. Then he swings it over his shoulder and walks off in triumph!

We were told on Eigg that this jig was brought there about a hundred years ago from the Strathaird district of Skye, but we could find no trace of it there. Since then we have found that it was performed in Moidart until about twenty years ago. There it was performed by one man only, the otter (a piece of oilcloth, stuffed with straw) being just placed

[23] MS. records of the competitions. See an article by us " Some early Highland dancing competitions ", to appear shortly in the *Aberdeen University Review*.

[24] HFD, p. 125.

on the ground at the beginning of the jig. The conclusion of the Moidart version was exactly as in Eigg. We have not met this jig anywhere other than Eigg and Moidart.[25]

The place which these dramatic jigs held in the social life of former days can best be understood by going back to mediaeval times. We must rely here largely on our knowledge of the social pastimes of England, for the Scottish records of the period are not very informative on this subject. We have little doubt, however, that conditions in the two countries were very similar.

In England, the records show that in mediaeval times there was a great variety of sports and pastimes in use on festive occasions, by all classes of society. At casual gatherings, on the green in summer, or round the fire on a winter's evening, there was doubtless ordinary social dancing and those pastimes which have come down to us as children's games. At more organised festivities, on occasions for general rejoicing, such as a wedding or a harvest kirn or during one of the great Festivals, pagan or Christian, we find not only these, but also more special performances, such as a morris dance, a sword dance, a dramatic representation of some simple kind, or comic dances and songs by one or two characters.

During the Middle Ages, it was normal for dancing to be accompanied by song. This custom was declining by about 1500, when instrumental music was coming into use, particularly among the upper classes, but for another century at least the union of song and dance remained a living and creative force. We have seen in the various jigs described in this paper how the union of song and dance led naturally to the introduction of mime, and this was presumably true also in mediaeval times.

These special performances, whether of ritual dance or simple dramatic entertainment, call for the existence of a special group of entertainers, representing the talent of the community, and there is substantial evidence to indicate the existence of such groups in England in the Middle Ages.

These semi-professional folk-entertainments combining song and dance were taken up by professional actors, and led to the development of a definite type of dramatic performance, the stage jig. The typical stage jig, of which a few examples have been preserved, was an afterpiece to

[25] A friend, Dr. Frank Rhodes, tells us that the name of this jig has become a stock comment on any amusing occurrence among one family in S. Uist. When anything funny and a little out of the ordinary happens in their household, they comment " Ah, Marbhadh na Béiste Duibhe ". They have, however, no idea where the saying originated.

a play, in the form of a brief farce which was sung and accompanied by dancing.[26] Such jigs were in vogue during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and there can be little doubt that they were a development of folk entertainments of a kind very similar to the dramatic jigs described in this paper.

To sum up then, it seems likely that in the various jigs which we have described here, we have late survivors of the folk drama current in the Middle Ages, which gave rise to the stage jig of Elizabethan times. If this conjecture is correct, then the interest of those still performed traditionally is very great indeed. We can only wonder whether any others still survive.

[26] For a discussion of the stage jig and its folk background, see Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig*, Chicago, 1929.