

## ABOUT OUR DANCES

### Intinerant Teacher, 1896—

By ALICE FREARSON of Barrow-in-Furness

Childhood recollections sent in response to the article by J. F. and T. M. Flett in *English Dance and Song*, November/December, 1956.

**W**HEN my sister and I were tiny we attended a dancing class taken by an itinerant teacher called Robinson. His home was at Lakeside and he travelled to the country districts of the Furness area accompanying his teaching by the fiddle. His mode of transport was by horse and trap, train or on foot.

He taught step dancing and ballroom dancing. The dances taught included : (a) Clog dances (and the clogs were of wood, painted bright red or blue) ; (b) Tambourine dances ; (c) Skirt dances (skirts made of butter muslin 15 yards wide) ; (d) Hoop dances (wooden hoop, with step dances performed as hoop was turned over the head) ; (e) Highland Fling (in costume) ; (f) Garland dances (similar to Ribbon Dance or Butterfly Hornpipe)—these garlands had a hook on the end and were carried by each dancer then attached to the back of a yoke on the Queen and acted as her train in the (g) Processional dance which was used as the Grand Finale. Usually these garlands were made of paper flowers and in many lovely colours. My sister when three years old was the Queen and she was accompanied by a boy of three who was the King and wore a crown.

A ball was given to end the season and this opened with a Grand March round the room, and ended as stated above with the Processional.

Individual steps were taught to each dancer who had to practise these at home and then was tested at the next class. If a mistake was made a tap on the head was given by the master with his violin bow and this was looked upon as a great disgrace.

We had an older sister of eleven who excelled as a step dancer and she was supposed to go from our village of Broughton-in-Furness to Althurside (about two miles and all up hill) to demonstrate the steps, then walk back. Nearly all step dances were ended by a single or double shuffle.

The traditional dances like Circassian Circle (both parts), Triumph, Sir Roger and certain longways dances were always included in the programme and Quadrilles, Lancers, Schottische, etc., were also taken. "Heel, toe, one-two-three" was always taught with a hop.

As we were sent to the day school at the age of three we were used to being taught so young.

A.F.

It should be noted that Miss Frearson's dancing-teacher taught longways country dances in addition to the more usual ballroom dances of his time. This would seem to indicate that we owe at least some of the longways dances still surviving in the north of England to professional dancing-masters, and that such dances are survivals from the polite ballroom rather than true folk dances.

The fact that such teachers as Mr. Robinson existed in England emphasizes once again the fundamental similarity between dancing in England and the south of Scotland, a similarity which has been obscured in recent years by the activities of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society. Mr. Robinson's repertoire of step dances is strikingly similar to those of teachers whom we have met in Galloway and Fife.

J.F. and T.M.F.

Apropos of "true folk dances" it is interesting to read Thomas Hardy's views which are given in two articles in the Society's Library: in *E.F.D.S. News*, No. 12, Sept., 1926, and in the *E.F.D.S. Journal*, 2nd Series, No. 1, 1927.

S.J.

## ***From Our Postbag . . .***

### **A Playford Club ?**

*From* ERIC HOPE, 23 Stanhope Road, Highgate, London, N.6.

One hesitates to join issue with Miss Joan Sharp as to what might have been Cecil Sharp's reaction to the present policy of the E.F.D.S.S. with regard to the relative merits of Playford and traditional dances. But surely the music of the Playford dances held a great attraction for Cecil Sharp, as it does for many of us to-day; and it is largely the absence of this music and the predominance of the vulgar and monotonous jog-trot of many traditional tunes that frequently keeps me, at any rate, away from Cecil Sharp House. One is grateful for the monthly Playford evenings, but even these, superbly conducted as they are by Mrs. Thora Jacques, can, by reason of their impromptu nature, yield only a fraction of the enjoyment to be derived from these dances when performed by a thoroughly competent team of well-matched dancers.

Is it quite impossible that a small section within the Society might be formed for the practice and performance of Playford dances by those whose tastes lie in this direction? It would be a pity if Playford enthusiasts were forced to look outside the E.F.D.S.S. for such an opportunity.

THE DIRECTOR *replies* :

Mr. Eric Hope probably doesn't know that in many of the Districts there are County Clubs, which provide meetings for experienced dancers, who come together from different parts of the District. Provision has always existed for the enjoyment of Playford dances under suitable conditions.

I think also that I should remind Mr. Hope that once a month at the Members' "At Home," which is open free to every Member of the Society, a substantial proportion of the programme has always been devoted to Playford and similar dances. Another Monday is provided for the enjoyment by Members of a Country Dance Party, in which the programme is designed to be "mainly Playford."

I shall certainly consider the possibility of a Playford Club, which could meet at regular intervals and will have this provision in mind when arranging the Cecil Sharp House programme for the coming year.