

country dances had already begun to be shaped and fashioned for town use, but the dancing masters were not yet in the ascendant and even by 1651 when Playford published his first collection, and for some years after, he was able to include many of the old rounds, lively set dances and simple longways which bore few signs of sophistication.

The practice of setting some country dances for minuet or rigadon steps was essentially an 18th century intrusion and even then met with little success. The essence of the English country dance form throughout has been its sociability and comparative simplicity, even when the figures became more intricate, and it is this essential quality which still appeals to us to-day without any necessity for being self-conscious.

(Note: The Editor wishes to acknowledge responsibility for the statements to which this letter refers.)

Groups and the Newcomer

"M.C." writes:—

I recently attended a Group Party, one of three in a year, which was fairly well attended but not up to the capacity of the hall, and of those present there was nobody whom I had not seen at similar functions in the past. Also the remark was made that "Groups don't seem to support each other so much now, preferring to stay in their own localities."

This seems to me to point a moral. The Group, as I see it, exists to spread the Society's work, and not to cater just for those already interested. This latter attitude seemed to prevail on this occasion and it was certainly reflected in the programme, there being few dances which would suggest that newcomers would be welcomed, nor was much help given for those without a very extensive knowledge.

My experience as a teacher and M.C. has been that most people's first impact with dancing is through the party. Friends are persuaded to "come and try"; they do, and are conquered, and often bring friends next time. Some will even subsequently join classes. But always there is, or should be, a sprinkling of *ignorami* at the party and the programme must be drawn accordingly, bearing in mind the likes of the experienced and including a few dances "for those who know." And the M.C. should always call instructions during the dance if this is required.

A Group which caters solely for its members seems to be largely wasting its time and heading for extinction, since where does it find its new members?

For those of the Group who do not wish to attend a party "to learn all over again" (a selfish attitude, as their assistance in helping beginners is invaluable) the Group can always stage a Members' Evening at which those present may choose their own programme.

A Broom Dance from Kent

Mr. A. SIMONS of 27 Oaklands Close, Orpington, Kent, writes:—

My interest was aroused by the letter from Miss Marion E. Smart in the August-September issue of the Magazine which mentioned a broom dance she had seen at a wedding in Kent about 20 years ago. Seeing that so few traditional survivals are known in Kent, I wrote to Miss Smart in the hope of further information.

The dancer turned out to be her cousin, Mr. W. G. Brooker, who now lives at Wembley, and from him I have learnt that the dance is done by one of each sex facing each other. ("The female," he says, "has to tuck her skirts up well and to be shyless at showing her legs"). The two broom heads rest on the floor about two feet apart. While the left foot goes over the handle is transferred from the right hand to the left and vice versa. "It is usual," in Mr. Brooker's words, "to start off slowly, then gradually getting up to a real gallop, and to see which one keeps up the longest. There is no special tune, but it is to the dancers to keep it in rhythm. I have done it several times to 'Cock of the North.'"

Mr. Brooker also tells me that he first learnt the dance when he was about ten years old at a family gathering for a wedding at Sutton Chart, near Maidstone. This would be about 50 years ago. It seems to have been handed down in his family and to have been particularly associated with weddings.

Have any other readers crumbs of information which might lead to the discovery of other Kentish survivals?