

FESTIVAL OF THE FOLK-DANCE SOCIETY

Once again the annual festival of the English Folk-Dance Society, at the Royal Albert Hall last night, demonstrated both folklore and fun. Both are to the purpose. It is part of the society's aim to keep alive the country's heritage (very nearly lost till Cecil Sharp rediscovered it) of mummers' plays, intricate clog and sword dances, and the rest of the more exotic and specialised survivals: but it is also important that more young people should be given the chance to see, learn, and enjoy the social dances—the Winstler Gallop, the Virginia Reel, the Circassian Circle, and the rest—which are also part of the inheritance. Square-dance parties nowadays are a feature of the children's Christmas holidays: they are notable both for the enjoyment they provide and for the almost total ignorance of most of the children at these parties about the square or country dances which they are trying to do. If they knew the dances better their enjoyment would be greater still. Thus significant, though not at all conspicuous, items in last night's programme were the two country dances performed by children from a school in Devon. Here was a happy example for other schools to follow.

These festivals are, as a rule, attended by at least one group of dancers from the Continent. The visitors last night were Lei Tambourinaire de Sant Sumian from Brignolles, with their authentically staid Provençal costumes and with, among other dances, a remarkable quadrille for hobby horses; this quadrille ends with a genial mockery of a knightly tournament—two of the hobby horses, armed with gay and

ineffectual little lances, charging each other in the approved Arthurian style. The programme was remarkable, too, for the variety and skill of the sword (or rapper) dancers and of the Morris men. There were, for instance, sword dancers from Yorkshire and Tyneside; there was also an elaborately dressed interpretation of the dirk dance of the King of Man. And the whole programme was sprinkled, as it were, with the Morris men's bells and gay handkerchiefs. Their chief contribution on this occasion was the Manley dance from Cheshire, for which the performers decorate themselves with tall floral crowns; one of the most energetic of the dancers was a grandly bearded gentleman who, apart from his flowers and bright braces, closely resembled Karl Marx.

Two other items should be noted: the little selection of dances given by the team which had represented the Folk-Dance Society on a South African tour last year (a reminder of the Commonwealth's growing interest in the subject); and the Yugoslav dances performed not by a team from the country concerned but by a group of people who have organised these foreign folk-dances here in Britain. The latter was a curiosity—an interesting symptom of which some purists might, perhaps, disapprove. One item, frankly, did not "come off": a reconstruction of a little May Day ceremony in or about an English country house. This may have been a genuine evocation of a custom of yesteryear, but it wore an unfortunately "phoney" look; it seemed just the kind of thing which Mr Douglas Kennedy and his colleagues of the society try so rigorously and so rightly to exclude.

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