

# JOKERS IN THE MORRIS PACK

## Folk Dance Festival

From our London Staff

Of all those who take part in the English Folk Dance Society's show in the Albert Hall, London, the morris men are the most persistent and, in some ways, the most various entertainers. They were, of course, there again last night at this year's festival—to demonstrate, for instance, the relatively familiar Cotswold morris and the unfamiliar morris which used to be performed each "Bower Day" (that is, Whit Monday) in Lichfield. This morris, of course, has its local eccentricities of step and dress, eccentricities based, however, on a very recognisable national pattern.

Scottish dances, too, were particularly conspicuous. Some were provided by a Scottish group which meets in Wallasey to practise. They included two dances from Barra which had been collected from a piper only two years ago. These, like the Lichfield Morris, were evidence that even now, when the legacy bequeathed by Cecil Sharp has been so long and so ardently developed, the society still has work to do in bringing the old, lost folk dances to life again.

But occasionally there are, so to speak, real jokers in the Morris pack; and the oddest of all these are the Coconut Dancers from Britannia, at Bacup, where, for their performance, the men put on a black-moor disguise of darkened faces, dress themselves in barrel skirts over black breeches, and accompany their dance with a tattoo of "nuts" (the tops of cotton bobbins), some of which are fastened to their hands while others are fixed to knee and waist. These Bacup dancers were perhaps the strangest item in last night's show.

The gibe that British, or at least English, folk-dancing is a dead thing is much less frequently heard nowadays when, owing partly to the reimport of our country dances from the United States under the title of "square dancing," so many young people have discovered the pleasure of their patterns and their vigorous rhythms. At all events, the country dances last night, performed by some 300 members of the society's branches, made a pleasant kaleidoscope and were evidently much enjoyed by the performers themselves. Incidentally, they gained much from the prevalence of the bright felt skirts which American square dancing has brought into British fashion. Sword dances from Scotland and from Durham and a clog dance (again from Durham) were also on view, but unfortunately the Spanish dancers from Navarre were unable to attend.