

# FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL

## THE MORRIS

The annual new year festival of folk dancing at the Albert Hall was held last night and will be repeated to-night. The emphasis this year is on morris dancing, of which the tradition has plainly received an accession of strength by teams of young men taking it up all over the country. The Headington team, with the veteran William Kimber playing the concertina for it, provides the link with the past, for it was through Kimber that the tradition was preserved and from which the revival sprang half a century ago.

Country dancing and sword dancing were adequately represented—the former by members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society and the latter by a traditional team from Earsdon in Northumberland. American square dancing, having acclimatized itself here, was shown in a smooth but dashing presentation with Mr. Douglas Kennedy officiating as caller.

There were, as usual, visitors from abroad to provide a foil to the display of our own dances and to attest the universality of a kind of dancing that has its roots deep in time and deep in the hearts of men before they become aware of it as art. But art it is, in the sense that it is doing something well—such as the remarkable step dancing from Devon in which a youth emulated the Cossacks in their special type of dance on the haunches. And even the dances which were not primarily for show but for active participation had enough polish on them to make them into a show.

## DANCERS FROM ZEELAND

This was true not only of our own teams but also of the Dutch dancers from the province of Zeeland, very soberly clad in black and white, who mostly did rather naive courtship dances, some of them in clogs, one with "kleppers," a kind of castanet like our own English bones (which were also played by the Devonians). They use extremes of arm movements from a wide stretch of invitation to hands in pockets, and also some very vigorous swinging movements of the legs in their "Paterje." Our own Playford dances which, though essentially social in character do often contain very beautiful movements to very beautiful tunes, were presented in a slightly stylized form which well suited the purpose of exhibition.

There was some singing of folk songs, not only unaccompanied but in combination with instruments, that have recently attached themselves to the tradition in a way other than that of arrangement for piano. Thus Miss Jean Ritchie sang three songs from the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky to an instrument which she called a dulcimer, but which is more like a guitar gone wrong than a true dulcimer, and Mr. Frank McPeake, of Belfast, ventured on singing to bagpipe accompaniment—not the raucous Scottish variety but a Uilleann pipe which is cousin to the Northumbrian small-pipe.

The "Mayers" of Padstow sang their May Day song to the capers of their fearsome hobby-horse, but the pleasure here was anthropological rather than musical. The appeal as always of these festival performances is mixed and multiple: the folk lore behind them touches our deepest instincts without our awareness of it; the dances make a fine spectacle—the Manley Morris was perhaps the most striking thing in this particular programme; the music, though simple and sometimes rough, has melodic quality and gusto; and the massed dancing releases some form of communal emotion which unites audiences, dancers, and musicians into a fellowship of delight.