

FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL

BRITONS AND DANES

The annual festival given by the English Folk Dance and Song Society at the Albert Hall was held there last night and will be repeated to-night. The visitors from the Continent this year were a team of Danish dancers, but Scotland and Northern Ireland also contributed lavishly to the programme, of which the backbone was English.

It is exactly 50 years since Cecil Sharp first saw the Headington team dance their Morris, and the man who then played the tunes was present last night, still playing "Shepherd's Hey" and "Constant Billy"—William Kimber.

The pageant began with the singing by un-accompanied solo voice of an Epiphany carol and the first dance, communally performed, was appropriately "Selling's Round." Morris and sword dances from the north of England followed—also two kinds of dance new to this festival, a clog dance by Jackie Toaduff, of Durham, and a traditional team dancing the country dance "Morpeth Rant," which has been widely practised by folk-dancers of the revival. One other country dance was noteworthy, "Princess Margaret's Fancy," composed in the traditional style for the society's Patron and danced by her when she visited the society at its home in the summer.

This kind of composing in the tradition, which is not strictly speaking folk-dancing, is much practised in Scotland, and a team from Edinburgh danced a number of such country dances. They also danced true folk-dances from the Highlands, including a Hebridean Lilt, which was a mimetic dance based on the motions involved in the conversion of a fleece into cloth. The Irish dances, though based on traditional steps and figures, have had the natural life drilled out of them and look too professional.

The Danish dances were all of them social dances not unlike our own: their "Hornfeld" had some slight resemblance in its figures to our "Three Meet," but "The Pig Fell and Broke His Hip" was if not exactly mimetic somehow suggestive of a scurry of pigs, in the way the dancers' legs flew out, and produced an amusing effect. There was also a hornpipe and a dance resembling the Lancers, "The Half Chain." Comparative study, however, was more profitably employed upon the solo dances. After the clog dance, right down to earth a Highlander skipped into the air as though he need never alight again. "Shepherd's Hey," neither earthy nor airy, was muscular and moved to and fro; the Irish "Slip Jig" was more like a peg-top in action. It is wonderful how differently two legs can behave under the stress of different national traditions.

Most of the music was provided by violin duets, which is a new and satisfactory form of dance accompaniment. The accordion and concertina have won a place as modern traditional instruments, good for dancing, but they do not blend well with strings, and the band used for the big massed dances was not in consequence right for any occasion outside a village hall, especially as it was rhythmically deficient in the bass. Solo violin, solo voice, solo concertina, solo pipe and tabor, each had its own effectiveness and appeal. The production of the spectacle was this year on rather simpler lines than on some previous occasions when a masque has been compounded of these same ingredients, but, under the practised direction of Mr. Douglas Kennedy, the show, though perhaps not quickening our elemental feelings as these traditional arts sometimes do, was as richly varied, as artistically satisfying, and as spectacular as ever. But in the matter of spectacle the Englishman always has to regret that he has lost his traditional costume and has left only ribbons and baldrics with which to bedeck himself for ritual dancing. The Scot has the better of him in that and did not fail to show it last night.