

ENDLESS VARIETY IN FOLK DANCE

LIMITED THEMES NO HANDICAP

The annual New Year festivals of folk-dance and folk-music which the English Folk Song and Dance Society mount at the Albert Hall are necessarily variations on a limited number of themes.

The three principal traditions of English dance are Morris, sword, and country, and these must always be presented, for they are our own. For contrast Scots, Irish, and dances from somewhere in Europe show their ideas of rhythmic bodily movement.

Last night's performance was the first of three—there are two to-day with slight differences of programme. The visitors this year are a Basque team, Groupè Folklorique du Reveil Basco Bearnais, of Paris, who presented an elaborate sword-dance in which the leader stood on the lock, some less noteworthy female dances with garlands and apples, some sophisticated part-singing which was hitched to tradition by a curious discordant shout at the cadences, and some quite flabbergasting piping—a chromatic octave with double tonguing was obtained from a one-handed pipe such as is used with tabor. Our own massed Morris dancers in a virile demonstration revealed similarities with the Basques and with an unfamiliar form of Irish Morris from Wexford. Flamborough long-sword dance, a Tyneside rapper dance, and Scottish broadswords represented this form of ritual dance. Solo virtuosity was provided by Miss Pat Tracey in a Lancashire clog dance. Northumberland small-pipes (two players) produced some pleasant harmony and the number of folk-dance bands was quite astonishing.

Of the dances which have grown a little way from popular tradition by going up in the social scale the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society provided familiar examples neatly executed—but surely bare feet are wrong in this context?—and Playford's *English Dancing Master* made a welcome appearance, for though its dances may not be folk they are certainly English and employ the same technique. There was none of the brilliance that other nations display in the professional teams they send to us and no more stylization of the dances than enough to make a good floor pattern, but there was ample variety to entertain Princess Margaret, the society's patron, and a contented audience.