

ROLL BACK THE CARPET

I. MADRIGALS

A writer, composer, painter or other creative artist with something to communicate demands mental activity from the consumers. But the only physical activity he expects is that they shall look or listen. A composer of hymns, on the other hand, demands that the consumers get together and do something. He has to remember, too, that hymns are for everyone, though he may also compose anthems "For Choir Only", and madrigals for musical societies.

Like a composer of hymns, a deviser of country dances demands action from the consumers, though he may also make up demonstration dances primarily intended to be looked at. Here are parallels to hymns and anthems. What about madrigals? There have been times in the past when it was common for small groups to meet, as they do now for bridge, and sing madrigals for their own pleasure without an audience (lucky audience?). Madrigal composers of those times had to make the consumers get together and do something.

Analogies can be useful provided they are not taken too far and any deductions made from them are carefully scrutinised, so it is worth pursuing the hymn-country dance analogy a little further. The chief difference, of course, is that hymns are for worship, however much we enjoy singing, while country dances are for enjoyment, however much we worship dancing.

In a recent number of English Dance and Song, the E.F.D.S.S. magazine, Douglas Kennedy wrote that in America the Square Dance was in the doldrums "because the fanatics have, as usual, demanded intricacy and ever more novelty; so the ordinary man and girl have been frozen out." Using the hymn-dance analogy, hymns were being displaced by madrigals.

It is true that no activity can survive without recruits, and many recruits prefer broad roads to straight and narrow paths, but some people see no remedy except to return to the simple and primitive and preserve it in a deep freeze (is freezing in better than freezing out?). They would ban madrigals, not merely from church services, but altogether. They would not allow members of the congregation to join a madrigal society on the grounds that madrigal singing was too difficult for ordinary people and that anyone becoming an expert madrigal singer would despise and take no further part in hymn-singing. (To avoid misleading anyone, I add hastily that I don't believe this is the policy of Douglas Kennedy or of the E.F.D.S.S.)

Scottish Country Dancing in Britain is not in the doldrums. Thanks to the popularity of classes, "Anthems For Choir Only", such as Macdonald of Sleat and Bonny Anne find their way into "congregational" programmes. Demonstration experts enjoy hymn-type dances and take beginners in their stride. But is enough being done about "madrigals"? Do enough groups of eight or so roll back the drawing-room carpet and, not worrying too much what they look like, try out new ideas? Samuel Pepys used to collect his friends to sing the part songs he had composed. Are there many similar gatherings today? If drawing-rooms are too small these days then "senior" as opposed to "advanced" or "demonstration" classes might serve instead.

Scottish Country Dancing has been developing and producing new ideas for several centuries and shows no sign yet of being frozen primitive (anything preserved so that it can't go bad is bad). More ideas are needed from each generation to keep the dancing alive and vigorous. Are there some ideas worth considering and developing even if they are not immediately acceptable to ordinary men and girls or even demonstrators? Here is work for small groups or "senior" classes. They can experiment, rush up blind alleys and back again, formulate and discuss abstract theories about musical stimuli and mobile pattern-making, until some Samuel Pepys develops into a Bach or Beethoven and thus maintains the tradition that the deviser of country dances, even of the "hymn" type, is an artist with something to communicate and not merely a compiler of timetables.

At this point any ordinary man or girl reader, if still reading, will have become restive. They may not know much about choreography, but they know what they like.

As consumers, they are right (as always) and it will do them no harm to believe that dances grow on gooseberry bushes. It is for the providers rather than the consumers that these articles are being written.

Keats made his Grecian Urn tell its consumers, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,— that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." It seems to me that the important word here is "Ye". Keats and the urn-maker must have needed to know a good deal more than that.

2.

NEW FIGURES FROM OLD

In the S.C.D. Books almost every "traditional" dance has at least one 8-bar sequence that does not occur in any of the others. This is mainly because the selection of traditional dances is spread over a long period, full of changes, from Cold and Raw (Playford-1695) to The Dashing White Sergeant (Anderson-1890), and the editors have tried to avoid duplication.

Thomas Wilson (early 1800's) used a much more limited range of figures for his "complete system". He described them all in a book and expected country dancers to know them by name and to perform, without walking through, any dance described by the M.C., whether it was an old favourite or something thought up five minutes before. His instructions for devising dances were to select any sequence of figures which covered the right number of bars and which ensured that each couple went on from where it left off. Compilers of stage-coach timetables may have profited from his advice, but not Wilson himself since he invented a number of new figures of his own.

Scottish country dances devised in the last 30 years have followed the example of the S.C.D. Books rather than the instructions of Thomas Wilson. Almost every dance includes at least one 8-bar sequence that has not been used before. Of course, once a new figure has been introduced it becomes available for inclusion as an 'old' figure together with others dating back beyond Playford. For example, the figure, half reels of four with corners, was, I believe, first invented by Elma Taylor for her dance, The White Rose of Scotland.¹ It has since been included in Eliwyn's Fairy Glen and Mairi's Wedding. Though John Duthie or James Cosh may have re-invented the figure independently, they would have been entitled to abstract it. Dances are copyright, but figures are free for all.

In this series of articles I will describe several figures I have invented myself, though I should not be surprised to hear they had also been invented by others. But it is not to the figures themselves that I wish to call attention so much as the methods of deriving new figures from old ones. So take any old figure, develop a new one from it, roll back the carpet and try it out.

A reel of four can be made to go round.² A revolving reel is actually easier to phrase than a straight one. In a straight reel of four in 8 bars the dancers pass right shoulder on odd bars and left in the middle on even ones. While the two dancers in the middle have to press on to pass left shoulder the other two have to hover or make a wider loop than is strictly necessary. If the reel revolves those "looping" have further to go and those passing left in the middle not so far, which suits everybody.

The reel revolves thus: the four dancers start in a North-South line. 1 and 8 face South and 2 and 4 face North. At the end of the first bar 1 and 2 (and 8 and 4) have passed right shoulder and the axis of the reel has revolved 45 degrees. 2 is at the N.E. end and 8 at the S.W. end. 1 and 4 face each other. On bar 2 these pass left shoulder in the middle. 1 is then facing W. and 4 facing E. The other two dancers loop round, 2 from N.E. to E., 3 from S.W. to W. so that the reel axis has revolved another 45 degrees. The right shoulder on the third bar brings the axis of the reel to S.E.-N.W., with 2 and 3 facing each other, 1 at N.W. and 4 at S.E. The fourth bar brings everyone back to their starting places on the floor. This is half the reel, whose axis has revolved from N.-S. to S.-N. The dancers cover exactly the same (kidney-shaped) routes to complete the reel.

Reels can intersect.³ In Miss Nancy Frowns 1st couple, from top place, cross to below 2nd, cast off round 3rd, lead up, cross back to their own sides and cast off into 2nd place. If 1st couple started from 2nd place and went straight across, but otherwise imitated this movement the two routes would be intersecting figures of eight. Let the other four dancers join in (2nd couple begin by casting off and 3rd by leading up and crossing over) and we have two intersecting reels of three.

Reels of four can be made to intersect too. They do in one of the strathspey figures of James Cosh's Bonny Glenshee. In quick time it may be easier to make them intersect if they also revolve.⁴ Roll back the carpet and try.

1 The dance was given in The Reel No. 19, of June 1954, but the figure had, with Miss Taylor's permission, been described in We agree to differ in The Reel No.7, of June 1952.

2 In Belhaven.

3 In Greenwich Hill.

4 In Belhaven.

3.

MORE NEW REELS

As I have shown, reels of four can revolve and any reels can intersect. Now I will show reels of three going at half speed, taking on ballast, and travelling crabwise. I shall not advocate a reel in a vertical plane, with dancers going alternately over and under, as this would require more elevation than is seemly in Scottish country dancing.

Reels can be for any number of dancers starting in a straight line and facing alternately in opposite directions. In a reel of four the four dancers, passing or "looping" on each bar take 8 bars to get back to their starting places. A reel of eight would take 16 bars. By this reckoning a reel of three would take 6 bars: on each bar two dancers would be passing shoulder to shoulder and the third looping.

The reel could be done at half speed if the dancers took hands-and 2 bars-to pass, and set on the loop. Here is a very simple figure: half a reel of three in 6 bars.¹ 1st, 2nd and 3rd couples are in their starting places. 1st and 2nd man change places giving right hands, 1st and 2nd women do so giving left hands, while 3rd couple set to each other (2 bars). 1st and 3rd change places, men giving left hands and women right, while 2nd couple set (2 bars). 2nd and 3rd change, men giving right hands and women left, while 1st couple set (2 bars-total: 6 bars).

When a reel of three is danced in 8 bars instead of 6 it would be possible to keep the pattern of two dancers passing while the third looped if each pass or loop took a bar and a third. If this strict phrasing were kept in the reels across the dance in The Montgomeries' Rant 2nd man would get to the centre a bar and a third before 3rd man. As it looks better for 2nd and 3rd men (and women) to cover with each other, each reel of three really becomes a figure of eight for two plus one. 2nd couple dance a figure of eight, much as in Corn Rigs. Neither of them goes through the dead centre of the eight: they pass shoulder to shoulder just each side of it at the end of bar 2 (by doing the same, 3rd couple keep the covering). Meanwhile 1st woman dances a figure of eight more or less independently, with no-one to balance her in the way 2nd couple balance each other. Why shouldn't she be balanced? Two plus one equals four minus one. Why not a figure of eight for four?

Start with 1st and 2nd couples in their original places.² 1st couple dance a figure of eight, as in Corn Rigs (to begin they cross to 2nd couple's places), but 2nd couple don't stand still. They also dance a figure of eight, beginning by casting up. For courtesy, and to avoid confusion, women have the precedence, as in Corn Rigs: each woman goes below her partner as they cross. All end where they started.

A reel of three cannot be made to revolve about its centre because, when looping, the dancers face in the same direction. But it can be made to move crabwise if the dancers loop a little wider than usual and, when passing, veer slightly in the direction desired. Here is a suggestion, "Crab Reels", for the ending of a 32-bar dance. The positions at bar 17 are: 1st couple in 2nd place, 2nd at top, 3rd in 3rd, all on the 'wrong' sides. The three on each side dance two reels of three in succession, each of 8 bars. To begin the reels, 1st and 2nd woman pass right shoulder, as do 1st and 3rd men. At some point, bar 20 I should guess, the reels start moving crabwise across the

dance to their own sides. At the end of bar 24 they pass through each other. I think all the dancers pass their partners left shoulder. Or do 1st couple pass right shoulder? Roll back the carpet and try.

1 Similar figure in Jig wi' the Snap.

2 Similar to figures in Curlywee, The Rhinne of Kells, etc.

4.

GRAFTING

The last two articles showed various ways in which a new figure could be evolved as a result of analysing, dissecting and reconstructing an old one. A new figure can also be produced by grafting two old ones together.

By grafting I mean more than joining. I would classify as a graft the figure that begins The Duke of Atholl's Reel, – set, right hands across half round, set, left hands across back again. I would say the figure in bars 17-24 of the same dance – cross, cast off and half figure of eight – had its components joined rather than grafted.

There are plenty of grafts in the S.C.D. Books. Most of them consist of interpolating something, usually setting, between two parts of a figure. Examples: set, six hands half round repeat (Strathglass House); set, half right and left, repeat (Jenny's Bawbee). There are also the charming interpolated settings in Lady Mary Menzies' Reel and the settings between hand-givings in the rights and lefts in Because he was a Bonny Lad. For an elementary course in grafting by interpolation the serious student may examine Miss Murray of Ochertyre (1-8), The Machine Without Horses (1-16) Miss Caboon's Reel (1-16), Kenmure's on and awa' (1-16), Calver Lodge (1-16), Keppoch's Rant (1-8), Donald Bane (9-16), Campbell's Frolic (1-16), Captain MacBean's Reel (1-16) and The Maid of the Mill (25-40).

It might also be considered a graft rather than a join when half of one figure is used to get somewhere and half another to get back again: four hands round to the left, back with left hands across (La Tempete); right hands across half round, back with a half poussette (St. Patrick's Day).

Here are some grafting suggestions which, for all I know, may be new.

Cross and half circle¹: 1st and 2nd couples are in their starting places. They cross, giving right hands to partners, form a circle and go half round to the left. This is half the figure, but it would suffice if a four-bar progression was needed. The second half is the same except that the dancers cross giving left hands and circle half round to the right. This looks very effective in slow time and is, I think, possible also in quick time. In the latter case the skip-change on bar 2 becomes almost indistinguishable from two slip-steps, but on the way back there are definitely two skip-change and four slip-steps.

The movement can be developed into a three-couple figure in at least two ways, both of which could be used for the final movement of a strathspey. The first takes 8 bars.² 1st couple are in 2nd place, 'wrong' sides; 2nd in top, 3rd in 3rd, both on own sides. There is a half Grand Chain

(4 bars): to begin, 2nd face across, 1st down, 3rd up. The three hands of the chain take three bars and on the fourth the women twirl round to their right and the six form a circle. They dance half round to the left (2 bars), then 1st couple cross to own sides (2 bars).

The second ending takes only 4 bars.³ 1st couple are in 2nd place, 2nd in 3rd, 3rd at top, all on own sides. All cross, giving right hand to partners and form a circle (1st couple let go of each other, 2nd man and 3rd woman twirl) and dance six hands half round. Another 8-bar dance ending combines circling and casting.⁴ It will fit either fast or slow time. 1st couple are in 2nd place, 2nd at top, 3rd in 3rd, all on own sides. They dance six hands round to the left (4 bars) going three quarters round, and let go. Then 2nd and 3rd dance on to their places, while 1st couple, turning left about, dance round outside them counter-clockwise to 2nd place, wrong sides (2 bars). Then 1st couple cross to own sides (2 bars).

Finally, here is a graft of a reel of four inside a chase rounds, for use in a set dance for four couples. The four women, in normal order, are in a column down the centre of the dance. In the same column, 1st man is above them and 4th man below them. 2nd man is out to the men's side, 3rd man out to the women's side. All are facing their partners. The women turn right and dance a reel of four, while the men turn left and chase each other round in a circle. After 8 bars all will be back where they started, the women still reeling and the men chasing round. The 1st woman comes out of the reel, at the top, and starts chasing 3rd man. Immediately after, 1st man goes into the reel, where, taking his partner's place, he passes 2nd woman right shoulder. Two bars later 2nd couple change over, then 4th, then 3rd. At the end of this 8 bars the four men are reeling and the four women chasing round.

There are several possible 'continuations', to use a Chess term. One is for the men to emerge at the top of the reel (in the order 1st, 2nd, 4th, 3rd) and take hold of their partners, who providentially will be passing at the right moment.

As a variation, partners could change over at both ends at once, 1st and 4th together, then 2nd and 3rd two bars later. There are quite a number of possibilities.

I think one can graft a reel of three inside a chase (6 dancers, 6 bars), but I am not sure. Roll back the carpet and try.

- 1 In Miss Jean Raeburn, Curlywee, Auld Robin Gray, The Banks of the Devon.
- 2 In Castles in the Air.
- 3 In Auld Robin Gray.
- 4 In Wha'll be King but Charlie?
- 5 In Belhaven.

5. COUNTERPOINT

It is possible for one dancer or one couple to do one figure while others do another, just as in music one instrument can play one tune while others play others. Using the musical term, I will call this counterpoint.

Of course, strictly speaking, all non-unison dancing is in counterpoint. A reel of three is a three-part canon with the rule that the three dancers follow the same route, but start at different points. The figure rights and lefts also involves counterpoint in two 'parts', those starting in opposite corners dancing the same 'part'. There is counterpoint also when one dancer is doing reel steps while seven others circle round.

It is more interesting to consider cases where the counterpoint has not yet been formalised into a familiar figure.

In our dances the simple canon is the commonest form of counterpoint: the canon, or rule, that one dancer does what another did a few bars ago (are there possibilities of more complicated canons? Say, that one dancer should imitate another at half speed or in reverse?). There is a three-part canon in Muirland Willie. Each couple does something different, then each repeats what one of the other couples has just done. In Bob Sanders (17-24) 1st woman dances a reel of three while her partner is dancing three hands round. Then (25-32) the man reels while the woman circles. There is a sort of fugue in Lucy Campbell (17-24): 1st couple cast off, turn, lead up and wait, while 2nd wait, move up, cast off and turn.

There are more instances of counterpoint in some of the modern dances. In Prince Charles of Edinburgh two couples dance a reel of four while the other two couples swing partners. In The Reel of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo two couples cross over while the other two 'petronella'. In Schiehallion the men dance fling steps while the women petronella. The Queen's Bridge ends with 1st couple dancing up the middle, setting and casting off, while the rest dance down, set, turn partners and dance up.

So roll back the carpet and experiment with some more counterpoint. One very simple idea is counter-circling, and I see no reason why this should not become as common a piece of counterpoint as the reel of three or rights and lefts. In this some of the dancers go round one way, while others, outside them, go round the other way.

Here are two examples, the first with four inside two and the second with two inside four. To start the first,¹ which would do as a four-bar dance ending, all three couples are on the 'wrong' sides, 1st in 2nd place, 2nd in 3rd, 3rd at top. 1st couple are facing outwards. 2nd and 3rd dance a very gentle right hands across, half round, back to their own corners, while 1st speed round them counter-clockwise, to reach 2nd place, own sides.

The dancers are in the same places to start the second example,² but 1st couple are facing each other. This movement also takes four bars and will do to end a dance or, better still, to precede the figure, turn corners. 1st couple turn by the left hand nearly twice round, while the corners

dance round them clockwise. First corners arrive home just in time to start turning 1st couple by the right hand.

Here is a more elaborate example of counterpoint.³ 1st couple are in the middle of the dance, 2nd place, corners are at their corners. 1st couple dance figures of eight round their corners' places, beginning by going between them (whether they turn right or left depends on where they want to end). While 1st couple are dancing their figures of eight, the corners dance rights and lefts.

There may be other pairs of figures which can be combined just as intricately and with acceptable risks of collisions.

And here, to go the whole hog, is Fugal Fergus. Tunes: as for Waverley, until some musician composes a suitable fugue for it.

FUGAL FERGUS

Bars

- 1- 8 1st, 2nd and 3rd women dance round the three men, as in Waverley.
- 9-16 The three women set and cross over, set and cross over to own side. Meanwhile 1st, 2nd and 3rd men dance round the three women.
- 17-24 The three women set, cross over, turn right and, led by 1st woman, cross back at the top and dance down on their own sides (1st ends in 3rd place and turns right about). Meanwhile the three men set, cross over, giving right hands to partners, set and cross back.
- 25-32 The three women dance a reel of three on their own side: to begin 1st and 2nd women pass right shoulder. Meanwhile the three men set and cross over. They pass through the women's reel, each man passing his partner on his left, then turn left and, led by 1st man, cross back and dance down on their own sides (1st ends in 3rd place and turns left about).
- 33-40 The three women, continuing, dance half another reel of three (4 bars) then, while 3rd stands still, 1st and 2nd turn by the left hand 1½ times to make their progression. Meanwhile the men dance a reel of three on their own sides; to begin, 1st and 2nd man pass left shoulder.
- 41-48 Continuing, the men dance half another reel of three (4 bars) then, while 3rd stands still, 1st and 2nd turn by the right hand 1½ times to make their progression.
Repeat, having passed a couple.

1 In The Highland Troop.

2 In Hey, Johnnie Cope.

3 In Cousin Jim.

JOINTS: PLAIN AND FITTED

While good figures are meant to be displayed, good joints should be unobtrusive (I am writing about dances). In good dances, therefore, the dancer is hardly aware of how various figures are joined together, but the choreographer must know exactly what he is doing when he selects one figure to follow another. A general discussion, even if it arrives at no general conclusion, may help him.

Joints can be divided into two types, plain and fitted. With a plain joint all the dancers finish one figure in the normal way and start the next in the normal way. With a fitted joint some modification, usually at the end of the first figure, is required. The modification varies from the hardly noticeable, such as the change of feet 1st couple need to make at bar 24 of Hamilton House to start the six hands round, to something as drastic as 1st man's two-bar sprint at bars 15-16 of Gates of Edinburgh or the acrobatic feats called for at bars 24 and 32 of The Golden Pheasant.

Both plain and fitted joints have their own delights, but any fitting must be tidy and not cause a strain. As he dances, a choreographer should notice which joints he likes or dislikes and, if possible, why. Here are some of my own favourites. Plain joints: The New Rigged Ship, bar 8, for 1st and 2nd men; Miss Mary Douglas, bar 32 and bar 40, for 1st couple; The Machine without Horses, bar 16, for 1st and 2nd men; The Dashing White Sergeant, bar 24; The Camp of Pleasure, bar 4, for 1st man; but, for some reason I can't explain, I am not so enthusiastic about bar 4 of Ladies' Fancy. Fitted joints: Dalkeith's Strathspey, bar 4, for 1st man; Monymusk, bar 12, for 1st couple; and, perhaps best of all, The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, bars 20 and 24, for 1st couple.

A defective joint will not necessarily ruin an otherwise good dance. Major virtues will more than compensate for minor defects. There are defective joints in two very good dances, Duke of Perth and Hamilton House. The defect is physical in the first and psychological in the second.

At bar 16 of Duke of Perth 1st couple are turning by the left hand; at bar 17 they are back to back, on a diagonal, setting to first corners. In strathspey time such a joint would be perfect because the diagonal would be shown on the 4th beat of bar 16. 1st couple would approach the diagonal and hop on it before moving back the way they came. In quick time the diagonal is shown on the first beat of bar 17. 1st couple, curving left on 16, have to go a little too far, twist to the right, and then give an awkward jump back again. In strathspeys one can make a neat joint from travelling to setting whatever the direction of approach, but in quick time only if one approaches from behind or the left, e.g. by passing partner right shoulder.

One expects a choreographer to move his dancers from place to place by travelling, though there is nothing against their moving up or down, walking forward to meet their partners, or taking a short step this way or that. But it is a defect to abandon a dancer in the wrong place and make her walk to the right one, as 1st woman has to do in Hamilton House, bars 7-8.

At any joint, plain or fitted, dancers taking part may

1. start travelling,
2. stop travelling,
3. flow, or
4. pause.

By 'flow' I mean continue travelling in a straight line or smooth curve. By 'pause' I mean turn round and come back again or make some other sharp change of direction.

In strathspey time, as setting involves travelling from side to side, a start from setting to travelling or a stop from travelling to setting can often be classified as a flow or a pause. There is flow at bar 3 of Dalkeith's Strathspey and bar 3 of Strathglass House. If there wasn't the dancers could not get round in time. When about to set, a dancer coming from the right pauses, coming from the left he flows. The latter is the more difficult to phrase right.

7.

JOINTS: FLOWS AND PAUSES

At a joint between two figures, dancers, apart from starting and stopping, can either flow or pause. As I explained in the last article, by 'flow' I mean continue travelling in a straight line or smooth curve. By 'pause' I mean turn back on one's tracks or make some other sharp turn.

Pauses are easier to phrase than flows. If one arrives at a pausing place too soon one can take a little longer to turn round before starting off again. In a flow one needs to be crossing a line exactly at the right beat of the right bar. Since we are none of us perfect this means that before a pause we can risk being quite a bit early without anyone noticing, but with a flow, as at the start of a yacht race, we must never be early crossing the line, though we can risk being a very little late.

Dances with plenty of flow are very enjoyable to do, though the necessity for perfect phrasing makes them difficult to demonstrate well. In a few dances 1st couple flow continuously. Strip the Willow is one. Maxwell's Rant is another. My favourite flows are 1st couple's in Duke of Perth (1-16), Mairi's Wedding (1-32, and second corners get a nice flow at bar 24), Miss Nancy Frowns (9-32), The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh (9-32), and Miss Mary Douglas (21-48). Part of the charm of the latter lies in the variations of speed required.

Flow is not the only way of maintaining continuity. The dance that sticks closest to a single idea with no padding whatsoever is The Black Dance. Yet it has a pause every fourth bar until the end. With singleminded obsession 1st man turns partner by the right hand; and left; discards partner; gets a new one; turns her by the right hand; and left; discards her; takes back 1st woman, and flows into a new round.

But flow is a very pleasant joint, particularly when all the dancers can flow from one figure to the next. In Sodger Laddie, Fiddle Faddle, Minard Castle and in Douglas Henderson's New Ashludie Rant six dancers do two reels of three in succession. All can flow smoothly, but with subtle speed variations, from one reel to the next.

Other examples of flow for everyone occur when two couples follow a hands round to the left by a half right and left (The Menzies Rant, Midlothian) or by back to back with partners (Two and two), though, owing to the rush the last flow is rather difficult to achieve.

Good effects can be obtained when a flowing dancer picks up a stationary one in passing. In The Nut 1st woman dances round her partner, who is balancing in line with 2nd couple, and flows down the middle, taking him with her. In My Mother's Coming In 1st couple cast off into 2nd place and flow into advance and retire, gathering up their corners for company.

In McLaine of Lochbuie, the dancers who have just been reeling gather up the others, though without taking hands, for the crossing over.

There are joints, too, where some dancers can flow, though others must pause, but there is a danger that these may make a dance look unsymmetrical. In The White Cockade, for instance, 1st couple follow a hands round to the left with 3rd couple by rights and lefts with 2nd. 1st man can have a perfectly good flow, but 1st woman has to pause and come back on her tracks. For the look of the thing therefore, it is best for 1st man to make a 'sympathetic' pause.

In None So Pretty (bar 24) 1st couple, having danced a reel of three at the sides, end back to back facing 2nd couple in order to begin a reel of four across the dance. 1st woman and 2nd man must pause, but 1st man and 2nd woman could flow if they wished to. At an ordinary dance they would probably do so, but in a demonstration a sympathetic pause is needed for the sake of symmetry.

I end with two suggestions. The first is for a symmetrical pause-and-flow joint inspired by None So Pretty.¹ 1st and 2nd couples, starting from the beginning, dance rights and lefts followed by a reel of four across the dance. To enter the reel the two men-and women-turn three-quarters round when they give their last left hands, letting go soon enough to allow 1st woman and 2nd man to pass each other left shoulder and start the reel by giving right shoulders to partners. These two, in the middle, flow. 1st man and 2nd woman, on the outside, need to pause and turn to give right shoulders to partners. The pauses frame the flow.

In a final reel at the sides with 1st couple giving right shoulders to second corners it is usual to start from a stop or pause with, at most, 1st couple flowing. Here is a joint which lets everybody flow.² On bar 22 1st couple are in 2nd place, own sides. The other two couples, 2nd at top, 3rd in 3rd place, are on the 'wrong' sides. On 23-24 the corners cross over, giving right hands to partners. Second corners make a slight curve, but first corners go straight across so as to leave room for 1st couple to turn by the right hand (or arm) just over once round. Provided the corners remember to flow (and Lot's Wife and Orpheus) they will find themselves just right for the final reel at the sides.

One more word. However much care the choreographer takes with his joints there will always be some people who make every dance look like The Golden Pheasant.

1 Similar to figure In Elizabeth Adair.

2 In Wheatly Hills.

THE DANCE AND ITS TUNE

So far I have dealt only with bits of dances. Now for the dance as a whole.

Kipling said, "There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays, And-every-single-one-of-them-is- right!" Half of this – the first half – is true of constructing country dances. Tens of thousands of dances have been constructed in the past three centuries, but only a few have lived very long or, when resurrected, taken on a new life. Are these few just happy accidents, chance hits in a wasteful spray of misses? Or are they due to technical competence sparked by flashes of genius? No would-be choreographer should have any doubts on the subject.

Inspiration may come from anything at any time, but the more a choreographer has thought about the subject, experimented, and made notes, the greater will be his technical competence and the more dirigible his genius. Coleridge dreamt all Kubla Khan in one dream, but only because (apart from being Coleridge) he had for years been filling notebooks with potentially useful material and constantly turning it over in his mind.

But it is not necessary for a choreographer to wait for chance inspiration. A dance must have a tune. If it is born without one a long and tedious search may be required to find one that really fits. Ask anyone who has conscientiously hunted for suitable alternative tunes for existing dances. So, to choreographers who are not also composers of music, my advice is start with the tune-and pick a good one.

The first thing is to appreciate the tune as a whole. This is very difficult to write about: the analysing of the bits and the way they are assembled is much easier. I can only recommend the choreographer to hum the tune, silently if necessary, whenever he can, until he begins to feel something he thinks the composer must have felt.

To use a not very satisfactory simile, each tune is like a country, with its laws, customs and conventions, a settled country, where certain things are done and certain things are not done. One will only get to understand it by living there. It is not a lawless, under-developed jungle, like the snatches of melody a composer might choose for the 'first subject' of a symphony or a leitmotif in an opera,– or the opening bars of a country dance tune.

Having absorbed the general content or message of the tune as a whole, an emotional rather than an intellectual process, the choreographer can start considering the parts. Does any part make him want to set, or travel, or do slip-steps? Does one part of the tune press him down and another release him? Does one part send him out and another rein him in? Does one part excite and another soothe? And where do the peaks of excitement come?

Is there an 8-bar phrase so markedly divided into 2-bar bits that it suggests a dance figure in 2-bar bits, such as rights and lefts, turn corners, set to corners and partner, double triangles? Does another 8 bars have a flowing melody that suggests reels of three, down the middle and up, crossing and casting?

The choreographer should look at the written music, even if he can only just read it, note the phrasing, note particularly the repeats-not just the 8-bar or 16-bar repeats, but repeated occurrences of two bars, one bar, even half a bar. Often a bar is repeated higher up (like bar 2 of Highland Whisky) or lower down (like bar 2 of Jenny's Bawbee). In other words, the choreographer should examine the structure of the tune: what parts it has and how they are put together.

When there are repeats, or near repeats, in a dance, as for instance in bars 9-16 of Petronella and The Flowers of Edinburgh, I find it very pleasant to have the same music over again. I regard it as a minor defect in The Lea Rig and Waverley that the repeats in the dance are not matched by repeats in the tune. Of course most tunes have far more repeats than could be used in a dance and so one cannot demand that where there is a repeat in the tune there should be one in the dance also. All the same, like the composer, the choreographer must invite the dancers into a country with its own customs and conventions. He must imagine himself saying to the dancers, "Bars 1-2 are just grand for setting. Don't you think so? We have them again for 5-6, so set again and make sure. 17-18 repeat 1-2; you remember, we like setting for these. 21-22, the same again, but this time try travelling for a change."

The choreographer is not likely to be able to put into his dance everything the tune has. He cannot, so to speak, write a history of the country, only a short story about some of the inhabitants. But he must know the country.

He should stick close to the tune at first, whether he starts at the beginning, middle or end. Later, when the dance is half or three-quarters built, it should have developed a personality of its own and will probably be crying out for one particular figure to complete it-for artistic reasons, I mean not as a mere mechanism to get 1st couple to 2nd place. If the tune wants this too, so much the better, but if no compromise can be agreed on then the dance must have the final say.

To sum up: I believe that, for the choreographer who cannot compose the tune at the same time as he is constructing the dance, only one way of construction is right. He should choose a tune and let himself be led by it, not necessarily all the way, but for as long as he can.

9.

THE TUNE: STRUCTURE.

The choreographer, having selected the tune to inspire his dance, has two things to consider: its content and its structure. Strictly speaking the structure is part of the content, but here I am making a rough classification by including under structure the lengths and repeat schemes of the musical phrases and under content the musical phrases themselves.

The tunes most commonly used for Scottish country dances are strathspeys, reels, jigs and Scottish measures (including under this last heading hornpipes, marches, etc.). Reels and strathspeys have quaver rhythm, plain for reels, dotted for strathspeys. Played at half speed, like Duke of Perth, the quavers of the reel become the crotchets of the Scottish measure. Strathspeys, played slower and with each bar divided into two, can be made into jigs. The tune Orange and Blue, for example, is used in strathspey form for The Hebridean Weaving Lilt, under the name Broachan Lacimh, and in jig form, under the name Hot Punch, for The Shire of Ayr.

When considering the structure of dance tunes, therefore, it helps to keep in mind that two bars of a Scottish measure or jig often corresponds to one bar of a reel or strathspey.

In Scotland in the late 18th century reels and strathspeys were the commonest dance tunes and of these the commonest type was a 16-bar tune with bars 5-8 repeating 1-4 and with the last 8 bars in the form I shall refer to as 6 plus 2. In the 6 bars the composer makes his point, saying all he has to say, and in the last 2 seems to be announcing, "I must now draw to a close." Dancers interpret this as, "Time to go home." Lord Macdonald's Reel, for example, is a tune of this type: 4 bars repeated; 6 plus 2.

At the time when these tunes were popular the most popular dance ending was set and turn corners, reel at the sides. For a 32-bar dance the 16-bar tune was played through twice. So for the last 16 bars 1st couple had the same four bars for setting to and turning each corner, 6 for the reel and 2 to go home.

The corresponding Scottish measure or jig tune would be of 32 bars, with 9-16 repeating 1-8, and the last 16 in the form 12 plus 4 (e.g. Lady Mary Hay's Scotch Measure, bars 1-32, given for Scotch Measure in Four Step Dances. The Drunken Piper, given for The Reel of the 51st Division, The Machine without Horses).

There were also reel and strathspey tunes in which both the first and last 8 bars were of the form 6 plus 2 (e.g. Mrs MacLeod, Orange and Blue). In this type the composer often emphasised that he was drawing to a close in 15-16 by repeating 7-8.

Another type, more common than the last, had bars 5-8 repeating 1-4 and 13-16 repeating 9-12 (e.g. The High Road to Linton, Duke of Perth). In these tunes the last four bars are often of the form 3 plus 1. A tune drawing to a close in one bar may not be a good match for a dance with a 6 plus 2 ending.

The corresponding Scottish measures and jigs (e.g. Duke of Perth played at half speed, Petronella, Lamb Skinet) would have 9-16 repeating 1-8 and 25-32 repeating 17-24. Corresponding to a 3 plus 1 ending in a reel or strathspey, these tunes would end with 6 plus 2.

The frequency of 6 plus 2 endings for reels, strathspeys, Scottish measures and jigs explains why nearly all the stock dance endings are of the form 6 plus 2. There is the reel at the sides, mentioned above. In the poussette and allemande the progression is made in 6 bars, leaving 2 to go home. There is turn corners, violent turns, with a gentle 2 to go home giving left hands to partners. There are the 'Cauld Kail' setting to corner and partner and the double triangles, each with its petronella turn home on 7-8. In rights and lefts the turning towards the left hand on 7-8 distinguishes the final 2 from the previous 6. Even hands round to the left and back again, which one might be tempted to classify as a pure 4 plus 4, is also a 6 plus 2 (though it could be a 7 plus 1), with the home-going reckoned from when the men let go of the women.

Almost the only stock endings that are not of the form 6 plus 2 are those which have one or more couples turning partners for the last four bars. These dance endings match beat with tune endings

of the form 12 plus 4 or 3 plus 1: 3 to turn 1 to go home. If a 6 plus 2 tune ending is being played, dancers can just reconcile this with a final 4-bar "turn 1½ times" by imagining that they turn once round on 5-6, realise it is time to go home, and on 7-8 complete the last half turn and do so.

The first four bars of a dance sometimes sound like 2 plus 2, Mrs MacLeod is an example: bar 3 repeats bar 1, bar 2 resembles bar 4. Other tunes seem to begin with 3 plus 1, e.g. Monymusk, in which the first half bar is repeated in bars 2 and 3, with bar 4 providing a contrast. A 3 plus 1 phrase, repeated, suggests travelling for three bars and turning on the fourth, as in down the middle and up or hands across and back. 2 plus 2 suggests something in 2-bar bits, such as set and turn or advance and retire.

Students of structure will soon find that besides the tunes which definitely start 2 plus 2 or 3 plus 1 there are some that do neither and some that do both. Scotland was, and still is, a free country.

10.

THE TUNE: CONTENT

Music written purely to be heard can run the whole gamut of the emotions, from wildest joy to deepest sorrow, from courageous optimism to desperate pessimism, from gnawing unease to quiet content. It can, to descend to mechanical terms, keep varying the speed and the volume. It can modulate from key to key or even dispense with key altogether. It can call on any one of several solo instruments, or whole orchestras and choirs.

Scottish dance music is more limited. There are virtually only two speeds, which must remain constant throughout the dance, only three suitable instruments for the melody (or should this be two?), only simple modulations inside each tune, such as from minor to major or tonic to dominant, and the variation in volume, if any, must not be such as to make the music inaudible over ballroom conversation.

There is a similar limitation to the range of emotions it can evoke. A ballroom seems to call only for one – sociable gaiety. Music like Tchaikovsky's Pathetic Symphony would be out of place. Still, some dancers may sometimes wonder whether among all the gaiety, it might not be pleasant sometimes to include a dance expressing, say, religious fervour or philosophic doubt. No special figures would be needed. Our present movements could take on the emotional significance given by the tune. Advance and retire, for instance, can symbolise showing off, flirtation, – or twin souls sundered by cruel fate.

Can one then say that Scottish dance music must be gaily sociable and leave it at that, implying that since the mood should always be the same any dance will go equally well with any tune? Definitely, no. A popular dance owes some of its popularity not only to having a good tune, but to having a good tune that fits the dance, a tune that 'tells you what to do.'

In my last article I dealt with structural fitting. The fitting of content, or mood, may be even more important. Even though the general mood may not vary, the tune will have its peaks of excitement, its pressures and releases, its holdings in and sendings out.

Perhaps these abstract terms will be made clearer by a few concrete examples. In turning with one hand the moment of greatest tension, when one's biceps need most stimulus, is on the first beat of the second step. The ideal music for turn corners therefore would give peaks of excitement at the beginning of the 2nd, 4th and 6th steps. I use the word step instead of bar because I am leading up to the turn corners in Duke of Perth, where there are two steps to the bar. On the turn of first corner the tune works up to a high note (G) at the moment of greatest tension. For the more violent (once and a quarter) turn of partner the tune starts on that high note (G) and goes even higher (to A) for the high tension. The music for turning second corner is the same as for first, and then there is relaxation for the final turn of partner, only three-quarters round.

This is, of course, a very crude example. Going up to a high note is not the only way of providing a peak of excitement. If bar 1 is sufficiently urgent it will carry the dancers through a one-handed turn even when there is relaxation on bar 2. Still, if a choreographer has 8 bars of a tune with peaks at the beginning of bars 2, 4 and 6, the figure, turn corners, is worth considering.

Another figure which welcomes the same peaks is the pousette, since the 'turn' is more exciting than the 'sway'. Even if the 'sway' is emphasised and the 'turn' regarded merely as a preparation for the 'up or down', there must still be excitement on the 'big turn' on bar 6.

Another possible is set to corners and partner, if you consider the physical effort of 'Goodbye' requires more of a boost than the social effort of 'Hullo!'

Any musical phrase, whatever its length, begins with pressure and ends with release, but the strength and length of the pressure varies. Some phrases increase the pressure as they go on; others maintain it steadily until almost the end; others start with a boost that suffices to carry them through to the end.

In bars 1-8 of The New Rigged Ship there is steady pressure for bars 1-6, with a slight relaxation at the end of bar 4. For bars 7-8 the pressure is relaxed. The music and dance here match exceptionally well. The tune urges the dancers round and half way back. Then, if they are listening to the music, they will release their partners on bar-7 as they return to their own sides.

In bars 1-4 of Hamilton House the boost on the high note at the beginning gives enough pressure to carry through to the end of the phrase. Again the music and dance match. 1st woman makes for 3rd man and turns him, setting politely to 2nd man on the way. If she set to 2nd man with a view to turning him, didn't like the look of him, turned 3rd man instead, she would need music with a boost on bar 3.

The Duke of Atholl's Reel, with its first tune in particular, shows an excellent match of the moods of the tune and the dance. The tune urges the dancers on for the energetic bars 1-16, then relaxes and lets them jog happily through the carefree bars 17-32.

Pressure and relaxation is not always the same as reining in and sending out. The tune Rachael Rae seems to me to begin with both pressure and sending out. So, to a lesser extent, does Mrs MacLeod. Sending-out music suggests travelling, preferably with an increase of speed.

I have only mentioned the crudest and most obvious points: peaks of excitement, pressure and release, reining in and sending out. A choreographer needs to listen to all the tunes possible, both while dancing and undistractedly on his own, until he evolves a theory or better, acquires an instinct as to what sort of movement suits what sort of music.

11.

PETRONELLA

In my last two articles I made some general remarks about the fitting of dances to tunes. In this and again in the next I will examine a particular dance in detail.

Petronella matches its tune almost perfectly. The original Petronella may have had a push-and-pull poussette without turns. If so it did not fit the tune as well as our present dance. As I am not now concerned with its history I will try to make the points I wish to make by imagining how a present-day choreographer, working from the tune, might produce the dance.

He considers the first four bars. The first two constrict, the third and fourth release or, at least, provide a cheerful interlude. In general, a tune coming down holds a dancer in, going up it sends him out. All four bars suggest pas de basque. So he turns 1st couple round on themselves, making them pick out a slightly complicated route for bars 1-2, and then releases them to set, carefree, to their partners. Bars 5-6 repeat 1-2, 7-8 are even more relaxing than 3-4, so he makes 1st couple repeat themselves. With 9-16 repeating 1-8, he gets first couple back home.

Then the music bursts out exuberantly, carrying 1st couple down the middle and up again before the choreographer has time to think, but with the repeat of the music he listens to these 8 bars more closely. The tune reaches peaks of excitement on bars 2, 4 and 6. At bar 4 the tune does not quite reach the heights of bar 2, but at the next attempt, on bar 6, it provides a final thrill by getting there again. Then it relaxes for 7-8. This is just made for a poussette, with its turns on bars 2, 4, and, the big turn, on 6, followed by the gentle home-going. On bar 32 1st couple look at each other, just as they used to when the same music was played on bar 8 and bar 16. There is also a pleasing touch for 1st man on bar 24 of the dance: the long notes just suit his step, close, preparing for the poussette.

Here then is an unusually perfect match. How unusual will appear when one tries to find an alternative tune that is anything like as good. Bars 1-16 of The Persian Dance match well and 17-24 are cheerful, not as exuberant as in Petronella, but they will take 1st couple down the middle and up again all night. But they don't fit the poussette. There is no excitement for the turn on bar 2. It merely repeats bar 1, and bar 4 is even quieter. A good musician, who knew the dance as a dancer, might be able to make bars 2, 4 and 6 sound exciting, but the tune itself does not ask to be played that way.

Chester Castle, the tune suggested in Mrs Shand's Old Scottish Music, is a nice tune, but it doesn't make enough of the setting on bars 3-4. To this tune 1st couple set to each other purely for the sake of politeness and to pass the bars away, not with the wild delight of seeing each other again after their tricky bit of footwork, as they do to the original tune; Chester Castle fails also in the poussette.

Kerr's Collection gives Staten Island as an alternative and its first two bars are almost better than the original tune for turning 1st couple round. Bars 3-4 give a reasonably cheerful setting, but not so good as Petronella and the Persian Dance. Down the middle and up is adequately catered for, but the poussette is a flop, especially at the all-important bar 6.

As an exercise I suggest examining all the poussettes in the S.C.D. Books in conjunction with their music. Personally I give first prize to Petronella by a large margin. Next I place Teviot Bridge, The Rock and the Wee Pickle Tow, Rothesay Country Dance and the second tune for Waverley. Near these I place Circassian Circle (1st tune) and Meg Merrilees. Giving marks for excitement on bars 2, 4 and especially for the climax on 6, I find that depressingly many score zero.

This does not necessarily mean that none of the choreographers constructing these dances were paying any attention to the tune. They may have followed it closely for the first half of the dance and then, as a concession to popular taste, made the progression with a poussette.

It is important to remember also that the poussette has changed considerably since it first came over from France at the time of their revolution. Then it was just a push-and-pull movement, with hand-holds-and no revolution. Later, when gentlemen could decently be seen putting their arms round ladies' waists it became a "two-step waltz", to quote from a book published in 1910. There have been various holds and different methods of phrasing.

The modern choreographer is only concerned with the modern poussette and should not try to match it to unsuitable music unless the dance itself will not be contented with anything else.

12.

THE MONTGOMERIES' RANT

Another marriage of dance and tune as happy as Petronella's is that between The Montgomeries' Rant and the tune, Lady Montgomerie.

The original Montgomeries' Rant, "a strathspey reele" in the Menzie MS (1749), in the Sandeman Library, Perth, begins with 1st couple going back to back instead of crossing over, as they do now, and ends with "lead out att ye sides." Lead outsides was a figure like the ending of Waverley, except that 1st couple led between the men first.

The tune, Lady Montgomerie, composed by the Earl of Eglintoune, who was (of course) a Montgomerie, is included in Gow's 4th Repository. Its date, as given in S.C.D. Book 10, was 1796.

The genius to whom we are indebted for our present Montgomeries' Rant is therefore the person who altered the original dance, which had nothing much to recommend it, and chose the tune, Lady Montgomerie, to go with it. It is also very jolly, but quite irrelevant, when the names of the tune and dance have something in common.

The tune as given by Gow is of the very common type: 4 bars repeated; 6 plus 2. In S.C.D. Book 10, bars 5-8 have been slightly altered, but bars 5, 6 and 7 still begin by thumping on the same note (the tonic) as bars 1, 2 and 3, so that the tune can still be regarded as having four bars

repeated for its first half. In Gow's version bars 13-14 repeat bars 9-10. In Book 10 bar 14 is slightly altered.

The mood of the first 8 bars is one of restraint. In the first three bars the tune, after the accentuated first beat, begins by going down. The tune pushes the dancers on, but keeps them well under control. With bar 9 the tune bursts out, setting the dancers free. Starting on the same note as bar 1 the tune this time goes up. Bars 15-16, with the tune hopping down the scale, provide typical 'going home' music.

The dance starts quietly with only one couple moving until the outburst on bar 9 throws the other two couples into action. The second time through the tune, bars 1-8 again keep 1st couple under constraint, while they set to the other dancers, then, again on bar 9, the sending out sets all the dancers travelling.

The first time through the tune, the boost, boost, boost, relax, of the first four bars urge 1st couple on their travels. The second time through, 1st couple have a boost to start them setting to 2nd woman, a boost to turn them round to face 3rd man, a boost to start them setting to him and relaxation while they veer unobtrusively round to face 3rd woman.

Bars 9-16 can be heard in two ways. Since bar 13 repeats bar 9 the tune can be heard as two four-bar phrases that start the same but end differently. Heard this way it is just right for an 8-bar reel of three, four bars for each half. But the 2-bar 'going home' music shows that it can also be divided into 6 plus 2, just right for a 6-bar reel with 2 to cross over.

It is not so difficult to find reasonably good alternative tunes for The Montgomerie's Rant as it is for Petrollella. This type, with bars 1-4 giving three boosts and a relax, repeated as 5-8, with 9-10 repeated as 13-14 and with bars 15-16 for 'going home', is fairly common. It is also quite usual to have bars 1-8 restrained and bars 9-16 more exciting. Lord Eglintoune, the first tune given in Book 10 is of this type, though I like it less as a tune than Lady Montgomerie and it does not have quite so much restraint in bars 1-8, nor quite such an outburst on bar 9. It would not take long to make quite a good list of alternative tunes to select from, though I doubt if any would be good enough to displace Lady Montgomerie from being 'the original'.

I now draw to a close, hoping that a few choreographers or groups that have rolled back the carpet will have found in these articles some new ideas to stimulate them to produce newer ideas of their own, even if – perhaps, particularly if – they disagree with some of the views I have expressed.

To sum up, my advice is: study existing dance figures and invent new ways of developing or combining them and of joining them together; with this for background, and noting the ways in which the music can 'tell you what to do', take good tunes and construct dances to fit them, remembering that each dance must also have a personality of its own.

WE AGREE TO DIFFER

1. SHOULD WE?

The question is, Dark, should we agree to differ? Should members of a Society amicably dance certain dances, figures or steps in slightly different ways?

There is no question at all, Light. The Society was formed to encourage the dancing of traditional dances according to tradition.

But what tradition – That of 1900, 1860, 1800, 1750, or when? And what books should you trust? Thomas Wilson in 1825 wrote very scornfully about some of the dances published by Playford in 1700. I know he was writing of English Country Dances, but I bet the Scottish Dances changed as much or more. Then, where do you go for your tradition? A dance may have been done in three or four different ways in different parts of the country.

To dam – not damn – your spate of erudition, I will say that the tradition I want to follow is that of 1952. In short, I don't care very much what we do as long as we all do the same. The Society's authorities should study all the traditions, decide and decree. We should follow. If they make new discoveries, let them change their minds, but let them publish the official dogma and see that the Society's Instructors stick to it.

But, Dark, that would wrap us up like mummies. We can't dance in strait waistcoats. All the intelligent and enterprising dancers would lose interest, and the others their power to think. After all, we dance because we have found it fun, not just to preserve a ritual.

You stopped listening half-way through my last remark. I didn't say there should be no changes. Your thoughtful enterprising dancers could write to the Secretary or the Council, argue all night at St. Andrews, get themselves elected to Branch Committees, become Branch representatives. But If they must move heaven and earth, let them do it through the proper channels.

But that is like mixing politics and religion. "A crown is worth a Mass" and so forth. Imagine the lobbying, "You want a seat on the Branch Committee so that you can lower the class fees, raise the price of dance tickets and put A in the place of B as teacher of such and such a class. I know fifty people who will vote for you if you sign an undertaking to support the skip-change-of-step for the two-handed turn.

There is no need to mix the two. We could have a Committee of Taste which kept free of administration. Only it must be an official Committee. It won't do to have self-appointed leaders of fashion fighting over where the front heel goes in the pas de basque, whether or not the sole of the foot dirties the stocking in the Strathspey travelling step, whether the foot comes up fast or slow in the common schottische.

They would fight still more to get on to a Committee of Taste.

Hugh Foss

But at least we should know who had won. You are advocating chaos.

You haven't given me a chance to advocate anything yet. To use a hackneyed phrase, I want liberty, but not licence.

Meaning?

It is liberty to leave it to the dancers whether they take right or left hand at the second crossing in The Montgomeries' Rant. It is licence to use the pas de basque instead of skip-change-of-step for travelling.

In Duke of Perth is it liberty or licence to turn twice instead of once in bars 5-8, use the arm grip instead of the hand hold for turning corners, and for the men to raise their arms and clap their hands when setting to corners?

Liberty, liberty, licence, licence.

And supposing the authorities decreed tomorrow that the correct way to dance Duke of Perth included swinging corners with the arm grip, would it be liberty or licence to do it the other way?

I loathe taking hands for turning corners in Reel time. I have never enjoyed either doing it or seeing other people do it, however expert they were.

You haven't answered the question.

Liberty, of course, but my real answer is that I don't want decrees from authorities.

Then you will have pandemonium. You mentioned The Montgomeries' Rant. What does it matter which hand we take at bar 5 as long as we know?

I think the left hand is better. The woman has a smoother run, but, if you prefer the right, arrange it so with your partner.

But what would a demonstration look like with each couple a law to itself?

I wasn't talking of demonstrations. I agree that every dancer in a team must use the same conventions, but every team need not be like every other.

They won't be. But they might try.

You might as well ask every actor to give the same interpretation of Hamlet.

But would you have every instructor teaching his own pet version?

Now you have gone from demonstrations to classes. You keep switching about. Let us allow ourselves one paragraph each on dances, demonstrations and classes.

Why separate them? The same principles apply to all three. But go ahead if you must.

Dances first, because they are what everything else is in aid of. I welcome a local variation. When I go to Rome, I do as Rome does, but I don't advocate catholicism. And I welcome personal variations-minor ones, of course. We are not all the same in age, shape, size, skill and temperament. Some variations, such as how you do a particular step in the Foursome, matter only to yourself. Others, such as whether you turn half or once and a half in Hamilton House, matter only to yourself and your partner. Others, such as what grip you use for turning corners, whether the women do a right- or left-shoulder reel at the beginning of Miss Mary Douglas –

What did you say?

Don't interrupt. It's not your turn yet.

But it is a right-shoulder reel.

Another time for that, Dark. Let me go on. Things like that matter to the whole set, ...

I'll say they do!

... but they don't matter to the whole room.

I was once at a Ball which had Lady Susan Stewart's Reel in the programme. One set preferred General Stuart, and danced that instead. Here is a suggestion for you if you are ever an M.C. Announce that the band will play a 32-bar reel, and invite each set to do a dance of their own choice.

You will not see the difference between liberty and licence.

Imagine yourself at a Ball with two or three hundred good dancers, the men in Highland dress, the women in white. Imagine yourself in the gallery watching the ordered swirl of twenty sets all in unison. Doesn't the pageantry quicken your pulse, clutch your throat. Then look down on another Ball where half a hundred local and individual variations have crept in to remind you of a heterogeneous chicken run, and, tell me, is it liberty or is it lousy?

Demonstrations next. Each team should choose its own conventions and stick to them, without necessarily looking as homogeneous as Guards on parade or a troupe of well-matched chorus girls. But each team should think and feel for itself, and not merely ape other teams.

Demonstrations are to show us how to dance. You admitted that. We should all try to dance the same way, and so all teams should try and show us that way.

Classes. In each class you should do what the teacher says, even if you don't agree. Otherwise, it is a waste of his time and your money. But the teacher should not expect you to adopt his ways outside the class if he hasn't convinced you that his reasons are sound. Let him explain them. He is there to make you think, not merely to put you through the motions.

I don't want to think, I want to know. The instructor is there to tell me. And how is he to maintain his authority if everything he teaches is liable to be contradicted by another instructor or done some other way by a reputable demonstration team? Imagine a keen dancer taught one thing at a Beginners' Class, something else at an Elementary Class and so on all the way up to the Demonstration Class. He'd think, all right, I know what he'd think. Hand hold – arm grip, right hand-both hands, right shoulder ... What was that you said about the women's reel at the beginning of Miss Mary Douglas?

Next time, Dark, next time.

2.

THE REEL OF THREE PERPLEXES ME

The question is: When you are a corner in the reel of three at the sides, do you keep time with your partner or with the opposite corner?

With your partner, of course. You start level and keep level.

I don't agree. Look at it this way – or, rather, start by looking at the reel of four. The Editors won't let me draw dotted lines or arrows, but I think I can show it with letters. Begin with four people in a straight line.

A B C D

A and D facing inwards and B and C outwards?

Yes. A and B begin by passing right shoulder, and so do C and D. Now their positions at the end of each bar are:

0.	A	B	C	D
1.	B	A	D	C
2.	B	D	A	C
3.	D	B	C	A
4.	D	C	B	A

and so on. As each dancer gets to the edge he circles round in a wide loop, which keeps him on the outside while the two in the middle are passing left shoulder. Agreed so far?

More or less.

Then take the reel of three in six bars. It is obviously right to start with that because the normal allowance for a reel is two bars per person. A reel of eight, for instance; would need 16 bars. Well, with A facing B to begin the reel the positions ought to be:

0.	A	B	C
1.	B	A	C
2.	B	C	A
3.	C	B	A
4.	C	A	B
5.	A	C	B
6.	A	B	C

The eight-bar reel has the same movements only slower.

No. You are wrong. Start with the eight-bar reel. That is much simpler to understand. B faces A. B goes

0.	A	B	C
2.	B	-	-
4.	-	B	-
6.	-	-	B
8.	-	B	-

and so gets back to the middle, taking two bars to go out, two to come in, two to go out, two to come in. The six-bar reel has the same movements, but faster.

I agree with you about B. But what about A and C?

They do the same. Two bars to go in, two to go out and so on.

You mean like this

0.	A	B	C
	-	C	-
2.	B	A	-
4.	C	B	A
	-	A	-
6.	-	C	B
8.	A	B	C

with A and C almost colliding in the middle at the end of bar 2? You would, in fact, make A and C change places with four equal steps and change back with four more, with B dodging between them first to one side then to the other?

No, not quite. A gets to the middle just before C on bar 2. It's like the figure of eight round the standing couple in Corn Riggs.

I don't like that. I want my reel of three to have dancers crossing the centre at regular intervals. I know the beginning and end may involve a little hovering and swooping, particularly if the dancers do not begin or do not end in a straight line. If you are dancing my reel of three on a lawn – a six-bar reel – and a worm comes up in the centre, a dancer will hop on its head on the fourth beat of every bar.

But if you have that sort of reel of three at the sides you miss the beauty of the second and third couples keeping level with their partners.

And that, my dear Dark, is where we started. I say that it is the opposite corners that should keep in time with each other. They catch each other's eye as they pass through the centre of the reel.

Nonsense, Light, you ruin the symmetry. And, besides, I don't like the hovering and swooping at the beginning and end. I prefer an even pace.

Let us sum up by making it quite clear how my regular crossing reel differs from your even-paced reel. I'll push my A, B and C about on the left, and you push yours on the right.

If you must, Light. Here they go. Right shoulder reel as in Monymusk. B is the first man passing right shoulder with A, the second woman. I'll put a dot to show the centre of my reel when B is not in it. Readers can pencil in the tracks if they want to.

	Regular-crossing			Even-paced		
0.	A	B	C	A	B	C
1.		A	C	A	*	C
	B			B		
2.	B	C	A	B	*	A
		A		C		
3.	C	B		C	B	A
	C					
4.		A	B	C	*	A
		B				B
5.		C	B		*	B
	A			A		C
6.	A	B	C	A	B	C

My A and C are always the same distance from the centre. That shows they are level with their partners on the other side of the dance.

Agreed. But my reel is better balanced than yours. The centre of gravity remains close to the centre of the reel. Your centre of gravity swings from side to side. My reel keeps the dancing area evenly populated. Yours leaves ugly empty spaces.

Well, Light, your theory is very ingenious, but quite wrong, you know.

Shall we agree to differ?

No. Either a thing is right or wrong, and there's an end to it.

Then, my dear Dark, shall we agree to differ about agreeing to differ?

That is just as bad as agreeing to differ.

Shall we argue the point in the next number?

If you must, Light, but there is nothing to argue about.

3.

THE WOMEN'S REEL

This time there is a letter to the Editor to start us off:

Sir, – Here are some points Mr Light and Mr Dark may like to consider in their next argument.

The right-shoulder reel on the women's side in bars 1-8 of "Lady Mary Douglas" seems awkward and ugly. The first woman starts by turning her back on her partner, which conflicts with the spirit of the dance. She finishes by dancing away from the centre during the last step, and has to make an awkward turn to start the next figure (by dancing towards the centre).

None of the dances containing such reels was collected – they all come from old books or MSS. Tradition is therefore not involved, and when I was at Cambridge we tried the experiment of giving the women a left-shoulder reel. The advantages were obvious at once. Not only does the first woman start and finish the reel dancing in the right direction, but on bar 4 she sweeps round the bottom towards her partner (smiling at him if he is lucky) in a very pleasant manner. Further, the reels are now symmetrical, and-country dancing not being modern art-symmetry means beauty.

I have since looked the point up in old instruction books. The result was gratifying. Three books (Thomas Wilson's "Complete System of Country Dancing," 1825; and books by Nicholas Dukes, 1752, and Matthew Welch, 1767) describe the reels as symmetrical. No book gives the women a right-shoulder reel.

Wilson's description is the clearest. Moreover, his writings are very relevant to us, as twenty of his dances have been published by the R.S.C.D.S.; among them "Lady Mary Douglas" and "Dumbarton Drums".

The same arguments apply to the figure in which the first couple reel on opposite sides and then on their own. "The Gates of Edinburgh" shows the right way of dancing this; "Tulloch Gorm" a wrong way. In the originals the opening figures of these two dances are the same. We should therefore dance them the same way.

Should Mr Light or Mr Dark like to see the books I have mentioned, they are in the E.F.D.S.S. library, and may be consulted by non-members.

Yours truly,
H. A. THURSTON.
The University, Bristol.

Very interesting, Light; I take it that you agree with Mr Thurston.

Yes, Dark, I do. And since reading his letter I have discussed the question with several others who had arrived independently at the same conclusion. The only dance I know that calls for a right-shoulder reel on the women's side is one composed recently, in which the first woman continues by casting off, followed by the man. This was an attempt to give proper choreography to the right-shoulder reel. If there were any eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century dance with the same feature Mr Thurston's argument would be weakened. The only dance that makes me doubtful is Tibby Fowler o' the Glen. I would like a right-shoulder reel on both sides for that.

I have been looking in my S.C.D. booklets. There are reels at the sides for the three men and the three women in The 92nd (4,6), Dumbarton Drums (5,2), Tibby Fowler o' the Glen (8,11), The New Rigged Ship (9,7), Miss – or is it Lady – Mary Douglas (10,11), Green grow the Rashes (12,2) and My Mother's Coming In (15,1). In none of these do the directions state whether the reels are right- or left-shoulder.

Then why do you say they should be right-shoulder?

Because that is what I have been taught. The introduction to the blue booklet (repeated in the green one) says all reels are right-shoulder except when they are preceded by a set and turn.

What about the double reels?

As you know, the booklets give right-shoulder reels on the women's side for Tulloch Gorm (8,1), Cadgers in the Canongate (9,10) and Willie with his Tartan Trews (14,1) and left-shoulder reels for The Gates of Edinburgh (15,5). Then there is Jessie's Hornpipe (8,9) – collected, not taken from an old book. The diagram gives the woman a right-shoulder figure of eight. I suppose you want her to do it left-shoulder, facing into the dance at the beginning and end.

Hugh Foss

Yes. On the women's side, I want left-shoulder reels or figures of eight in all these dances, except Tibby Fowler. And while we are on the subject of reels at the sides I want a different reel at the end of Miss Cahoon's Reel (V,2). I want the dance to end in the way described for Struan Robertson's Reel (16,7) so that the first couple end the dance facing each other. Miss Cahoon's Reel is taken from Bremner's Second Collection, where the directions are "Hey contrary sides. Then on your own sides." I haven't looked up Struan Robertson's Reel in Rutherford, but I expect the directions are much the same.

Then you want to go against the general rule that all reels not preceded by the set and turn are right-shoulder reels.

Do you think it wrong to have one law for men and another for women?

I am not thinking. I am going by what I have been taught. And it does help to have an easily memorised rule.

You could substitute the rule that first and third couples always begin by coming into the set and the second couples by going out. If you read the introduction to the booklets more carefully you will see that the reels described there "have the principal man (or woman) in the centre." It does not mention reels with the principal woman at one end. I think we can regard the right-shoulder rule as useful in the early days of the Society, when the dances were strange to most of the dancers, but as something which can now be abandoned. There are no acknowledged left-shoulder reels – if you don't count Red House (7,2) – in Books 1-11. But in Book 12 we have two dances with left-shoulder reels: Kiss Quick and Sodger Laddie. These had to have left-shoulder reels and so the right-shoulder rule had to be discarded. In Miss Nancy Frowns (14,5) – beautiful choreography – there are left-shoulder reels. If Tulloch Gorm, Cadgers, Willie with his Tartan Trews – and Miss Cahoon's Reel – had come in Book 16 instead of earlier, would they have been described as they were? You remember you said last time that you had no objection to the authorities changing their minds, provided they published the fact.

I did. They may have changed their minds – and the descriptions of The Gates of Edinburgh and Struan Robertson's Reel seem to show that they have – but I haven't seen it in writing, nor have I come across any instructors who have swung to the left.

I have it on very high authority that it is optional which kind of reel is done on the women's side. If it were optional, which would you favour?

I don't like things being optional. But if it was, and I saw it in writing, then I would favour the left-shoulder reel.

Then for once, Dark, we almost agree.

Yes, Light, but I don't mind betting it won't be for long.

NEW DANCES

I was at a Reel Club last night and someone tried to make me do a dance he had composed himself. "Thrums", he called it. If it had been an R.S.C.D.S. show I should have complained to the Committee. As it was, I just refused to join in.

Would you have joined in if he had called it "St. Ronan's Well", and told you he had got it from an old manuscript dated 1800?

I should have been suspicious. St. Ronan's Well wasn't written until about 1825.

Dated 1825, then?

Yes. I should have tried it, but I should not have liked it. A present-day composer can't catch the spirit of those times, any more than a present-day composer of music could write like Mozart, even if he was Mozart.

I agree that if Mozart lived again now he would write a different sort of music, but I am sure I should like to hear it.

I shouldn't. What I like is the spirit of the eighteenth century coming out in Mozart, or, to return to the subject, in the Scottish Country Dances of the period. A present-day composer would try to be too clever, or would be clever in the wrong way. Besides, I enjoy the link with the past. You mentioned St. Ronan's Well. Scott brings Nathaniel Gow into it. I like to think I am dancing the same dances that Scott's characters, or perhaps even Scott himself, danced to Gow's music.

Well, Dark, it's a relief to hear that you like to think. But you may get a shock when you start studying old books. Our dancing has developed a lot since Scott's time. Our composition should develop too. After all, there must be nearly as many people dancing Scottish Country Dances now as in 1800. I mean, of course, in actual numbers, not percentage of the population. What will the Scottish Country Dance Society of 2052 think of the present age if it produces no more than a dozen dances? Or of the present Society if it takes no steps to encourage or guide dance composition. When the Constitution was being revised recently the Ayr Branch proposed that an additional object should be "to encourage the invention of new dances, and that suitable dances should be approved by the Society."

I know. I am glad the proposal was not carried.

I know of a Reel Club in London that tries out homemade dances on Members' Nights, and even introduced one successfully at their Annual Ball. And there is a club in the West of England where between a third and half of the programmes are of new dances. But, Dark, every Reel Club, every Branch of the Society ought to be bubbling over with new dances.

A horrible thought, Light. Think of the Dance Committees beset by eager composers furiously hawking their productions. Prima donna demonstrators are bad enough, but prima donna composers too – horrible! And, as you know, I like uniformity. I want to go to any dance run by any Branch of the Society with my booklets in my sporrán, knowing that, given a few minutes to study the booklets, I can join in any dance in the programme.

Would you object to having one or, at the most, two new dances in an evening, provided the figures were announced by the M.C., or, better still, printed in the programme. Then if the dance is too clever, let someone else modify it and the new form be tried later. In fact, let the dance knock around and have its raw edges rubbed smooth by the "folk" dancing it. Then if it becomes popular let the Society collect and publish it, as they did *The Reel of the 51st Division*.

Your scheme might land the Society with actions for infringement of copyright. And personally, though I like *The Reel of the 51st*, I think it was a mistake for the Society to publish it.

Do you like *The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh*?

Yes, fairly well, but I don't think it should be danced at any show run by the Society. In any case, you don't meet my chief objection, which is that dance composition is a lost art. And why worry anyway, even if it won't be all the same in a hundred years' time. We have sixteen books with twelve dances in each and I expect we shall have another dozen in 1953. What is the point of making up new ones?

Well for one thing, composition is fun, and, for another, it teaches you to understand and enjoy the dances better.

I can enjoy a poached egg without being a hen, or even a chef. In fact, I prefer to eat a meal someone else has cooked.

But think of the tradition. It is traditional to compose dances as well as to dance them. Shouldn't the Society encourage people to carry on the tradition. Thomas Wilson, in his *Complete System* (1825), describes a number of stock figures, supplemented by some of his own invention, and invites his readers to compose their own dances from them. At balls in his day, apparently, each lady drew a numbered card and when it came to her number she had the right to choose the dance. She could make one up if she wanted to.

I have been told that if you set a number of monkeys to type at random and that if they went on forever, they would be bound in due course to type the whole of Shakespeare's plays.

Yes, or any other book, including many masterpieces that have been lost or would not otherwise be written. The only trouble is that you would have to skip a lot to get to the interesting parts. What of it?

Only that I think that Wilson's ladies would have just as much chance of producing a good dance as the monkeys of typing Shakespeare.

Nonsense! You seem to think that all very small chances are equal. Even the monkeys could do better at dance composition than at typing. They would produce Duke of Perth or General Stuart's Reel before they got to typing even the title of King Lear.

How would they compose?

By putting together the stock figures. Look! Start with the rule that they must keep strictly within the tradition, and only use 8-bar figures that are already in the S.C.D. books.

I see. You write each figure on a nut, and put all the nuts in a bag.

Yes. And get the monkeys to draw out four nuts to make a 32-bar dance. Then you choose the music. After that you put the nuts back, shake them well, and start again. I wonder how many different dances they could get, thousands, millions or what?

I guess about half-way between millions and what. How many nuts?

I have no idea. Is this a conversation or a discussion?

Why?

If it is a discussion we ought to find out how many nuts. If it is a conversation we should spoil it by being so accurate,

If you find out how many nuts, I will make it a discussion.

That's not fair. You dragged in the monkeys.

But I don't want to know the answer.

Curse you, Dark! See you soon.

x x x x x

Hullo, Light, I haven't seen you for weeks. What have you been doing lately?

From 330 nuts the monkeys could get 11,644,783,920 dances. Some physically impossible, some deadly dull, some too like others, and, I hope, some really good ones.

I had forgotten all about the monkeys. How did you get the nut figure?

In the 16 S.C.D. Books there are 171 long dances with the normal progression. I kept the monkeys off circular dances like Waltz Country Dance, set dances like the Foursome, and dances where the first couple progress straight to the bottom in one round as in Strip the Willow.

Quite right. Strip the Willow is dangerous enough with humans.

These 171 dances have 699½ 8-bar phrases.

Call it 699.

There are 53 plain down-the-middle-and-ups, and 10 more with and-cast-off at the end, 37 poussettes, 30 rights-and-lefts, 28 set-and-turn-corners, and so on down to 34 figures that come in twice each and 258 that come in once each in the 699. As I said before, there are altogether 330 different 8-bar phrases. Of course, I could get more nuts by breaking them into halves and quarters and joining them up differently, but I stuck to the rules we laid down.

Have you any idea what proportion of the dances would be physically impossible because even monkeys could not get from one figure to the next?

That is difficult to estimate. You know Mrs Stewart's Strathspey?

Yes. It has the best opening of all the dances.

I agree. Well, in the fourth nut – I mean in bars 25-32 – the first couple have made their progression and are in the second place, turning corners. The next figure is an allemande, so they have to nip back to the top to make their progression over again. The reason for this non-sequitur is that in 1800, when the dance was recorded the figure then called the allemande did not involve progression. In the course of development the dance retained the name of the figure, but not the figure itself. In Mrs Stewart humans can easily fake the end of turning corners by dancing up to the top again, so I thought the monkeys could fake other figures in the same way and if they couldn't dance from one figure to the next they could get there by running, jumping or swinging by their tails.

A beautiful thought. Now what about all these 8-bar figures that only occur once each? Doesn't the fact that you had 258 of them show that the monkeys' rules were wrong? Evidently true folk composers invented figures rather than dances, and it was dancing masters like Thomas Wilson who collected figures from different dances and encouraged his pupils to do monkey-selection.

Not quite. You are overlooking two points. Firstly, the dances collected by the Society do not represent a random sample from all the dances there ever were. Apart from picking the good ones the Society would, quite rightly, not publish a dance that was very like another they had already published. To take one instance, the opening figure of Hamilton House only occurs once in the 16 Books, but it was quite a common figure 150 years ago. Secondly, of course, composers, even dancing masters, invent new figures as well as new dances. I told you some weeks ago when we began this discussion that Thomas Wilson invented figures of his own for his Complete System. Modern composers do the same.

You mean like the three-hands-across across figure in The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh? I don't like it. If I give my hand I want to take someone else's with it, not just put it into a pool.

Other dances have new figures too. In *The Fair Maid of Perth* the first and third women cross to the men's side and dance a reel of four with the second and fourth men, while the first and third men dance a reel of four with the second and fourth women on the women's side. In *Princess Margaret's Strathspey* the first couple dance a reel of four with their first corners while their second corners dance an imaginary reel of four at right angles to it (it is nearly but not quite the same as the figure in *The Reel of Six* in the *Border Book*). Then in the *Macphersons of Edinburgh* there is a reel of four with first corners followed by one with second corners. The reels are preceded by setting, but personally I prefer them without, and I know three unpublished dances with these two reels of four. And one dance I recently heard of had a grand new figure. The first couple are facing first corners. They dance the first half of a reel of four with their first corners, then the first half of another reel of four with their second corners. Then, to get their corners home again, they dance the second half of the reel with their first corners and then the second half with their second corners. Put four dots in a square to represent the four corners and draw the first man's route. It's a pretty pattern.

Yes. I see. You're right. But it's too clever ...

Well, all the figures, even the reel of three, must have been clever once. And very puzzling, too. Ask any beginner.

And it is not in the tradition.

How would you compose new figures or new dances that were in the tradition?

I wouldn't.

Well, how do you suppose they did it in the old days?

I don't know. It's a lost art.

Well, then. What is the difference between a good dance and a dull one? Why do you like some dances more than others?

That is difficult to say. I don't like dances with a violent wrench in the middle. I want – er ...

Continuity? Flow?

Yes. Flow. And, more important than that, I want a certain something that gives the dance unity.

A theme? Story?

Theme rather than story. She's *Ower Young to Marry Yet* has a story you can put into words, and it is one of my favourite dances, but some of my other favourites have no such

story, but each has a theme, whether or not you can put it into words. Yes. Theme, flow, and, thirdly, variety.

Variety in steps? Not all travelling like Mary Douglas, or no travelling like Hamilton House?

They are both favourites of mine too. Mary Douglas varies the pace. The leisurely bars 25-32 act as a contrast to the rest. The last eight bars of Hamilton House give it just the touch of variety it needs. Still, I do like variety in the steps. I don't know if it is a coincidence, but three of my greatest favourites, Duke of Perth, The Montgomeries' Rant and Glasgow Highlanders all have 16 bars travelling, eight bars setting – or setting and turning? – and then eight bars travelling. Miss Nancy Frowns has the same three to one proportion, but the setting comes at the beginning.

Miss Nancy Frowns flows very well.

Yes. The only complaint I have against it is that four bars is too long to look at one of your own sex. Another thing – and we ought to have mentioned it before – is the tune. The tune must fit the dance. Or it might even be better to start with the tune.

Thomas Wilson started with the tunes. In his Companion (1816) he gives three sets of figures for each tune, "the first easy; the second more difficult; and the third for the most part double." That is, 32 bars of figures for a 16-bar tune repeated. He says ...

Stop! I am tired of Thomas Wilson.

Quite. From what you have been saying I believe you could do as well yourself. How do you distinguish between theme and flow?

Flow means that at the end of each figure all the dancers are not only in the right positions to begin the next, but are also facing – or can gracefully turn to face – in the right direction. No swinging by their tails. In a dance with flow each figure follows easily after the last, but in a dance with a theme each figure follows inevitably. By the way, since I saw you last I have had a go at "Thrums", the dance that started this discussion. It flowed all right, but it had no theme, which just shows that the art of composition is lost. You see, at Bar 17 ... By Jove! I hadn't thought of that. At Bar 17 ... yes, it could be made into a jolly good dance if you scrapped the second half, and at Bar 17 ...

5.
BEGINNERS

Well, Light, I say beginners should be encouraged, but segregated – firmly segregated.

I don't agree, Dark.

You are not meant to. Beginners make me uncomfortable; either physically because I am dancing with them, or mentally because I feel I ought to be.

Well, segregation makes beginners uncomfortable.

I don't see why it should. Before they begin they should make up their minds they are going to learn.

But many start almost by chance. If welcomed, stimulated and given self-confidence, they will get keen about it, and soon become pleasant to dance with. But if you tell them – firmly – that to save yourself possible discomfort they must confine themselves to classes for their first year, they will go to the cinema or stay at home and listen to the wireless.

Then organise special beginners' dances for them, with simple programmes – The Dashing White Sergeant, Petronella, Scottish Reform, working up to Hamilton House, and, as a supreme effort, Duke of Perth two bars behind time. When they know a dozen simple dances by heart and can perform them accurately, then let them learn some more and come to the ordinary dances. After all, many people are content with a dozen stock dances, and don't want to learn what they call quaint old museum pieces like The Montgomeries' Rant and General Stuart.

You and I are not talking about the same people. You are using the word "beginner" as a euphemism for "bad dancer" or "unenterprising dancer". By a beginner I mean anyone, good, bad, or merely inelegant, who hasn't danced Scottish Country Dances before. Many beginners enjoy museum pieces. They get more fun failing to do General Stuart's Reel than failing to do Petronella. I have often seen a crowd, mostly beginners, make an appalling hash of a dance and then applaud like mad for an encore. I used to be surprised until I realised that they could not see themselves.

If they could see themselves they might decide to get better or get out. As long as they did one or the other, I wouldn't care which.

If I didn't know you I would say you were a selfish snob.

What would you say if you did know me?

Let's get back to the subject. Dancing is sociable. Dancing is fun. You and I dance because we like it. We like other people to like it. We want them to begin to dance, and, having begun, to go on dancing and become good dancers.

You and I both like dancing. I agree with that much. But there are among my acquaintance some who should never begin to dance, or, having begun, should stop at once.

But if they enjoy themselves –? It's fun for them. Look, Dark, we are off the subject again. It's not good and bad dancers. It's beginners.

Well, Light, expound your ideal course for your ideal beginner.

Ideal? Well, if the beginner was very rich or frightfully popular for some other reason I would advise him to get seven experts to dance with him. Then he could learn by doing instead of by being taught.

In the way a tennis ball learns to play tennis?

No. I am assuming the beginner is keen and intelligent, and that in between the lessons he will study the booklets, work out the figures with chessmen, practice pas de basques in front of a mirror, and dance figures of eight round the dining-room chairs.

Like the well-known author described in Who's Who as educated during the holidays from Eton. Still, I agree that beginners would save time and money if they treated classes like music lessons, and practised in between them.

I have often thought it would be a good idea for a class's syllabus to be announced beforehand, so that pupils could do homework.

The trouble is some would and some wouldn't. Then those who had read up the dances would be so keen to show off their knowledge to those who hadn't that the instructor wouldn't be able to make himself heard. The unselfish snobs – (How well should I have to know you to call you one?) – are just tolerable at dances, but at classes they can be a darn nuisance.

Then do you or don't you believe in homework?

I do really. I believe one should do homework and be silent about it, if it is possible to combine the two.

It becomes possible with practice.

But is it fun?

Let's sum up. You believe that initiation should be painful, as it was at English schools in the old days – and, I gather, at some American schools now. You would bully the new boys, excusing yourself by saying you were bullied yourself when you were a new boy.

Call that summing up? You forgot to take away the number you first thought of. No. I am not in favour of bullying. But while on the subject of schools, I must say that I think the present trend is to take the guts out of education. Teachers try to make all subjects as

simple and interesting as possible. They ought to make them as difficult and dull as possible. Then children would learn to learn.

What you say is revealing but irrelevant. We don't learn to dance as part of our education for a job or place in society. We dance for – because we want to. I think you should be kind to beginners, so that when they, in their turn, become expert, they will be kind to beginners too. Thus happiness is spread and our main object achieved.

Well, I won't argue further. I have been invited to a private dance next Tuesday. Most of the Demonstration Class and a few others will be there. Are you free next Tuesday?

Yes. Rather.

Then, could you relieve me of this? It is all explained in this letter. There's a group of people who have never done any Scottish Country Dancing, but have heard that it is good fun. They are meeting next Tuesday, and want someone to teach them the Eightsome, Dashing White Sergeant, Petronella, and the Gates – I repeat Gates – of Edinburgh.