SOMETHING ABOUT MORRIS AND COUNTRY DANCES.

BY JULIET WILLIAMS.

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So far, I have been writing of Morris Dances, which are really dances for men only, out of doors; but the Espérance Club also teaches Country Dances, which are for men and women in equal numbers and suitable for both indoors and out. Some of these have been collected from old country people, figures and tunes as they were danced a generation ago, either on lawns at summer festivities or in "halls" at winter gatherings. But some have been revived from an old 17th century dancing book called "*The English Dancing Master or Plaine and Easie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances*, with the tune to each Dance. London: Printed by *Thomas Harper*, and are to be sold by *John Playford*, at his shop in the Inner Temple, neere the Church Doore, 1651."

I have quoted the whole title, and will now quote part of his preface as it is so amusingly expressed. It is addressed "To the Ingenious Reader," and runs thus:—

> "The art of Dancing called by the ancient Greeks *Orchestice* and *Orchestis*, is a commendable and rare Quality fit for yong Gentlemen, if opportunely and civilly used. And *Plato*, that Famous Philosopher thought it meet, that yong Ingenious Children be taught to dance. It is a quality that has been formerly honoured in the Courts of Princes, when performed by the most Noble *Heroes* of the Times! The Gentlemen of the Innes of Court, whose sweet and ayry Activity has crowned their Grand Solemnities with admiration to all Spectators. This Art has been Anciently handled by *Athenæum, Julius Pollux, Cœlius Rhodiginus*, and others, and much commend it to be Excellent for Recreation, after more serious studies, making the body active and strong, gracefull in deportment; and a quality very much beseeming a Gentleman." * * * * "your servant to command J.P."

I have already mentioned that some of these dances were danced by members of the Club at the May Day Matinée last year. Miss Nellie Chaplin was the first to make use of these charming old Country Dances, and by her interest and acumen has brought them within the reach of almost everyone. She has republished some, and she makes no secret of her knowledge, and the Club Members have learnt some deciphered by her

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from the edition of 1665, in her possession. Then Mr. Carey went to the British Museum and has studied several editions including the first, and has been teaching these to the Club Members. In the meantime, Mr. Sharp has done the same, and has transmitted the results of his work to the English Folk Dance Society.

I have also been looking at the first edition, and others, and have tried my hand at making out the dances, and so has a friend of mine with an enthusiastic Morris and Country Dancing Club, at Burgess Hill. The steps are not given in Playford, but the tunes and the figures are, and it is indicated to what part of the tune the figures go. Curious words and abbreviations are used so that before one has the key it is very puzzling to read. The following are the instructions for "Kemps Jegg":—

"One man lead in two We forwards and back twice: Honor to one, honor to the other, then turn the third ˙ Lead your own with your left hand, and the woman you turned, and as much ⁚ Then as much with the other two We turning your own ⁚˙ The next man as much ∴ ∴ Then the third man as much ∴ ∴ ∴

"First man lead the We as before: Turn half round, holding both hands, and his own as much to the other, turn the third Wo ˙Do thus to all the rest following and doing the like.

"First man take the We as before by the Co hands behind, then lead them forward and back, pull one halfe about and kisse her, as much with the other turn the third ˙ Do thus to all, the rest following and doing the like."

"The Old Maid in Tears" does not appear in the first edition, but in a later one (1718). It is for "as many as will," and runs thus:—

"The 1 Wo holds her Handkerchief on her Face, and goes on the outside, below the 3 Wo and comes up the middle to her place, the 1 Man follows her (at the same time Pointing and Smiling at her) up to his place ˙ The 1 Man do the same, only he beckons his Wo to him ⁚ The 1 Wo makes a motion of drying first one Eye, then the other, and claps her Hands one after another on her sides (the 1 Man looks surprizingly at her at the same time) and turne her Partner ˙ The first Cu move with two slow steps down the middle and back again: The 1 Cu set and cast off ⁚"

This is the first figure of the Spanish Jeepsie, which is "Longways for eight":—

"Lead up forwards and back ˙ That again ⁚ Turn all back to back, faces again, go all about your We not turning your faces. That again the tother way ˙ First and last Cu meet a D back again, turn all back to back, faces again, go about each other not turning your faces, the other way as much ⁚ The other four as much ∴"

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Playford himself explains some of the abbreviations such as Wo = woman, We = women, Cu = couple (spelt cupple in those days), and D = double; ˙ means "strain once through"; ⁚ means twice, etc. There are figures printed to show the positions of the dancers, men denoted by crescents and women by circles. A large number are "longways for as many as will," and for these the company stands as for Sir Roger. Practically all of these begin with the two first couples going through certain figures, which generally end by the first couple being in the second couples place: the first couple then dance the same figures with the third, the second couple standing still at the top—but when the first couple are dancing with the fourth, the second and third couple dance together, and so on, all down the line, each couple standing still once at the top, till all are dancing, and I suppose if continued long enough the first couple would again arrive at the top, however long the line was!

In some of them the progression down the line takes place during some of the figures, so that the first couple gets back to its place ready for another figure. Some of the figures are done by everyone at the same time, such as "sides," "armes," "set," etc.

Other dances are arranged for four, or six or eight dancers, who sometimes stand in lines, sometimes in circles or squares.

Though many of the abbreviations and terms have been apparently quite certainly deciphered, there are several which no one can be sure of. The expression "sides" is one of these; though those who have studied dancing have concluded that this is going out to the side in some way or other, something in the manner of "set" in the Lancers, and four steps out and back does as a rule fit with the part of the tune assigned to this figure.

In one very quaint dance called Dargason or Sedany, the dancers stand in one line, the first couple facing each other and the ladies behind the first lady and the men behind the first man as in Oranges and Lemons. The first couple dance together and pass on to the next, dance with them, and so on, to the end of the line till all dance and all get back to their places again. Then a slightly different second figure begins but with the same changing of partners, then a third.

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William Chappel in his *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, gives the words which were sung to Dargason. They begin:—

"It was a maid of my Country
As she came by a hawthorn tree
As full of flowers as might be seen
She marvelled to see the tree so green
At last she asked of this tree
How came this freshness unto thee?
And every branch so fair and clean?
I marvel that you grow so green."

The tree answers that the dew keeps it green; then the maid asks what would happen if she were to cut it right down and take its blossoming branches back to the town: to this it replies it would grow up green again next year:—

"And you, fair maid, cannot do so,
For when your beauty once does go,
Then will it never more be seen,
As I with my branches can grow green."

Which so abashes the young lady that she gives up the habit of talking to trees.

It was quite the custom in the 17th century to sing and dance to the singing. In the third edition of the second volume of Playford, I found a dance with the words given, all about Quakers, with the figures more or less suiting the words. "Once I lov'd a Maiden Fair," is still a well-known song and is in the first edition as a dance. I found, by consulting Chappel's book that nearly half the tunes in the first edition of the *Dancing Master* are known Ballad Tunes and have words to them: I easily counted 44 song tunes out of the 105. In his Introduction, Chappel says of the Playford tunes, "the names … must convince an ordinary reader that at least a considerable number among them are song and ballad tunes, while a musician will as readily perceive many others to be of the same class, from the construction of the melody . . . . . Sir Thomas Elyot, writing in 1531, and describing many ancient modes of dancing; says (in *The Governour*) 'As for the special names [of the dances]

they were taken, *as they be now*, either of the names of the first inventour, or of the measure and number they do containe; or of the *first words of the ditties* which the song comprehendeth, whereoff the dance was made. And to approach nearer to the time of the publication in question, Charles Butler, in 1636, speaks of 'the *infinite*
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multitude of ballads set to sundry pleasant and delightful tunes by cunning and witty composers, with country dances *fitted unto them*': see his *Principles of Musick*."

Chappel also gives in his book a Morris Dance Tune called "Trip and Go," with words to it. The Morris Dances still have, you will remember, many of them, snatches of words, and the old man said, "you sing the words to get the steps in." Baring Gould in a book about Folk Songs says, an old shepherd said to him, "All young folk sing as they dance, and the burden serves to mark the turns of the dance." So the custom is not quite dead, even now. An attempt has lately been made by the Espérance Club to revive this old fashion by putting simple and suitable dances to some of the old Ballads. and by singing the old words to those dances which were made to Ballad Tunes. The effect is perfectly charming. Sometimes it is done in chorus by the dancers, sometimes by a solo voice.

Many old country people still call ballads "ballets," and the word is derived from the Italian *ballare*, to dance, a word probably of Greek origin, and the word *ballada* was used in Italy in the same general sense as the word *carole* in France. This was "the ancient circular dance with joined hands, accompanied by a song and sometimes instrumental music" also. The verses were as a rule sung by one singer, and a refrain by all the dancers. In very early times dancing and singing were very much merged in one,—and these dances,—and possibly the Morris Dances, are survivals of this old custom. It has survived in a wonderful way until the present day in the Faroe Islands where, though songs are on occasion sung without dancing, it is still the custom to dance to song and sing to dancing.[1] Mr. Percy Grainger has taken down and described some of these dance-songs, and has arranged at least one. which I have heard, for a string orchestra and male voices, Dancing has had an effect on Verse forms too, as well as its well-known help in the development of instrumental music.

To return to Playford: there are, in the first edition 8 dances "for foure"; 25 for 6 "longways," but sometimes standing *man woman man* opposite *woman man woman*, or in other odd ways. Kemps Jegg and two others are for six in a "round";
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there are 15 longways for 8; 5 round for 8; 6 "round for as many as will." This means danced standing in a circle and not what we now mean by "round dances," and there are three "square" dances for 8 people standing like the Lancers, and some odd ones.

The figures consist of crossings over, "settings," turnings of yourself (single), and your partner, various windings among the other couples, leading "up," *i.e.*, towards the "top" of the room, "meeting" in couples or singly, "falling" back, changing places with your partner and others and dancing round them and back, taking hands and dancing round in twos or threes or fours in various ways, and some to us undance-like movements, such as snapping fingers, clapping hands, wiping your eyes, kicking feet, winding your hands ("in the manner of winding wool," an old book explains), and holding up a finger, nodding at each other and quite a number of the dances contain saluting the partner in various ways including kissing.

The names of some of the dances are odd, such as Stingo or Oyle of Barley, The Old Mole, Woodicock, Confesse his Tune, Nonesuch, The Fine Companion, Skellamefago, Have at thy Coat old Woman, The Spanyard, Up Tayles All.

There are 105 dances in the first edition. This book was reprinted over and over again, with additional dances, and later on a second volume was added, and by the early 18th century there were over 300 dances in each of the two volumes.

Some of the dances I have learnt and seen from the later editions of Playford are just as charming as those in the first. "The Old Maid in Tears," "Hunt the Squirrel," "Greenwich Park," and "Cold and Raw," are all quite charming, and I have taught them at Sonning. I have found nice words to "Greenwich Park" and "Upon a Summer's Day," and have asked the mistresses to let the children learn them. They can then dance these, which they know, whenever they like, singing as they dance. Most of the 17th century ballad words were quite unsuitable for children.

Milkmaids were specially known for their good dancing. Chappel says: "It was formerly the custom for milkmaids to dance before the houses of their customers, in the month of May, to obtain a small gratuity; . . . . to be a milkmaid and to
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be merry were almost synonymous in the olden time," and many tunes and dances were named after them as "The Merry, Merry Milkmaids," "The Milkmaid's Dump" (a dump is a slow sort of dance).

In an old carol by George Wither (1588), we find:—

"Our lasses have provided them
A bagpipe and a tabor
* * * *
The wenches with their wassail bowls
About the streets are singing."

And in a song:—

". . . . . I had been
Piping in the country shades
To the homely dairy maids,
For a country fiddler's fees,
Clouted cream and bread and cheese."

A Mr. Misson travelling all over England in the reigns of James II. and William III., describes the dancing of milkmaids to bagpipes. In old days the "pipe and tabor" or the bagpipes, which are just as English and Irish really, as they are Scottish, were the instrumental music to which the country people danced. Granville Barker in his production of *A Winter's Tale*, introduced this with most delightful effect. The violin and the concertina now take the place of pipe and tabor in our peasants' dances.

I think it is quite recognized that the "Country Dances" were originally those of the country folk, but they must have been begun to be danced by the gentlefolk at the end of the 16th century, for in a letter from the Earl of Worcester to the Earl of Shrewsbury, dated September 19th, 1602, we find: "We are frolic here in Court; much dancing in the Privy Chamber of Country Dances before the Queen's Majesty, who is much pleased therewith."

It seems to me that they were originally fairly simple, and mostly danced to existing song tunes, but when they were adopted by the nobility and gentry they became a little more elaborate, some of the Playford's are very long and complicated. Then as time went on tunes were written specially for dances, and as the number of dances became greater each one was a little simpler. Baring Gould in *Old Country Life*, quotes "Sweet Kate," out of a "*Dancing Master*" of the 18th century, and it consists of only the first
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and most typical figure of the dance as given in Playford (1716), and "Bobbing Joan" has two figures only, while in Playford (1650), it has twelve.

Mr. Carey possesses an old book of dance music. It contains eleven books of dances dating from 1788 to 1802, and in looking through these one notices that they get simpler and simpler. In the earlier ones such as *Six new Minuets and Twelve Country Dances*, composed by H. Bishop, 1788, they still use the little marks ⊥ ⁚–, etc., to indicate to which parts of the music, the figures go, and the figures consist mostly of "leading, setting, casting, heying," etc., but new words and terms are also introduced such as "pousette," which is taking hands in couples and dancing in and out till the top couple gets to the bottom and all have changed places; it is a figure in the sword dance: "allemande" another word for an old movement, "swing" and "foot it."

The dances are all fairly elaborate: in a collection of Rants, Reels and Strathspeys for 1796, there are several new directions. The "Countess of Sutherland's Reel" is written thus: "Foot it hands across half round the same back again lead down the middle up again foot it to your partner and turn with both hands." It is in common time.

In *Bland and Weller's Annual Collection of Country Dances* for 1799, we find a dance called "Croppies Lie Down," written thus: "First lady set and turn 2nd gentleman ⊥ . First gentleman set and turn 2nd lady ⁚–. Lead down the middle and up again ⁚–. Hands 6 round ⁚–." But in another book published by Fentum for the same year, there is a dance with the same name and a similar, though not identical tune which runs "Hands across and back again, change sides and back again, lead down the middle, up again. Cast off, allemand, hands 6 round right and left."

So by that time there were obviously variations of the same dance, and if various people were publishing yearly collections of new dances, the total number of dances must have increased tremendously. I did not see a single name in these eleven books the same as in the first edition of Playford. In Riley's *New Country Dances*, for 1807, I noted new directions such as "reel at the sides," "chases down outside," but the dances are very simple, and a dance from his book of 1802,
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called "Lieut.-Col. Gordon's Fancy." "Set and change sides the same back again, down the middle up again, pousette," is quite typical of the shortness and simplicity of all the dances.

Last year I collected the directions of four Country Dances from an old man in the Almshouses here (Sonning), and they are as simple. One of them was called "Old Triumph," and ran as follows: "First gentleman takes second lady down, turn her under his hand, and back. First gentleman takes first lady down, turn and back. First two couples advance to meet each other and back, and first couple take hands and second the same and dance round till second couple is at the top." He said, "we used to sing

Down the middle, down the middle,
Down the middle, pretty little dear,

to a bit of the tune."

There is a similar tune called "The Triumph" in one of the old Dance Books for 1793, and here we find it more elaborate, the directions being as follows: "The first lady set to the second gentleman, turn ·. The first gentleman set to the second lady and turn ¨–. The first lady take the second gentleman by the right hand and lead him down to the third cu's place ¨–. The first gentleman cast off and [join] his partner: all three lead up to the top together ¨– the first cu lead down the middle up again and cast off¨ ." The word in brackets I am able to supply as I learnt at the Espérance Club a traditional Country Dance called "Ladies' Triumph," in which the first gentleman dances down below the third couple outside the ladies and joins his lady and the second gentleman, and dances up on the other side of his lady. There is a blank in the old book. The tune is very like one of the Berkshire Morris Dance tunes called "Sally Luker."

Old Thomas George gave me two simple dances to be danced to the tune "Haste to the Wedding," one he called by that name and the other "Hands Across." This was extremely simple, consisting only of the first two couples taking right hands in a wheel to half the tune, and left hands back the other way for the second half. Top couple down the middle and back and two couples forward and back, and dance round till second couple is at the top.

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Another dance called "Double Lead Through," he could not give us the tune to. He told us of a man who might know it; but he has left Sonning, and I am trying to trace him.

The Country Dances are as essentially English as the Morris Dances. They were introduced into both France and Italy, and had a great vogue in both countries, especially, I believe, in the 18th century. Mr. Skeat in his Dictionary gives the derivation of Country Dance as being from the word country, meaning a rural region and *not* from the words "Contre Danse," which was what they were called in France, when brought there from England. Chappel confirms this and says the word "Contre Danse" is not found in French dictionaries before 1700.

The only one which has survived to be still danced by all ages and classes is, I think, "Sir Roger de Coverley"; but our grandparents knew and used to dance a great many, and a few remain in the memories of the old people, and are occasionally danced. There are the four I mentioned that I collected. The Espérance Club has a good many among the dances it teaches that were collected straight from those who had danced them. They have "The Triumph" and "Haste to the Wedding," and others; and in their book they publish "The Bonny Breast Knot," from Sussex; "The Figure of Eight," and "We won't go Home till Morning," from Ilmington; "Step and Fetch Her," and "Pop goes the Weasel," from near Oxford; with rules and music.

I must end up again by asking anyone who finds these old dances interesting, to do their best to find other old traditional ones; by asking old people they know whether they can remember tunes or figures. If any such are found and any difficulty is found in taking them down I will be very pleased to come and do it, or send someone who can. There is much haste needed to collect our old songs, Morris and Country Dances, as the old folk to whom they were familiar are fast dying out. Old Thomas George, who told me my dances last summer, died last Christmas Day.

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[1] See *The Ballad in Literature*, by T. F. Henderson.