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EDITORIAL

Usually, news about prices turns out to be bad news; they are always going up. The cost of printing is an exception; and this is because of the introduction and spread of photographic methods. Xeroxing is now so much cheaper than it was that our price for out-of-print back numbers is less than it was a few years ago; and the photolithographic process is so much cheaper than the process we used in our first three years that we have never had to raise the annual subscription to The Thistle, in spite of the rise in postage and other prices. Finally, we can now reduce the price of "16 Scottish dances (1945-1967)" in spite of some improvement in the quality of reproduction. The new price is 60¢.

OUR DANCES NO. 70: The Soldier's joy

There is a simple and attractive dance of this name in the Scottish country-dance book number 2. It is quite a typical 19th century dance, being thirty-two bars long, with an individual first half and the standard second half, namely down-the-middle-and-up-and-poussette. Unlike nearly all dances of this type however, it is a three-couple dance: the second figure is a six-hands-across.

Most of the dances of this type were fairly widespread and were printed in one or more of the nineteenth-century manuals. However, The soldier's joy is an exception: its occurrence in SCDB 2 is its first appearance in print, and it is a local dance. (The footnote in SCDB 2 describes it as "collected in Ayrshire" but does not say in what part of the county. It is unlikely to have been current over the whole of Ayrshire).

The tune for the dance is, of course, also called "The soldier's joy". In fact, the name is really the name of the tune and (as was usual in those days) the dance

does not have a name of its own, but is called after its tune.

The tune is unusually widespread. Very many tunes are known in both Scotland and Ireland; and it is not too surprising for a tune to spread also to Northern England and New England; but Soldier's joy is common also in the southern U.S. (Kentucky, Virginia etc.) and all over Scandinavia. One of the pleasantest recordings of the tune that I know is in fact Norwegian (Sigbjørn Osa, playing a west-coast folk-instrument, the Hardingfela. The Hardingfela is a violin with sympathetic strings, giving a just-audible pedal-point, like the drone of the bagpipes but much quieter).

Because the tune is so widespread, it is not surprising that several dances use it. The New England "Soldier's joy" is a kind of Circassian circle; the English one (from Northumberland) is even more typical than ours, being a two-couple dance. Its first half contains a reel of four, and it is danced with vigorous "ranting" steps. At least three Norwegian dances and at least two Swedish dances also use it.

There is one very interesting point about the tune. Normally there is a clear distinction between reels and hornpipes in Scottish dance-musicology; and there are two sure ways of telling the one from the other. The first is theoretical: look at the tune and see if it has (when written in 2/2 or 4/4) a crotchet-rhythm or a quaver-rhythm. The Soldier's joy has a clear crotchet rhythm, as is shown by the three crotchets on the first three beats of bars 2, 4, 6 and 8, and this makes it a definite hornpipe. (For those who don't read music, the tune goes "deedle deedle deedle deedle deedle pom pom pom" and the poms are the crotchets). The second way is practical: look at any book of Scottish dance-music printed before 1920, or listen to any medley of tunes for the eightsome reel played by a piper, a fiddler or an old-fashioned dance band (but not a modern one: modern dance-band leaders seem to have lost the ability to distinguish reels from other fast tunes) and if a tune is labelled "reel" in the books, or included in a reel medley, then it is a reel. However, The Soldier's joy is an exception to this -- it is the only tune I know that is sometimes labelled "reel" and sometimes labelled "hornpipe"; and it is the only tune with a hornpipe rhythm that is commonly included in reel medleys.

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THE GENERAL DANCED AT DAWN

By Dand MacNeill. Reprinted from Scotland's Magazine by kind permission of the Editor.

Friday night was always dancing night. On the six other evenings of the week the officers' mess was informal, and we had supper in various states of uniform, mufti, and undress, throwing bits of bread across the table and invading the kitchen for second helpings of caramel pudding. The verandah was always open, and the soft dark night of North Africa hung around pleasantly beyond the screens.

Friday night was different. On that evening we dressed in our best tartans and walked over to the mess in two's and three's as soon as the solitary piper, who had been playing outside the mess for about twenty minutes, broke into the slow, plaintive "Battle of the Somme" -- or, as it is known colloquially, "See's the key, or I'll roar up yer lobby".

The table was a mass of silver: the horse's-hoof snuff-box that was a relic of the few minutes at Waterloo when the regiment broke Napoleon's cavalry, and Wellington himself took off his hat and said, "Thank you, gentlemen;" the set of spoons from some forgotten Indian palace with strange gods carved on the handles; the great bowl, magnificently engraved, presented by an American infantry regiment in Normandy, and the little quaich that had been found in the dust at Magersfontein; loot that had come from Vienna, Moscow, Berlin, Rome, the Taku Forts, and God knows where, some direct and some via French, Prussian, Polish, Spanish, and other regiments from half the countries on earth -- stolen, presented, captured, bought, won, given, taken, and acquired by accident. It was priceless, and as you sat and contemplated it you could almost feel the shades elbowing you round the table.

A twenty-minute pibroch is no small thing at a range of four feet. Some liked it, some affected to like it, and some buried their heads in their hands and endured it. But in everyone the harsh, keening siren-sound at least provoked thought. I can see them still, the faces round the table; the sad padre, tapping slowly to "The Battle of the Spoiled Dyke"; the junior subaltern, with his mouth slightly open, watching the tobacco smoke wreathing in low clouds over the white cloth; the signals officer, tapping his thumb-nail against his teeth and shifting restlessly as he wondered if he would get away in time to meet that Ensa singer at the club; the colonel, chin on fist like a great bald eagle with his lovat pipe clamped between his teeth and his eyes two generations away; the men, the boys, the dreamer's eyes and the boozer's melancholy, all silent while the music enveloped them.

When it was over, and we had thumped the table, and the pipe-major had downed his whisky with a Gaelic toast, we would troop out again, and the Colonel would grin and rub tobacco between his palms, and say:- "Right, gentlemen shall we dance?"

This was part of the weekly ritual. We would take off our tunics, and the pipers would make preparatory whines, and the Colonel would perch on a table, swinging his game leg which the Japanese had broken for him on the railway, and would say:
"Now, gentlemen, as you know there is Highland dancing as performed when ladies are present, and there is Highland dancing. We will have Highland dancing. In Malta in '21 I saw Strip the Willow performed in 89 seconds, and an Eightsome reel in two minutes 22 seconds. These are our targets. All right, pipey".

We lined up and went at it. You probably know both the dances referred to, but until you have seen Highland subalterns and captains giving them the treatment you just don't appreciate them. Strip the Willow at speed is lethal; there is much swinging round, and when fifteen stone of heughing humanity is whirled at you at close range you have to be wide awake to sidestep, scoop him in, and hurl him back again. I have gone up the line many times, and it is like being bounced from wall to wall of a long corridor with heavy weights attached to your arms. You just have to relax and concentrate on keeping upright.

The Eightsome was even faster, but not so hazardous, and when it was over we would have a breather while the adjutant, a lanky Englishman who was transformed by pipe music into a kind of Fred Astaire, danced a "ragged trousers" and the cooks and mess waiters came through to watch and join in the gradually mounting rumble of stamping and applause. He was the clumsiest creature in everyday walking and moving, but out there, with his fair hair falling over his face and his shirt hanging open, he was like thistledown on the air; he could have left Nijinsky frozen against the cushion.

The pipe-sergeant loved him, and the pipe-sergeant had skipped nimbly off with prizes uncounted at gatherings and games all over Scotland. It was to mollify him that the Colonel would encourage the adjutant to perform, for the pipe-sergeant disliked "wild" dancing of the Strip the Willow variety, and while we were on the floor he would stand with his mouth primly pursed and his glengarry pulled down, glancing occasionally at the Colonel and sniffing.

"What's up, pipe-sarnt", the Colonel would say, "too slow for you?"

"Slow?" The pipe-sergeant would say. "Fine you know sir, it's not too slow for me. It's a godless stramash is what it is, and shouldn't be allowed. Look at

the unfortunate Mr. Cameron, the condition of him; he doesn't know whether it's Tuesday or breakfast".

"They love it; anyway, you don't want them dancing like a bunch of old women".

"No, not like old women, but chust like proper Highlandmen. There is a form, and a time, and a one-two-three, and a one-two-three, and thank God it's done and here's the lovely adjutant".

"Well, don't worry," said the Colonel, clapping him on the shoulder. "You get 'em twice a week in the mornings to show them how it ought to be done".

This was so. On Tuesdays and Thursdays batmen would rouse officers with malicious satisfaction at 5.30, and we would stumble down, bleary and unshaven, to the M.T. sheds, where the pipe-sergeant would be waiting, skipping in the cold to put us through our session of practice dancing. He was in his element, bounding about in his laced pumps, squeaking at us while the piper played and we galumphed through our eightsomes and foursomes. Unlovely we were, but the pipe-sergeant was lost in the music and the mists of time, emerging from time to time to rebuke, encourage and commend.

So we danced, and it was just part of garrison life, until the word came of one of our periodic inspections, which meant that a general would descend from Cairo and storm through us, and report to B.H.Q. on our condition, and the Colonel, Adjutant, Regimental Sergeant Major and so on would either receive respective rockets or pats on the back. Especially the Colonel. And this particular inspection was rather more than ordinarily important to the old boy, because in two months he would be going home; he should have retired long before, but the war had kept him on, and he had stayed to the last possible minute. After all, it was his life: he had gone with this battalion to France in '14 and hardly left it since; now he was going for good, and the word went round that his last inspection must be something for him to remember in his old age.

Now, it chanced, that, possibly in deference to the Colonel, the Very Senior Officer who made this inspection was also very Highland. The pipe-sergeant rubbed his hands at the news. "There will be dancing," he said, with the air of the Creator establishing land and sea. "General MacCrimmon will be enchanted; he was in the Argylls, where they dance a wee bit. Of course, being an Argyll he is chust a kind of Campbell, but it will have to be right dancing for him, I can assure you, one, two, three, and no lascivious jiving".

-- to be concluded --

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+ + + COMPARISON CORNER FRENCH COUNTRY DANCES + + +

In this article we are not going to compare the whole of the dances of one country with another -- those of France with those of Scotland -- but a very particular kind of Scottish dancing, the country dance, with an even more particular kind of French dancing -- the contredanse. In fact, the dances of France are so varied that any attempt to say anything reasonably general about all of them would be futile.

The close connection between the Scottish country dance and the French contredanse lies in their parentage -- they both originated not too far from 1700, and are descendents of the seventeenth-century English country dance. The difference is that in Scotland the English country dance changed rather little for over 100 years (the main dissimilarity between English and Scottish country-dancing through the 18th century was the surprising popularity of the sequence "set to and turn corners and reels of three at the sides" in Scotland), and even to-day retains its basic structure. This basic structure may not seem obvious to anyone who has recently started dancing in a Scottish dance-club, because of the large number of newly-composed whole-set dances, square-shaped dances, and such; but strictly speaking these should not be called country-dances: it is traditional dances like The Duke of Perth, Petronella, Speed the plough or Scottish reform, with their "repeat, having passed a couple" that have retained the ancestral structure unchanged.

In France, however, the country-dance began to change quite soon: early on, typical French steps (and presumably also French style, though it is difficult to be sure about this) were incorporated, and characteristically French tunes (branles, bourrées and so on) were used. It is quite natural, of course, for French music and French steps to go together.

French travellers had seen the country dance in England from early times, but the first reference I know of it in France is in 1684. In his diary entry for the 27th of October the Marquis de Dangeau notes

> *Le soir il y eut appartement; on y dansa pour la première fois les contredanses qu'un maître anglais, nommé Isaac, avait apprises à toutes les dames.*
> [In the evening there was entertainment. For the first time country-dances were performed; they had been taught to all the ladies by an English dancing-master named Isaac].

This was at the court at Fontainebleau, and indeed country-dancing first reached France at a very aristocratic, indeed royal, level. The next year a French dancing master, André Lorin, went to England to learn the country-dances in use at court. He collected fifty and wrote out sixteen in two manuscripts, entitled

Livre de la contredance presenté au Roy

[Book of the country-dance presented to the King].

and

Livre de la contredance du Roy

We might note here that *"contredanse"* or *"contredance"* was not at all a good translation of "country dance": *"contre"* does not mean "country" at all. However, by this date, and in this milieu, the country dance had lost all its rustic characteristics, and for this reason, aided by the fact that French is the technical language of the dance (what is the English for *entrechat* or *pas de basque*??) the French mistranslation crept into the English language, and we find later, in England, Scotland, and America, country-dances being called contre dances or contra dances. In America they still are.

Let us return to Lorin. The general style of dancing in France was rather different from that in England, largely because France had a strong tradition of dancing, together with riding and fencing, as part of the education of a gentleman. Lorin was surprised at the "bizarrerie" and variety of steps in England, and at the fact that each dancer chose his own so that different dancers could be using the same steps at the same time, which *"ne s'accommodent pas avec la manière française"*; and he altered all this when he imported the dances to France. Lorin's manuscripts were written more than fifty years before the first such manuscripts in Scotland.

Just as in Scotland, the general (aristocratic) public did not take to the new imports immediately. In Scotland it took a long time for them to catch on, and most readers will be familiar with the well-known remark of Major Topham as late as 1775 describing the lack of enthusiasm of the Scots for country-dances compared with their native reels. (See The Thistle no. 39). In France, the process was quicker, and there was a clear generation gap. The young people liked the new dances. Bonnet, in *Histoire generale de la danse sacrée et profane*, 1724 [General history of sacred and secular dancing] wrote

> *Depuis le mariage de M. le duc de Bourgogne on a vu que les danses noble et serieuses se sont abolies d'année en année ... les jeunes gens du cour ayant substituée en la place les contredanses, dans lesquelles on ne reconnaît plus la gravité ni la noblesse des anciennes.*
>
> [Since the wedding of the Duke of Burgundy, noble and sedate dances have been noticeably disappearing

year by year ... the young people at court having replaced them by country-dances, in which neither the gravity nor the nobility of the former dances are to be found].

whereas Pauli [Elemens de la danse, 1756] wrote

Les Français de la vieille cour, étant habituées à des danses noble et grave, detestèrent les country danses, comme trop badines et folatres pour des personnes du bel air.

[The members of the old French court, being used to sedate and noble dances, hated the country dances, considering them too wanton and sportive for people of decorum.]

One of those who liked the dances was the Dauphine, and in 1708 they were included in a Royal ball.

-- to be concluded --

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* * * The origin of treepling? * * *

(From Bernhard Grzimek's *Among animals of Africa*).

Chimpanzees like to drum by dancing on resonant surfaces and performing a sort of drum-roll with their hind legs. We found a hollow fallen tree in French Guinea that was used for this purpose. Reynolds observed that the apes also used the frond-like supporting roots of the nyakahimbe tree to drum on. The sound could be heard from almost two miles away.

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. . . OBITUARY . . .

It is with very great regret that we report the death of Harry Bruce, of Dunedin, New Zealand.

Harry the Bruce, as he often signed himself, was Editor of New Zealand Scottish Country Dancer from 1962 until the current issue. No-one who has read this magazine will need to be told what a good job he made of it; and anyone who has corresponded with Harry will know how his warm-hearted love for Scottish dancing showed up in all he did.

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