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FOLK MUSIC AND DANCE

THE EDINBURGH CONGRESS
BY OUR MUSIC CRITIC

The gathering convened in Edinburgh last week by the Scottish Anthropological and Folk Lore Society was in part a congress at which papers were read and discussed and in part a festival of traditional music and dance. The two parts were complementary, and together revealed the great wealth and variety of surviving material in traditions that are still alive in the British Isles.

It was high time for such a stocktaking to be held. The Edinburgh International Festival and the Folk Dance and Song Society has brought to London at different times, both before and after the great international festival of 1935, not only musicians and dancers from Europe but also individual teams from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. But in cultivating the international field, with its broad basis for comparative study, we have neglected to bring together all our insular traditions and see what comparison can reveal each to the other among ourselves.

A Swedish visitor even asked that the function of the ordaining body should be established to speak for the British Isles to the inquiring foreigner. On the purely artistic side it was the extraordinary diversity and the strength of the several traditions that was most impressive. Scotland's own two traditions were the most striking example of this independence. The Gaelic and the Lowland songs flow in two streams with little interconnection. Language would hardly account for the differences in technical features like phrasing, ornamentation, and the Scotch snap. The dances show a little more interaction, as Lord James Stewart Murray demonstrated, when he showed what happened to a simple country dance, when it crossed the Channel from England, when it reached Perthshire. He also showed the vitality of both Highland and Lowland dancing when he declared the birthplace and date of the Eighteenth Reel as Blair Athol about 1690. He invented a "Fifty-first Division" country dance composed in the tradition by prisoners of war. The Irish contingent similarly exhibited a fine spectacle composed in the tradition called "The Broch of Tara." The distinctive step of England between folk-art and individual composition is thus blurred in the Celtic fringe, where tradition is still fluid.

The dance traditions are of interest to musicians in that they show how traditions themselves behave. But to some of the questions about folklore answers are still sought in vain. Is there an ethnic as well as a linguistic element in the distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Celtic? Can we really affect vocal melody? Is the song form an attribute respectively to the gentle clarsach and the raucous bagpipe? Some say that, whether scales, intervals, and rhythms are native to the instruments or not, the style of singing may be, and they quote instances from Hebridean lullabies and Spanish folk-songs, where a whispering harp and a nasal pipe respectively influence the spinning and the drone. There is some paradox therein after such a dogmatic statement of instrumental priority to remember that in the eighteenth century it was held that "the finest instrumental music may be considered an

THE MAHARAJA OF COCHIN

Our Bombay Correspondent reports the death from pneumonia yesterday at Ernakulam, his capital, of His Highness Kerala Varma Maharaja of Cochin, at the age of 78.

He was the fourth ruler of this State on the extreme south-west coast of the Indian peninsula to die within little more than seven years. This high rate of mortality is accounted for by the fact that the malarial system prevailing in the State, as in its greater neighbour Travancore, succeeds more or less from the extremely high environmental temperature. The late Maharaja had occupied the mufaddal for 26 years. He was conspicuous for his ready and steadfast support of the movement for self-government and for Indian union. After the partition he reconciled the new independent States of Travancore-Cochin with the Indian Union soon after the partition last year. The State is of considerable importance, for it has a population of 1,500,000 and an area approaching 500 square miles, much of it, however, consisting of forest and lagoons or backwaters.

VICE-ADMIRAL R. WILLSON, U.S.N.

Vice-Admiral Russell Willson, U.S.N., retired, died in Washington on Tuesday, aged 64. He served, with the then rank of captain, as naval attaché at the American Embassy in London from 1937 to 1938.

As rear-admiral he was placed in command of the first battleship division, United States Navy, in 1939, and in 1941 was appointed cause to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, where he himself had once matriculated. Soon after Pearl Harbour, Admiral Ernest J. King, the Commander-in-Chief of the United States Fleet, selected him as his chief of staff and he served in this position until he was promoted in 1942 to be Deputy Commander-in-Chief. From 1943 until 1946 Admiral Willson was attached to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington. He was closely associated with Admiral R. K. Turner in planning the first American amphibious operation at Guadalcanal Island, and was active at the Quebec conference in 1943 and at the Casablanca conference in the same year.

In 1911 he married Miss Mildred Scott, and there were two daughters and a son of the marriage. His son lost his life as a naval airman in the late war.

MR. H. G. ROBERTSON

Sir Walter Moreton, K.C., writes:

The Bar has lost a very distinguished figure by the death on Wednesday of Henry George Robertson. After a brilliant career at Rugby and Oxford, he was called to the Bar in 1903 and became a Bencher of the Inner Temple in 1919. He was the Recorder of the Town and Captain of the Rugby XV, and won the cross-country race three years in succession. At Oxford he continued his career of brilliant scholarship and got a double first, and in sport he was a founder of the university rugby team. At the Bar he was well known for his tenacity, and for a long time was the Chairman of the Committee of the Inner Temple. J.J. S.