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Curwen, 2/6

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By C. J. Sharp and H. C. MacIlwaine  
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## THE MORRIS BOOK

By C. J. Sharp and H. C. MacIlwaine  
A History of and Instruction in Morris  
Dancing. Novello, 2/6

Particulars of teachers, organisation, etc.,  
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N.W.

# SET TO MUSIC

By MARY NEAL, Hon. Sec.  
Esperance Working Girls' Club

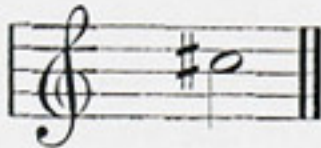
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An old Folk Singer from Somerset.

## SET TO MUSIC

To



I HAVE been wondering how I can best describe the interesting development which has taken place in the Club since September, 1905, and it seems to me fitly expressed by the title of this little report.

Our work, our aims, what we care most for, have been set to music. A door has been opened, away out into a new country, which is yet as old as England itself—and we have learnt something of that realm of imagination and beauty, of fear and of shelter which is all around us in our childhood, and which remains around the simple folk who may still be found, thank God, remote from town and city life, dwelling still by deep and silent waters, by swiftly running rivers, deep in the woods and in sheltered valleys among the hills.

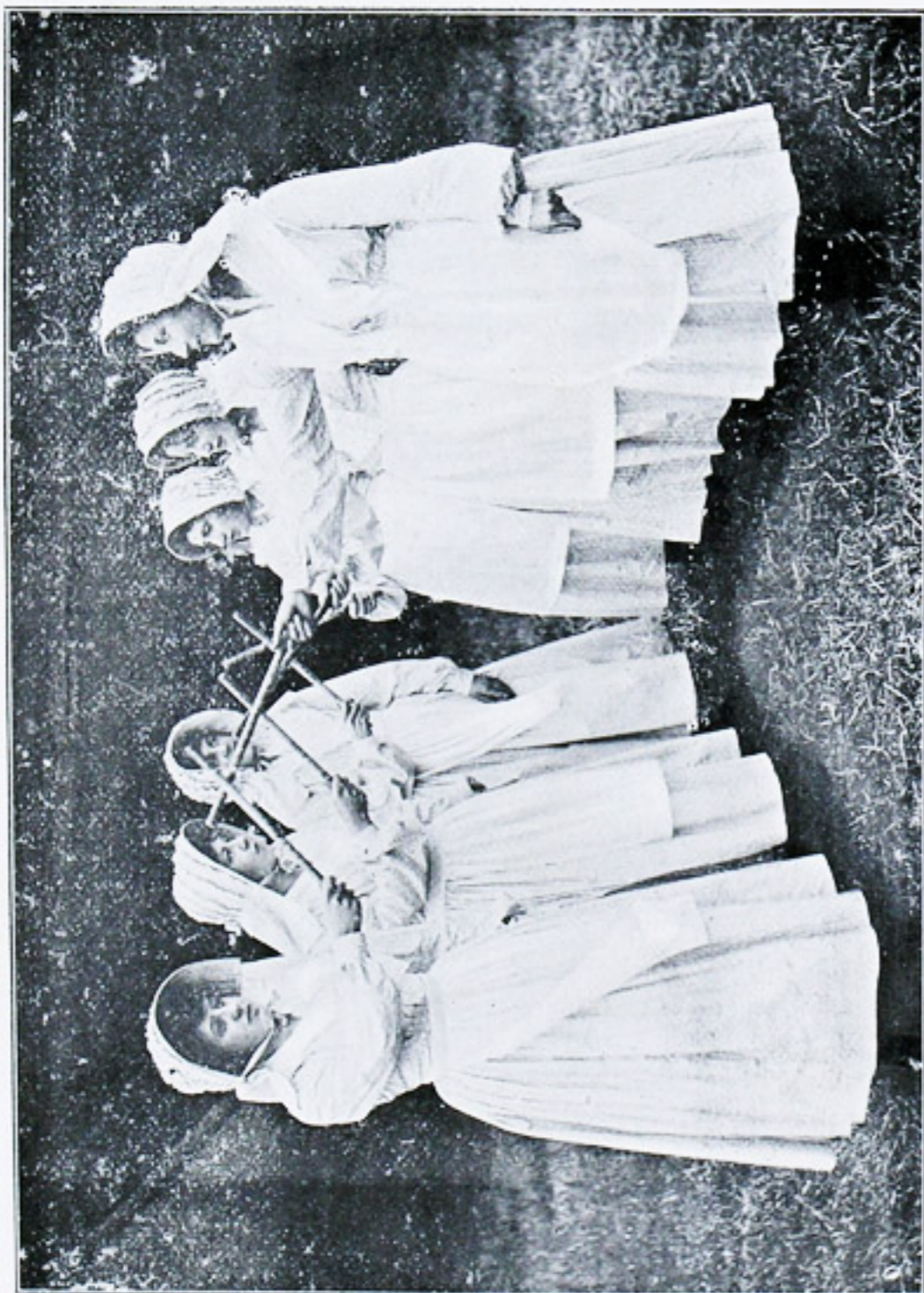
To bring a little of this serene and joyous life into the hurried, keen and vivid life of city dwellers, and to return it to the country folk with some of this added charm, has been the new development in our Girls' Club.

It happened in this way. For many years we have made music and dancing and play-acting some of the features of our Club, and we have found them in every way helpful to our members. But we had come to the end of our tether.

We had performed year after year some school cantata which our friends had been kind enough to say they enjoyed, and which had kept the girls happy during the long winter evenings. But a chance article in 'The Morning Post,' read by our Musical Director, on English Folk Songs set us on a new track. I went to see Mr. Cecil Sharp, who, the article said, had given much time to collecting these Folk Songs. I went to him to ask his advice as to whether these songs would be suitable for a Working Girls' Club. In ten minutes we were deep in the subject of the English Folk Song, and I was told that I should be surprised at the way in which English boys and girls would understand and appreciate their own Folk music.

"They will learn it," said Mr. Sharp, "by a sort of spiritual sixth sense, and there will be none of the grind and distaste which they may have shown in learning other things."

I went away having made up my mind to the experiment, although I confess that the music looked, to my inexperience, very difficult. In a fortnight I wrote to Mr. Sharp, telling him that I could only express the result of the first few lessons by saying that the Club had gone mad, that they were perfectly intoxicated with the



MORRIS DANCE—"SHEPHERD'S HEY."

music. Since then I have learnt a good deal about Folk Music, and can better understand what it was that appealed to these English girls.

Folk Music is the creation and the possession of the people. The words and the tunes of the Songs have come generation after generation from the heart of the English folk. Each generation and each individual who has sung them has added or omitted some little touch, and so, to-day, in these songs which have been mostly collected from old people eighty and ninety years of age, is the very heart and soul of English sentiment.

One or two points are interesting. The songs are full of the love of the land, of the flowers, and of healthy joyous life. The decadent verse-writers of to-day would not understand the love making of the country side, illustrated as it is by the song of birds and the blossoming of flowers and the mystery which is only felt and understood by those of simple and child-like mind.

The next thing was to find some dancing which would fit in with the spirit of the Folk Song. Again Mr. Sharp gave us invaluable help. Seven years ago he had taken down some Morris

dance tunes and, getting the address from him, I went into Oxfordshire and found the two countrymen who had given Mr. Sharp the tunes. These dances had been handed down from father to son for five generations, and were as truly folk dances as the songs were folk songs.

I brought these two men up to London and set them to teach my girls to dance.

In two evenings we had learnt enough dances to make an English Pastoral with the Folk Songs. Mr. H. C. MacIlwaine, our Musical Director, wrote a short pastoral as an introduction to the songs and dances, and we were able in this way to introduce a play which from beginning to end represented England hundreds of years ago. We gave this first of all at our Christmas Party, and the result was so delightful that I was urged to give a more public performance. We took the Small Queen's Hall and gave it again in April. Since then, the results have been most surprising. I have answered literally hundreds of letters from county people interested in village life, Poor Law teachers, drill instructors, girls' school mistresses, Club leaders and others, asking whether the songs and dances can be had. All with

the same idea, to bring back into the lives of English people their own Folk Music, to give them back an inheritance which the dwellers in the cities have lost entirely, and which is fast slipping away from the country people as the old folks one by one die, leaving no record behind.

At the present time the members of our club have taught, or are teaching, these dances in counties North, South, East and West, and we have rivalled the traditional John Kemp, who danced the Morris from London to Norwich. Everywhere the same result has followed. Clergymen and helpers of all classes write to me that quite a new life and interest has sprung up in these villages. Clergy who have despaired of reaching people have got at them through the medium of the Folk Music. Music is the one art in which the otherwise inarticulate can express themselves, and so we have in our Club to-day the truest meeting ground of all classes. For the first time we have something in our possession which others are glad to ask for, and which we are glad to share, and as the "Daily Chronicle" said of our first concert, it was "A little entertainment which may indeed light such a candle in England as will not immediately be put out."

Besides this we are teaching Girls' Clubs all over London, and before next spring we hope that enough girls in London will be able to dance to make it possible to take the large Queen's Hall, the floor of which shall be entirely filled with English girls dancing English dances.

While I was in Somerset, an old folk singer came to see two London girls dance. He was an old sailor who had lived in many lands and seen many things. He said "This is the dancing of my heart and I would not have missed the sight for two big apples," and he added a very significant remark:—"It's what I call clean dancing". And that is the impression one gets everywhere that the folk music is introduced, a healthy open-air and wholesome spirit is in it. He then sang us a song, "The Watchet Sailor," and with this exchange of arts, we left him. We are still hoping to carry on this work, which many helpers have told me is part of a great social revival—a going back from the town to the country—of a reaction against all that makes for city life. It is a help towards solving a great problem. We can never go back to the days when country life sufficed for everything. The town has come too near for that, but an



"ALL IN."

interchange between town and country is what we must look for in the future. The musician will go into the country and will set down for us dance and song from the old folks who live there. The town folk will learn them and add something to them of their own generation, and of the charm and vivacity of the city, and they, in their turn will teach the young folks of the villages. Already in Hammersmith, in the very heart of the town, I found the old tradition lingering, and Mr. Sharp has been to the country and taken down from "Grandad" another set of tunes to which we have yet to learn the dances.

In Warwickshire, through hearing what we were doing, our little pastoral and folk songs have been sung, and local Morris dances instead of those we had from Oxfordshire, were danced. Not a day passes without my getting some letter either asking for information or telling me where I can find other country dances. Last week a letter came from Japan saying that the love of England there was so strong that they too would like to learn the old English dances. The effect which having something they are able to give has had upon the girls is quite beautiful, and the impression they

have given to others whom they have taught is that their manners are as pretty as their dancing, which is saying a great deal. The hospitality which they have enjoyed in the country, the hospitality which they have given to the country folks who have come to teach them, has been a great joy to both sides. From being merely a Working Girls's Club in an out of the way part of London, we feel we have become part of a national movement, and like everything which takes one out of one's own little life and interests, it has had a splendid all round effect on the general conduct and character of the Club. It has added a certain dignity to the smallest thing we do. It is no small thing for a little London dressmaker to stay in the house, as an honoured guest, of a country squire, and ride in his motor car and write letters home at his study table, and feel at the same time that she too has something to give.

One has always felt that the national treasure was not all in gold and silver, that it was not even in its merchandise, nor with the great and learned, but that somewhere, somehow, it was in the people themselves. It has seemed to us this year that we have made a great discovery

of a hidden treasure, and that having discovered it we have become a medium through which others may also enjoy it.

I shall be very glad at any time to answer any questions or to send teachers who will help to spread the movement. Nothing but good, nothing but healthy enjoyment has come of it so far, and it seems to me and to others the very best counter-action of the more questionable pleasures of city life. We have done the best winter's work we have ever done. Our numbers have kept up and our more serious classes have been well attended. My newspaper class on Monday evening still continues, and if occasionally I have introduced a little Folk Lore and speeches of more artistic interest, we have still kept up our interest in the current topics of the day. Our Holiday Hotel at Littlehampton is as popular as ever, and by the time that this report is issued, it will have been filled with members of our Club, who look forward year by year to their fortnight at the seaside.

We have given seven concerts at the Small Queen's Hall, and many performances in the country, everywhere with delightful results. H.M. Inspector of Schools in one county des-

cribes that county to me as simply 'ablaze' with this beautiful revival of music.

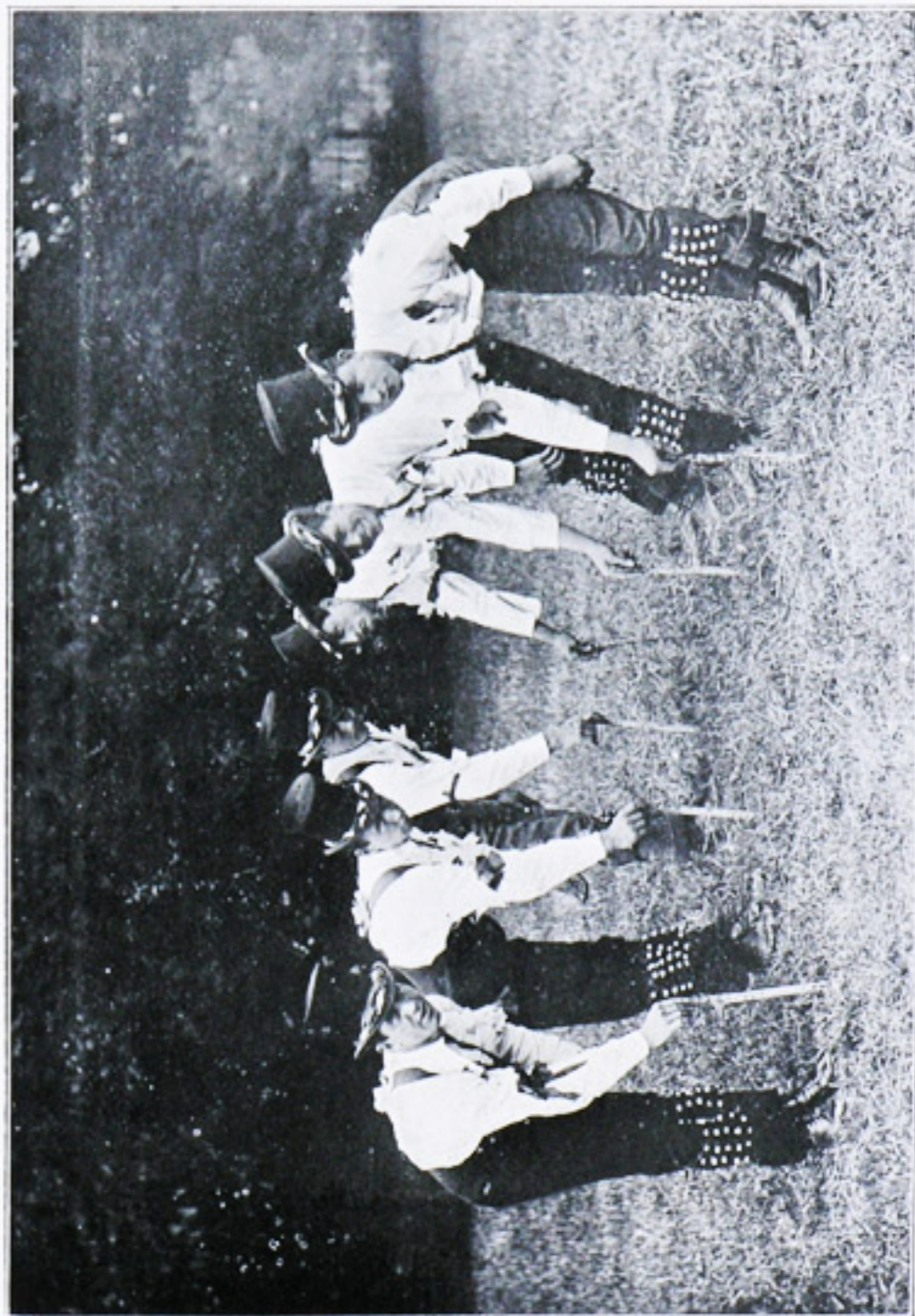
It has been a delightful development of our Club for working girls, boys and children, and we are on our way to achieve a great deal towards financial independence. But the initial expenses have been heavy and the increase in our membership has meant heavy holiday expenses, so that we end the financial year with a debt to the Hon. Secretary.

If every one who has enjoyed our concerts in town and country, and who is interested in this revival, would send me a donation of one guinea, I should be put quite beyond financial anxiety of any sort for at least a year, and should be able to follow all the developments which are sure to be needed in a movement which is so full of life and interest.

An audited financial statement is sent to all donors.

MARY NEAL,  
Hon. Sec.

Espérance Club,  
50, Cumberland Market, N.W.



BEAN-SETTING.  
Some of our pupils in the country.