

TEACHING MORRIS-DANCE.

Girls' Pretty Performance on House Roof.

London working girls are now acting as dancing mistresses, and travel to all parts of England to teach, not only country children, but even the dames of squires, the delight that lives in morris-dancing. And therein lies a poetic compensation, as for generation after generation town has remorselessly drawn upon the resources of the country, so that the age is now machine-ridden, and the gaiety of "Merry England" has forsaken our hamlets and villages, and the only music heard in their midst is the horn of the ramping motor.

The pioneer of this new-formed occupation for those on whom the burden of life falls none too lightly is Miss Mary Neale, who has taken a great interest in brightening the lives of working girls generally, and particularly in founding and conducting the *Esperance Girls' Club*, Cumberland Market, N.W.

"Morris-dancing is just capering through England," said Miss Neale to a "Daily Chronicle" representative. "And it is our club girls that have set the feet of country-folk jiggling with joyous delight. They are doing a national work, and doing it well! Some of the girls are making as much as 12s. 6d. a week in addition to their ordinary wages, by teaching the dances during their spare time."

"I am willing to send teachers to town or country, and particularly to county council schools. One of our girls has been teaching in a Monmouth county school, and the children picked up the dancing as though to the manner born. And why not? After all, it is their natural heritage. Other girl teachers have been at work in Derby, in Norfolk, and Surrey."

"Just lately I have made arrangements with six girls' clubs in London to take up the dancing. With the London girl it is altogether delightful to watch how the folk-music and the folk-dance call up all her vivacity. But come up on the roof of my flat, and you shall see them dance."

The flat roof was on a level with St. Pancras Church, separated from it by a narrow road. And up the stairs, into the gleaming September sun, stepped six pretty English maidens dressed in pink and blue and white cotton print costumes, with charming caps perched on their heads, or with their heads enveloped in the simple and becoming sun-bonnet still worn by English peasant women. Each girl carried a short wooden stick.

"Hum," said Miss Neale, and with a preliminary laugh the "side," "la la"-ed a simple tune, and the girls pairing off, the "Beansetting" dance began. It was all very simple and sweetly pretty.

REVIVAL OF MORRIS DANCING.



MR. KIMBER WHO TAUGHT THE GIRLS OF THE ESPERANCE CLUB TO DANCE THE MORRIS



A MEMBER OF ESPERANCE CLUB



OLD SOMERSETSHIRE DAMES WHO ARE REPOSITORIES OF OLD FOLK SONGS AND DANCES



LONDON GIRLS IN THE BEAN-SETTING DANCE



ALMOST as long ago as "once-upon-a-time," one of the merry things that went to the making of "Merrie England" was the Morris dance. As Cupid makes love for the love of the thing, so those old happy Englishmen danced out of the pure joy of living. It was good to be alive in those days—as now and always. But then things were simpler. Sincerity was hardly counted a virtue, as most, well-nigh of necessity, led simple and sincere lives. They lived very near to Mother Earth. She found them their work in life, and was largely mistress of their sorrows, hopes, and joys. And so it came about that they paid her tribute for tribute, stamping the earth-mark upon all their revels, played in the open under the kindly sun. And the earth, being whimsical and full of quaint humours, whimsicality and quaintness run through all the folk-songs and dances. The songs haunt, and the dances get at the blood—being English—that is in you.

As life grew more and more complex England forgot to laugh. Time the trickster tempted Eng-

lishmen to forsake the country, packed them into toiling towns, mewed them up in factories, fenced in the commons, took Hodge out of his smock, and robbed the folk of the dance and song. Here and there, in odd, old-world places and at odd times of the year, the old merriment cut a caper or two, shyly peeping out upon a bustling age that just found time to put it into a newspaper paragraph as "A Link with the Past," "An Interesting Survival," "A Quaint Custom," and then went on with the gloomy business of money-getting to dance attendance upon whirling machinery—the death dance of simple merriment.

A sad, and still growing sadder, England greeted the birth of the twentieth century. In the towns people revelled feverishly. The country was sadly silent, and the trudging labourer a mere thing of hire, a creature of toil, and with no part in the play of life such as his forebears understood so well.

At last there came along the writing man, a man who had nosed into the history of folk-songs and found it worth the doing. This was Mr. Cecil Sharp. While he was visiting friends in

Hedington, a little Oxfordshire hamlet, some villagers came to the house and asked if they might "dance the Morris." Of course they might, and Mr. Sharp looked and laughed, was charmed and delighted. And then, wiser than his generation, studied the dances, their dances and their music. He tried to get the dances introduced into the schools as the best way of reviving some of England's lost merriment. But few have the sense to see it in that light, and those who did never got beyond admitting that it was a "good idea." But it remained for a woman—Miss Mary Neal—to set young England jiggling again. At the Small Queen's Hall yesterday she gave an English Pastoral by Mr. H. C. MacIlwaine, introducing folk-songs and Morris dances, the singers and dancers being the "Babies, children, and girls of the Esperance Club."

Some fifteen years ago Miss Neal founded the Esperance Working Girls' Club, in Cumberland Market, N.W. In October 1905 Mr. Sharp suggested that Morris dancing should form one of the amusements of the club. The very thing,

and Miss Neal promptly got in touch with Mr. Kimber, whose family have been Morris dancers for generations, and got him to teach some of the club girls. The photograph of Mr. Kimber is taken, by kind permission, from Mr. Cecil Sharp's forthcoming book on Morris dancing, to be published by Novello. They took to it as though to the manner born, and went mad with the delight of it all. They learnt all the three kinds of Morris dancing—"stick" dances, "handkerchief" dances, and "corner" dances. In some of the "corner" dances there is at times a decided resemblance to the cake walk. "Beansetting" is the name of a very favourite "stick" dance. In this—or in all—there are six dancers, known as a "side." Each dancer has a short wooden stick which is crossed and clashed and waved and finally dibbed to the ground—the bean being set! "How d'ye do, Sir," is another one of these natural dances, the movements of the English fight with fisticuffs, ending with the handshakes of reconciliation. The dancing is body dancing, bringing all the muscles into play, vigour taking the place of

minging elegance. Morris dancing proper was for men, it is heel work, and it is this which gives the shin-bells their best jingle.

It was not long before the Esperance Club became a school centre for Morris dancing, and the working girl dancing mistresses have been travelling to all parts of the country bringing delight wherever they go. A family of Quakers living in the Midlands has been taught to "dance the Morris" by one of Miss Neal's little mistresses, and another has just "finished" the Poor-law school of St. Mary's, Holloway, and some fifty of the children were among the audience at yesterday's exhibition of Morris dancing and singing of folk-songs at the Small Queen's Hall. Many of the folk-songs sung in the Esperance Club have been literally snatched from the grave. "I'm seventeen come Sunday" is one of these. It was sung by a bed-ridden old Somerset woman of ninety to another old woman of seventy until the latter had learnt it thoroughly, when it was transcribed by ear. And thus "Merrie England" comes into her own again.

MORRIS DANCES AND FOLK SONGS: What the Esperance Club is Doing for its Working Girls.



LONDON WORKGIRLS PRACTISING MORRIS-DANCES AND FOLK SONGS ON THE ROOF OF THE ESPERANCE CLUB HOUSE FOR PERFORMANCE AT THE QUEEN'S HALL.



THE MUSICAL ABILITY AND GRACE OF THE LONDON WORKGIRL ARE ASTONISHING.