

## THE REVIVAL OF THE MORRIS DANCE.

After my week's visit to Thaxted to teach Morris dancing, the Editor asked me to send him a few notes on the origin of the old dances and their revival. Their origin seems uncertain. An old sixteenth century writer mentions them, and some authorities point to their introduction into England as early as the reign of Edward the Third. Some speak of the Moorish origin of Morris dancing, but others deny that it owes anything to the Moors. We teach it now to women as well as men, but in the old days it was only danced by men. Its revival came about in this way. In some parts of England it had died out. It has been danced for centuries, and is still danced in Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Gloucestershire and certain other counties. The men of Bidford still dance it. About five years ago Miss Neal, the secretary of the *Espérance* Club for working girls, was anxious to introduce old folk songs and country dances among the members, and hearing of the Oxfordshire Morris dancers, got two of them to come and teach at the club. Several traditional teachers have been since, and the *Espérance* Club has become the centre of the revival. Many of its members have now been trained as expert Morris dancers and are being sent out to all parts of England to teach the old country songs and dances, and so great is the popularity of the revival and so great the demand for teachers, that Miss Neal finds it difficult to keep pace with the requests that are pouring in.

The *Espérance* members give performances from time to time in various parts of London; many such are given at Queen's Hall and at Kensington Town Hall. The company consists of about twenty girls and a few baby girls between the ages of four and seven and six boys. The performance begins with "Morris on," danced to the traditional air to the accompaniment of which the dancers of Gloucestershire always used to make their entrance. Then perhaps the younger children play a singing game, and folk songs are sung and dances given for about an hour. There is an interval for refreshments, during which Miss Neal speaks about the principles and progress of the revival. We continue for another hour, concluding with the singing of "the White Paternoster," or "Evening Hymn," a beautiful hymn, verses of which appear in the present number of "The Country Town," and with the dancing of "Morris off." This last is quite different from the other dances, having none of their springing movements, but suggesting pleasant fatigue and "home going through the lanes and meadows to the cottage, to supper and to bed." The tune is interesting and beautiful, and seems to be one of the most ancient. There is a printed edition dated 1550 and headed "La Morisque," but it is probably much older than this date.



At Crosby Hall in Chelsea there is a performance every first Thursday in the month. The dancing is in the middle of the room, the audience sitting round. When we have danced a "Morris," the audience are invited to join us, which they willingly do, and seem to enjoy themselves very much. Some people complain that Morris dancing is heavy compared with other forms of the art, but they can never have seen it properly performed. It is certainly different from all other dancing, but is as light and charming and graceful as any.

Some of the traditional performers dance with straight knees, others from other villages bend the knee; some never put the foot out at the back; others disregard this, but the traditional dancers have always plenty of spring and lightness about them. Although in different villages various steps are in use, there are certain characteristics of the Morris that do not vary. There is generally a dignity in Morris dancing which is so often lacking in the modern dance. Of course the performance will always be best in the open air, in gardens and meadows, and one cannot imagine a more splendid spot for the dancers than the stone platform under the posts of the ancient Guild Hall in the market place of Thaxted.

BLANCHE PAYLING.

## THE FEBRUARY POEM. THE EVENING HYMN.

This old hymn, often sung at the close of Morris dancing and folk song performances, will be found in "English Folk Songs for Schools," collected by Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp, published by Curwen & Sons, 24, Berners Street, W., 2/6 net (with music). Words of the Songs can be supplied by Messrs. Curwen for 3d. or in cloth binding 6d. Vocal Edition 1/-. I would commend this charming collection of songs to the notice of "Country Town" readers, and especially to teachers, now that the Board of Education has included Morris Dancing and Folk Song in the new Syllabus of Physical Training. (EDITOR.)

Matthew, Mark and Luke and John,  
Bless the bed that I lie on.  
Four angels to my bed,  
Two to bottom, two to head;  
Two to hear me when I pray,  
Two to bear my soul away.

Monday morn the week begins,  
Christ deliver our souls from sin.  
Tuesday morn, nor curse nor swear,  
Christes Body that will tear.  
Wednesday, middle of the week,  
Woe to the Soul Christ does not seek.

Thursday morn, Saint Peter wrote  
Joy to the Soul that heaven hath bote.\*  
Friday, Christ died on the tree  
To save other men as well as me.  
Saturday, sure, the evening dead,  
Sunday morn, the Book's outspread.

God is the branch and I the flower,  
Pray God send me a blessed hour.  
I go to bed some sleep to take,  
The Lord, he knows if I shall wake.  
Sleep I ever, sleep I never,  
God receive my soul for ever.

(\*bote—bid for.)