

“Calling the Tune and Leading a Merry Dance” Part 9'- The French Connection and Ca Ira'

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The mention of Downfall of Paris in Part 8 from the newspaper report of 1825 was a bonus. It meant I could reference it as a country dance most likely known out here as surely readers would be up with the 'play' in the satirical account. Downfall of Paris is a tremendous tune in which details of origin are extremely interesting. It developed from a French revolutionary song *Ça Ira* with words vehemently aimed at the aristocracy. These words have been forwarded by Chris J Brady in England with other information variously given to him by Paul Roberts and Frances Tucker.

*"Ah! It'll be fine, It'll be fine,
It'll be fine aristocrats to the lamp-post
Ah! It'll be fine, It'll be fine,
It'll be fine the aristocrats, we'll hang them!
And when we'll have hung them all, We'll stuff a spade up their arse"*

An illustration of the revolution referencing the tune can be found via the link <http://tiny.cc/b39fs> It is from the British Museum and shown below.



Description

Political satire; a horned, winged devil, exclaiming "ça ira", pulls an open cart full of monkey-like musicians, followed by a row of women carrying farming implements and rows of infantry, with chicken faces; a nebulous city in the background and flying monkeys with French caps carrying a sheet of music labelled "Ah! Ca Ira" above the cart. 4 July 1792 Etching with some hand-colouring

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According to Winstock "Songs & Music of the Redcoats" the tune entered the British military tradition when bandsmen of the 14th (Bedfordshire) Regiment played the French "their own damned tune" at the battle of Famars in 1793. I have seen several references to this being the West Yorks Regiment but Winstock is clear it is the 14th and cites good sources for the story. So the British Army is almost certainly the origin of the "Downfall" title and very likely of the extended variation setting of the tune known to traditional musicians in the British Isles and north America - and indeed of the basic theme tune of that setting, which is significantly different to Ça Ira. This came from a talk and the information from a musician in the Napoleonic Association. Thus the tune was renamed and played by one of the British Regiments as an informal battle honour. Their Colonel was reputed to have ordered his band to play the tune during the final charge to victory, with a statement along the lines of "We'll beat the Froggies with their own damned tune". "After Waterloo, ... every band of music in the Austrian, Prussian and Russian armies, while they marched past the group of kings, played the tune called "The Downfall of Paris" the tune serenading the most autocratic monarchs in Europe was, by its other name, the savage "Ça Ira" song of the first and bloodiest French Revolutionaries..."

Ça Ira
(From Thomas Wilson's 'The companion to the Ball Room' London 1816)

The image shows a musical score for the tune 'Ça Ira'. It is written in 2/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The score consists of four staves of music. Above the first staff are the chords F, C7, F, Bb, F, C7, F. Above the second staff are C7, F, C7, F, C, F, G7, C. Above the third staff are G7, C, D7, Gm, C7, F. Above the fourth staff are Bb, F, Bb, C7. The score ends with a double bar line and the marking 'Da Capo'. The word 'Fine' is written at the end of the first staff.

Certainly Wilson has both tune and dance description(s) for both the Downfall of Paris and Ça Ira in his 'The companion to the Ball Room' 1816. Another reference says The 'Downfall of Paris' appears to have been composed originally as a contredanse (Carillon Nationale) and subsequently used by Ladré and Le Fayette for Ça Ira.

The Downfall of Paris Country Dance is basically -
top couple swing with right hand round one couple, then swing with left, second couple do the

same, down the middle, up again, allemande, and swing corners, lead outsides and turn you partner; set three across and three in your places, lead through bottom and top, hand four at bottom, and right and left at top. I would presume it to be a triple minor longways for as many as will.

French Contredanse and Cotillon

Whilst over at least a 200 year period the English had taken on and developed their own indigenous Country Dance, including some meld of the longways for as many as will from the Italian Balleti, France had been the real centre for dispersion of dance. Earlier court dances from Medieval, Renaissance & Baroque eras including the Carole, Branle, Galliard, Bourée, Courante & Rigadoon had all come via France. The major changes during the Regency Period and through to the end of the Nineteenth Century were likewise launched via Paris – Ecossoise, Quadrille, Waltz, Galop, Polka, Mazurka, Schottische until very late when it switched to an American influence with the Barn Dance and Two Step closely followed with the early 20thC Jazz dances - Cake Walk, Animal Dances, One Step, Tango, Foxtrot, Quickstep and Modern Waltz.

Back to the Regency, French Contredanses and Cotillons provided occasional variety to the English Country Dance in Britain although there is little reference to them in Australia. But the possibility is there. Remember Marjorie McLaughlin's comment the term 'contre' in French was originally associated with meaning 'country' and that the interpretation of 'contra' as opposites in the longways form is erroneous but has come to stay as in American contra-dance. England and Australia had special assemblies or 'long rooms' that catered for the Country Dance:-

Sydney Gazette Tuesday June 22nd 1830

*“R. EARL, from Hunter's River most respectfully informs the Ladies on opening a School on Monday the 14th of July, at Mr. SANDWELT's **Long Room** where a variety of the most fashionable DANCING will be introduced, comprising Quadrilles, Waltzes, Scotch, English and Irish Dances.”*

The French certainly took up the longways country dance from England as Contredanse l'Anglaise but their square ballrooms did not easily accommodate the longways form (or so it is said) and for that reason many of their contredanses and cotillons were arranged or developed in square formation. This also led to the single figure quadrilles which later gave rise to 'The Quadrille' or First Set where several favourite contredanses or cotillons were sequenced into figures of one dance. American square dance and contra dance developed from the transportation of the original English Country Dance followed by the introduction of the French quadrilles, cotillons and contredanses. Canada of course at least through Quebec with its strong French connection has another interesting parallel tradition.

Ellis Rogers has this to say about French Contredanses and Cotillons

“Quite a few sources say that the 'Ladies Chain' was only introduced into dances after the innovation of the quadrille. This is not true. The figure is described in De La Cuisse's 'Repertoire de Bal' of 1762 and is used in Cotillons at that time.” “The term 'contredanse' seems originally to have meant 'with a partner', not necessarily in opposing lines, as there are contredanses for two people only by Pecour. This is why, whenever a contredanse is mentioned, it must be investigated to establish its form: Contredanse a deux = couple dance, Contredanse a quatre = two couples facing, Contredanse a huit = four couples in a square, Contredanse a l'Anglaise = longways country dance.

In England a cotillion could be, as in France, either for two facing couples or for four couples in a square. Just to add confusion, a cotillion for two facing couples was occasionally, in the 18th century, called a quadrille. The 'verses' (called changes in England) of a cotillion numbered seven

for two facing couples and nine for a square set.”

That is a key difference, the figure of a quadrille was single, a cotillon consisted of a chorus alternating between changes of a number of verses.

Cotillon is the French spelling and Cotillion the English. We have a record of one Cotillion in which the music and description believed penned in the 1820s by Georgiana McCrae from an earlier source was brought to Australia (Arthur's Seat near Melbourne) when she and her husband immigrated in the 1840s. We don't know if it was danced out here, but Georgiana was certainly a socialite that attended many society balls in Melbourne. It is thought La Georgina may have been named after her Aunt Georgina. Georgiana's details have been preserved by the McCrae family and the National Trust of Australia, Victorian Branch. Much of Georgiana's music manuscripts and history have been published in 'Frae the friends and Land I love': The McCrae Homestead Music Book' by Rosemary Richards. Included are many Scottish reels of the day, a few Strathspeys as well as The Quadrille.

With reference to Jane Austen, Ellis Rogers' wife Christine provides some information on the Boulanger from France:-

The types of dance Jane mentions are the waltz, quadrille, cotillion and, of course, the country dance. The only dances she mentions by name are the Boulanger (Pride and Prejudice, chapter 3, and her letter to Cassandra Austen dated 5th September 1796) and the Minuet de la Cour (Love and Friendship, third letter). (The Minuet de la Cour was more a display dance). There are several descriptions of the Boulanger, all very similar. The music is in 6/8 time, the first part played 'moderato'. Dancers formed a circle of four couples or more and circled to the right for 8 bars (and in some versions circled back again). The second part of the tune is then played 'presto' and the first gentleman turns the right hand lady with the right hand, partner with left, next lady round with the right, partner with left, and so on until he has turned all the ladies, the musicians playing the 'B' music until he has finished. They then return to the 'A' music and the dancers repeat the circling, then the next gentleman takes his turn and so on until all the gentlemen have finished, when the first lady will take her turn and so on. In some versions the ladies go first, in others the gentlemen and ladies alternate. In some versions the turn is made first with partner and then with the next person round the circle. The step for the 'B' section appears to be a hop-and-step.

Minuets from France had basically been replaced by Cotillions towards the end of the 18th C, certainly by the Regency although the music was still advertised during this time and the dance surviving for training in deportment in classical circles. *Ellis and Chris Rogers* comment on the change from the Minuet to Cotillions as opening ball dances as follows:-

“The ball from 1800 to about 1820 might well have started with three or four Cotillions as these had replaced the Minuets that began a ball in the 18th century. These cotillions would certainly have been danced with steps, steps such as Pas de bourree, Contretemps, Demi- contretemps, balances, Rigadouns and Pirouettes.

In addition to the above, Jane makes two references to cotillions in chapter 10 of Northanger Abbey. The second of these - “The cotillions were over, the country dances beginning ...” is most interesting as it indicates that the cotillion had replaced the minuet (not mentioned by Jane) as occupying the first part of a ball, followed by country dances. There is no indication which of the many balls Jane mentions included cotillions and how many of the dances she danced were cotillions. Most of the references in her published letters refer to the number of couples taking part or the names of her partners.

The cotillion was another French square dance, of an earlier date than the quadrille and requiring less energy but more stamina, as one might be dancing continuously for ten minutes or so. They range from short and simple to long and extremely complex, some with changes of rhythm and some

including minuet steps. The form is of simple 'verses', called 'changes', and a more complex 'chorus', called the 'figure'. These are charming dances that would have been familiar to Mr Darcy and the Bingleys. English and French sources for cotillions can be found in the Vaughan Williams Library at Cecil Sharp House, including XXIV New Cotillons or French Dances, published c.1780 in London.

So we come to country dances, the form which appears most frequently in Jane's books and letters, both directly – "...danced two Country Dances and the Boulangeries ..." (letter to Cassandra Austen dated 5th September 1796.) and indirectly – "... having but a short set to dance down ..." (Northanger Abbey, chapter 16)."

The original Cotillons took their name from a French dance meaning 'petticoat' and associated with the swirl of the petticoat when dancing. A totally different and unrelated Cotillion appeared in the 1830s and it was simply a party game with the presenting of favours in dancing and gifts. It is believed the Waltz Cotillion, really a Waltz Quadrille, developed around 1840 from a section of this party Cotillon which was known to last hours.

There is an Australian newspaper account which describes this new party type dance:-

Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser Saturday 6th April 1833

New Dance.-We quote the following from the grave pages of the Morning Chronicle. Something of the kind was wanting. The men have got their new constitution-why not the ladies their new dance? "At the festivities last week at Gunton Park, the seat of Lord Suffield, a new dance was introduced, after quadrilles, waltzes, gallopades, and reels, and which far eclipsed them all. It bears the old name of cotillon, but is totally new and unequalled in spirit and effect. It begins by some six or eight couples waltzing; a chair is suddenly introduced into the centre, in which the first gentleman seats his partner. He then leads up and presents each of the other gentlemen in succession. If the lady rejects, the discarded retire behind the chair; but when the right man arrives, she springs up, the tone and accent of the music are accelerated, and off she waltzes with the elected--the rest seize their partners, and the circle is continued. All in turn go through the process. Three chairs are then placed. A lady (in succession) is seated between two bearers [query bearers], who importunately solicit her reluctant regard till at length she gives herself to one and waltzing is resumed. A gentleman is then seated in a centre chair, hoodwinked, and a lady takes the place on each side. In this perplexity of choice, the Tantalus of the mirth remains; till by a sudden resolution he decides for right or left, uncovers his eyes, and waltzes away with the chance-directed partner, followed as before by the rest. The chairs are now placed triangularly dos & dos, and three ladies are thus seated. The youths pace round them in a circle, till each of the fair one throws her handkerchief, and away they again whirl. The men then appear to deliver to each, but to one alone is given, a ring; and the dance concludes by the ladies passing hand and hand through arches made by the extended arms of the gentlemen; and each seizes his partner, and once more swings round the circle."

In Philip Richardson's 'Social Dances of the XIX Century p. 100-101 he provides a quote from The Honourable Mrs. Armytage writing in Mrs. Lilly Grove's *Dancing* who says: "*Perhaps one of the most noticeable cotillons ever danced was at the famous ball given by the Brigade of Guards to the Prince and Princess of Wales on June 26th, 1863.... The second great International Exhibition was over, and the vast building standing empty in Cromwell Road was secured for the entertainment.... Notwithstanding the size of the ballroom, it was densely crowded till a very late (or early) hour, and a Cotillon begun after two o'clock had not finished till the clock struck five. The numbers who had stayed to join it may be estimated by the fact that chairs all round this enormous room were required to seat the dancers.*"

This modern party game Cotillon could also incorporate the polka, polka mazurka, galop and

possibly other couple dance steps as variations to the nevertheless most popular waltz. All had been introduced via France. The Germans were great lovers of the Cotillon and for that reason in America this dance was called 'The German'.