

“ON WITH THE DANCE!”

A REVIEW

by

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I

THE PRUDE IN LETTERS AND LIFE

IT is deserving of remark and censure that American literature is become shockingly moral. There is not a doubt of it; our writers, if accused, would make explicit confession that morality is their only fault—morality in the strict and specific sense. Far be it from me to disparage and belittle this decent tendency to ignore the largest side of human nature, and liveliest element of literary interest. It has an eminence of its own; if it is not great art, it is at least great folly—a superior sort of folly to which none of the masters of letters has ever attained. Not Shakspeare, nor Cervantes, nor Goethe, nor Molière, nor—no, not even Rabelais—ever achieved that shining pinnacle of propriety to which the latter-day American has aspired, by turning his back upon nature's broad and fruitful levels and his eyes upon the passionate altitudes where, throned upon congenial ice, Miss Nancy sits to censure letters, putting the Muses into petticoats and affixing a fig-leaf upon Truth. Ours are an age and country of expurgated editions, emasculated art, and social customs that look over the top of a fan.

Lo! prude-eyed Primdinity, mother of Gush,
Sex-conscious, invoking the difficult blush;
At vices that plague us and sin⁹ that beset
Sternly directing her private lorgnette.
Whose lenses, self-searching instinctive for sin,
Make image without of the fancies within.
Itself, if examined, would show us, alas!
A tiny transparency (French) on each glass.

Now, prudery in letters, if it would but have the goodness not to coexist with prudery in life, might be suffered with easy fortitude, inasmuch as one needs not read what one does not like; and between the license of the dear old bucks above mentioned, and the severities of Miss Nancy Howells, and Miss Nancy James, Jr., of t'other school, there is latitude for gratification of individual taste. But it occurs that a literature rather accurately reflects all the virtues and other vices of its period and country, and its tendencies are but the matchings of thought with action. Hence, we may reasonably expect to find—and indubitably shall find—certain well-marked correspondences between the literary faults which it pleases our writers to commit and the social crimes which it pleases the Adversary to see their readers commit. Within the current lustrum the prudery which had already, for some seasons, been achieving a vinegar-visaged and corkscrew-curved certain age in letters, has invaded the ball-room, and is infesting it in quantity. Supportable, because evitable, in letters, it is here, for the contrary

reason, insufferable; for one must dance and enjoy one's self whether one like it or not. Pleasure, I take it, is a duty not to be shirked at the command of disinclination. Youth, following the bent of inherited instinct, and loyally conforming himself to the centuries, must shake a leg in the dance, and Age, from emulation and habit, and for denial of rheumatic incapacity, must occasionally twist his heel though he twist it off in the performance. Dance we must, and dance we shall; that is settled; the question of magnitude is, Shall we caper jocundly with the good grace of an easy conscience, or submit to shuffle half-heartedly with a sense of shame, wincing under the slow stroke of our own rebuking eye? To this momentous question let us now intelligently address our minds, sacredly pledged, as becomes lovers of truth, to its determination in the manner most agreeable to our desires; and if, in pursuance of this laudable design, we have the unhappiness to bother the bunions decorating the all-pervading feet of the good people whose deprecations are voiced in *The Dance of Death* and the clamatory literature of which that blessed volume was the honored parent, upon their own corns be it; they should not have obtruded these eminences

when youth and pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet.

What, therefore, whence, and likewise why, is dancing? From what flower of nature, fertilized by what pollen of circumstance or necessity, is it the fruit? Let us go to the root of the matter.

II

THE BEATING OF THE BLOOD

NATURE takes a childish delight in tireless repetition. The days repeat themselves, the tides ebb and flow, the tree sways forth and back. This world is intent upon recurrences. Not the pendulum of a clock is more persistent of iteration than are all existing things; periodicity is the ultimate law and largest explanation of the universe—to do it over again the one insatiable ambition of all that is. Everything vibrates; through vibration alone do the senses discern it. We are not provided with means of cognizance of what is absolutely at rest; impressions come in waves. Recurrence, recurrence, and again recurrence—that is the sole phenomenon. With what fealty we submit us to the law which compels the rhythm and regularity to our movement—that makes us divide up passing time into brief equal intervals, marking them off by some method of physical notation, so that our senses may apprehend

them! In all we do we unconsciously mark time like a clock, the leader of an orchestra with his *â* only more perfectly than the smith with his hammer, or the woman with her needle, because his hand is better assisted by his ear, less embarrassed with *impedimenta*. The pedestrian impelling his legs and the idler twiddling his thumbs are endeavoring, each in his unconscious way, to beat time to some inaudible music; and the graceless lout, sitting cross-legged in a horse-car, manages the affair with his toe.

The more intently we labor, the more intensely do we become absorbed in labor's dumb song, until with body and mind engaged in the ecstasy of repetition, we resent an interruption of our work as we do a false note in music, and are mightily enamored of ourselves afterward for the power of application which was simply inability to desist. In this rhythm of toil is to be found the charm of industry. Toil has in itself no spell to conjure with, but its recurrences of molecular action, cerebral and muscular, are as delightful as rhyme.

Such of our pleasures as require movements equally rhythmic with those entailed by labor are almost equally agreeable, with the added advantage of being useless. Dancing, which is not only rhythmic movement, pure and simple, undebased with any element of utility, but is capable of performance under conditions positively baneful, is for these reasons the most engaging of them all; and if it were but one-half as wicked as the prudes have endeavored by method of naughty suggestion to make it would lack of absolute bliss nothing but the other half.

This ever active and unabatable something within us which compels us always to be marking time we may call, for want of a better name, the instinct of rhythm. It is the aesthetic principle of our nature. Translated into words it has given us poetry; into sound, music; into motion, dancing. Perhaps even painting may be referred to it, space being the correlative of time, and color the correlative of tone. We are fond of arranging our minute intervals of time into groups. We find certain of these groups highly agreeable, while others are no end unpleasant. In the former there is a singular regularity to be observed, which led hard-headed old Leibnitz to the theory that our delight in music arises from an inherent affection for mathematics. Yet musicians have hitherto obtained but indifferent recognition for feats of calculation, nor have the singing and playing of renowned mathematicians been unanimously commended by good judges.

Music so intensifies and excites the instinct of rhythm that a strong volition is required to repress its physical expression. The universality of this is well illustrated by the legend, found in some shape in many countries and languages, of the boy with the fiddle who compels king, cook, peasant, clown, and all that kind of people, to follow him through the land; and in the myth of the Pied

Piper of Hamelin we discern abundant reason to think the instinct of rhythm an attribute of rats. Soldiers march so much livelier with music than without that it has been found a tolerably good substitute for the hope of plunder. When the foot-falls are audible, as on the deck of a steamer, walking has an added pleasure, and even the pirate, with gentle consideration for the universal instinct, suffers his vanquished foeman to walk the plank.

Dancing is simply marking time with the body, as an accompaniment to music, though the same—without the music—is done with only the head and forefinger in a New England meeting-house at psalm time. (The peculiar dance named in honor of St. Vitus is executed with or without music, at the option of the musician.) But the body is a clumsy piece of machinery, requiring some attention and observation to keep it accurately in time to the fiddling. The smallest diversion of the thought, the briefest relaxing of the mind, is fatal to the performance 'Tis as easy to fix attention on a sonnet of Shakspeare while working at whist as gloat upon your partner while waltzing. It can not be intelligently, appreciatively, and adequately accomplished—*crede expertum*.

On the subject of poetry, Emerson says: "Metre begins with pulse-beat, and the length of lines in songs and poems is determined by the inhalation and exhalation of the lungs," and this really goes near to the root of the matter; albeit we might derive therefrom the unsupported inference that a poet "fat and scant of breath" would write in lines of a foot each, while the more able-bodied bard, with the capacious lungs of a pearl-diver, would deliver himself all across his page, with "the spacious volubility of a drumming decasyllabon."

While the heart, working with alternate contraction and dilatation, sends the blood intermittently through the brain, and the outer world apprises us of its existence only by successive impulses, it must result that our sense of things will be rhythmic. The brain being alternately stimulated and relaxed we must think—as we feel—in waves, apprehending nothing continuously, and incapable of a consciousness that is not divisible into units of perception of which we make mental record and physical sign. That is why we dance. That is why we can, may, must, will, and shall dance, and the gates of Philistia shall not prevail against us.

La valse légère, la valse légère,
The free, the bright, the debonair,
That stirs the strong, and fires the fair
With joy like wine of vintage rare—
That lends the swiftly circling pair
A short surcease of killing care,
With music in the dreaming air,
With elegance and grace to spare.
Vive! vive la valse, la valse légère!

—George Jessop.

III

THERE ARE CORNS IN EGYPT

OUR civilization—wise child!—knows its father in the superior civilization whose colossal vestiges are found along the Nile. To those, then, who see in the dance a civilizing art, it can not be wholly unprofitable to glance at this polite accomplishment as it existed among the ancient Egyptians, and was by them transmitted—with various modifications, but preserving its essentials of identity—to other nations and other times. And here we have first to note that, as in all the nations of antiquity, the dance in Egypt was principally a religious ceremony; the pious old boys that builded the pyramids executed their jigs as an act of worship. Diodorus Siculus informs us that Osiris, in his proselyting travels among the peoples surrounding Egypt—for Osiris was what we would call a circuit preacher—was accompanied by dancers male and dancers female. From the sculptures on some of the oldest tombs of Thebes it is seen that the dances there depicted did not greatly differ from those in present favor in the same region; although it seems a fair inference from the higher culture and refinement of the elder period that they were distinguished by graces correspondingly superior. That dances having the character of religious rites were not always free from an element that we would term indelicacy, but which their performers and witnesses probably considered the commendable exuberance of zeal and devotion, is manifest from the following passage of Herodotus, in which reference is made to the festival of Bubastis:

Men and women come sailing all together, vast numbers in each boat, many of the women with castanets, which they strike, while some of the men pipe during the whole period of the voyage; the remainder of the voyagers, male and female, sing the while, and make a clapping with their hands. When they arrive opposite to any town on the banks of the stream they approach the shore, and while some of the women continue to play and sing, others call aloud to the females of the place and load them with abuse, a certain number dancing and others standing up, uncovering themselves. Proceeding in this way all along the river course they reach Bubastis, where they celebrate the feast with abundant sacrifice.

Of the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, in which dancing played an important part, the character of the ceremonies is matter of dim conjecture; but from the hints that have come down to us like significant shrugs and whispers from a discreet past, which could say a good deal more if it had a mind to, I hasten to infer that they were no better than they should have been.

Naturally the dances for amusement of others were regulated in movement and gesture to suit the taste of patrons: for the re-

finer, decency and moderation; for the wicked, a *souppçon* of the other kind of excellence. In the latter case the buffoon, an invariable adjunct, committed a thousand extravagances, and was a dear, delightful, naughty ancient Egyptian buffoon. These dances were performed by both men and women; sometimes together, more frequently in separate parties. The men seem to have confined themselves mostly to exercises requiring strength of leg and arm. The figures on the tombs represent men in lively and vigorous postures, some in attitude preliminary to leaping, others in the air. This feature of agility would be a novelty in the oriental dances of to-day; the indolent male spectator being satisfied with a slow, voluptuous movement congenial to his disposition. When, on the contrary, the performance of our prehistoric friends was governed and determined by ideas of grace, there were not infrequently from six to eight musical instruments, the harp, guitar, double-pipe, lyre, and tambourine of the period being most popular, and these commonly accompanied by a clapping of hands to mark the time.

As with the Greeks, dancers were had in at dinner to make merry; for although the upper-class Egyptian was forbidden to practice the art, either as an accomplishment or for the satisfaction of his emotional nature, it was not considered indecorous to hire professionals to perform before him and his female and young. The she dancer usually habited herself in a loose, flowing robe, falling to the ankles and bound at the waist, while about the hips was fastened a narrow, ornate girdle. This costume—in point of opacity imperfectly superior to a gentle breeze—is not always discernible in the sculptures; but it is charitably believed that the pellucid garment, being merely painted over the figures, has been ravished away by the hand of Time—the wretch!

One of the dances was a succession of pleasing attitudes, the hands and arms rendering important assistance—the body bending backward and forward and swaying laterally, the *figurante* sometimes half-kneeling, and in that position gracefully posturing, and again balanced on one foot, the arms and hands waving slowly in time to the music. In another dance, the *pirouette* and other figures dear to the bald-headed beaux of the modern play-house, were practiced in the familiar way. Four thousand years ago, the senses of the young ancient Egyptian—wild, heady lad!—were kicked into confusion by the dark-skinned belle of the ballet, while senility, with dimmed eyes, rubbed its dry hands in feverish approval at the self-same feat. Dear, dear, but it was a bad world four thousand years ago!

Sometimes they danced in pairs, men with men and women with women, indifferently, the latter arrangement seeming to us preferable by reason of the women's conspicuously superior grace and almost equal agility; for it is in evidence on the tombs that

tumblers and acrobats were commonly of the softer sex. Some of the attitudes were similar to those which drew from Socrates the ungallant remark that women were capable of learning anything which you will that they should know. The figures in this *pas de deux* appear frequently to have terminated in what children, with their customary coarseness of speech, are pleased to call “wringing the dish-clout”—clasping the hands, throwing the arms above the head and turning rapidly, each as on a pivot, without loosing the hands of the other, and resting again in position.

Sometimes, with no other music than the percussion of hands, a man would execute a *pas seul*, which it is to be presumed he enjoyed. Again, with a ripper and better sense of musical methods, the performer accompanied himself, or, as in this case it usually was, herself, on the double-pipes, the guitar or the tambourine, while the familiar hand-clapping was done by attendants. A step not unlike that of the abominable clog-dance of the “variety” stage and “music hall” of the present day consisted in striking the heel of first one foot and then the other, the hands and arms being employed to diminish the monotony of the movement. For amusement and instruction of the vulgar, buffoons in herds of ten or more infested the streets, hopping and posing to the sound of a drum.

As illustrating the versatility of the dance, its wide capacities of adaptation to human emotional needs, I may mention here the procession of women to the tomb of a friend or relative. Punishing the tambourine or *dara-booka* drum, and bearing branches of palm or other symbolic vegetables, these sprightly mourners passed through the streets with songs and dances which, under the circumstances, can hardly have failed eminently to gratify the person so fortunate as to have his memory honored by so delicate and appropriate observance.

IV

A REEF IN THE GABARDINE

THE early Jew danced ritually and socially. Some of his dances and the customs connected therewith were of his own devising; others he picked up in Egypt, the latter, no doubt, being more firmly fixed in his memory by the necessity of practicing them—albeit behind the back of Moses—while he had them still fresh in his mind; for he would naturally resort to every human and inhuman device to wile away the dragging decades consumed in tracing the labyrinthine sinuosities of his course in the wilderness. When a man has assurance that he will not be permitted to arrive at the point for which he set out, perceiving that every step forward is a step wasted, he will pretty certainly use his feet to a better

purpose than walking. Clearly, at a time when all the chosen people were Wandering Jews they would dance all they knew how. We know that they danced in worship of the Golden Calf, and that previously “Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” And ever so many generations before, Laban complained to Jacob that Jacob had stolen away instead of letting him send him off with songs and mirth and music on the tabret and harp, a method of speeding the parting guest which would naturally include dancing, although the same is not of explicit record.

The religious ceremonies of the Jews had not at all times the restraint and delicacy which it is to be wished the Lord had exacted, for we read of King David himself dancing before the Ark in a condition so nearly nude as greatly to scandalize the daughter of Saul. By the way, this incident has been always a stock argument for the extinction and decent interment of the unhappy anti-dancer. Conceding the necessity of his extinction, I am yet indisposed to attach much weight to the Davidian precedent, for it does not appear that he was acting under divine command, directly or indirectly imparted, and whenever he followed the hest of his own sweet will David had a notable knack at going wrong. Perhaps the best value of the incident consists in the evidence it supplies that dancing was not forbidden—save possibly by divine injunction—to the higher classes of Jews; for unless we are to suppose the dancing of David to have been the mere clumsy capering of a loutish mood (a theory which our respect for royalty, even when divested of its imposing externals, forbids us to entertain) we are bound to assume previous instruction and practice in the art. We have, moreover, the Roman example of the daughter of Herodias, whose dancing before Herod was so admirably performed that she was suitably rewarded with a testimonial of her step-father’s esteem. To these examples many more might be added, showing by cumulative evidence that among the ancient people whose religion was good enough for us to adopt and improve, dancing was a polite and proper accomplishment, although not always decorously executed on seasonable occasion.

V

ENTER A TROUPE OF ANCIENTS, DANCING

THE nearly oldest authentic human records now decipherable are the cuneiform inscriptions from the archives of Assurbanipal, translated by the late George Smith, of the British Museum; and in

them we find abundant reference to the dance, but must content ourselves with a single one:

The kings of Arabia who, against my agreement, sinned; whom in the midst of battle alive I had captured in hand, to make that Bitrichiti. Heavy burdens I caused them to carry, and I caused them to take . . . building its brick-work . . . with dancing and music; . . . with joy and shouting, from the foundation to its roof, I built . . .

A Mesopotamian king, who had the genius to conceive the dazzling idea of communicating with the readers of this distant generation by taking impressions of carpet-tacks on cubes of unbaked clay is surely entitled to a certain veneration; and when he associates dancing with such commendable actions as making porters of his royal captives it is not becoming in us meaner mortals to set up a contrary opinion, Indeed, nothing can be more certain than that the art of dancing was not regarded by the ancients generally in the light of a frivolous accomplishment, nor its practice a thing wherewith to shoo away a tedious hour. In their minds it evidently had a certain dignity and elevation; so much so that they associated it with their ideas (tolerably correct ones, on the whole) of art, harmony, beauty, truth and religion. With them, dancing bore a relation to walking and the ordinary movements of the limbs, similar to that which poetry bears to prose; and as our own Emerson—himself something of an ancient—defines poetry as the piety of the intellect, so Homer would doubtless have defined dancing as the devotion of the body if he had had the unspeakable advantage of a training in the Emerson school of epigram. Such a view of it is natural to the unsophisticated pagan mind, and to all minds of clean, wholesome, and simple understanding. It is only the intellect that has been subjected to the strain of overwrought religious enthusiasm of the more sombre sort that can discern a lurking devil in the dance, or anything but an exhilarating and altogether delightful outward manifestation of an inner sense of harmony, joy and well-being. Under the stress of morbid feeling, or the overstrain of religious excitement, coarsely organized natures see or create something gross and prurient in things intrinsically sweet and pure; and it happens that when the dance has fallen to their shaping and direction, as in religious rites, then it has received its most objectionable development and perversion. But the grossness of dances devised by the secular mind for purposes of aesthetic pleasure is all in the censorious critic, who deserves the same kind of rebuke administered by Dr. Johnson to Boswell, who asked the Doctor if he considered a certain nude statue immodest. “No, sir; but your question is.”

It would be an unfortunate thing, indeed, if the “prurient prudes” of the meeting-houses were permitted to make the laws by which society should be governed. The same unhappy

psychological condition which makes the dance an unclean thing in their jaundiced eyes renders it impossible for them to enjoy art or literature when the subject is natural, the treatment free and joyous. The ingenuity that can discover an indelicate provocative in the waltz will have no difficulty in snouting out all manner of uncleanliness in Shakspeare, Chaucer, Boccaccio—nay, even in the New Testament. It would detect an unpleasant suggestiveness in the Medicean Venus, and two in the Dancing Faun. To all such the ordinary functions of life are impure; the natural man and woman things to blush at; all the economies of nature full of shocking improprieties.

In the Primitive Church dancing was a religious rite, no less than it was under the older dispensation among the Jews. On the eve of sacred festivals, the young people were accustomed to assemble, sometimes before the church door, sometimes in the choir or nave of the church, and dance and sing hymns in honor of the saint whose festival it was. Easter Sunday, especially, was so celebrated; and rituals of a comparatively modern date contain the order in which it is appointed that the dances are to be performed, and the words of the hymns to the music of which the youthful devotees flung up their pious heels. But I digress.

In Plato's time the Greeks held that dancing awakened and preserved in the soul—as I do not doubt that it does—the sentiment of harmony and proportion; and in accordance with this idea Simonides, with a happy knack at epigram, defined dances as “poems in dumb-show.”

In his *Republic* Plato classifies the Grecian dances as domestic, designed for relaxation and amusement; military, to promote strength and activity in battle; and religious, to accompany the sacred songs at pious festivals. To the last class belongs the dance which Theseus is said to have instituted on his return from Crete, after having abated the Minotaur nuisance. At the head of a noble band of youth, this public-spirited reformer of abuses himself executed his dance. Theseus as a dancing-master does not much fire the imagination, it is true, but the incident has its value and purpose in this dissertation. Theseus called his dance *Geranos*, or the “Crane,” because its figures resembled those described by that fowl aflight; and Plutarch fancied he discovered in it a meaning which one does not so readily discover in Plutarch's explanation.

It is certain that, in the time of Anacreon,¹ the Greeks loved the dance. That poet, with frequent repetition, felicitates himself that age has not deprived him of his skill in it. In Ode LIII, he declares that in the dance he renews his youth:

When I behold the festive train
Of dancing youth, I'm young again.
And let me, while the wild and young
Trip the mazy dance along,

Fling my heap of years away,
And be as wild, as young, as they.

—*Moore.*

And so in Ode LIX, which seems to be a vintage hymn:

When he whose verging years decline
As deep into the vale as mine,
When he inhales the vintage cup,
His feet, new-winged, from earth spring up,
And, as he dances, the fresh air
Plays, whispering, through his silvery hair.

—*Id.*

In Ode XLVII, he boasts that age has not impaired his relish for, nor his power of indulgence in, the feast and dance:

'Tis true my fading years decline,
Yet I can quaff the brimming wine
As deep as any stripling fair
Whose cheeks the flush of morning wear;
And if amidst the wanton crew
I'm called to wind the dance's clew,
Then shalt thou see this vigorous hand
Not faltering on the Bacchant's wand.

For though my fading years decay—
Though manhood's prime hath passed away,
Like old Silenus, sire divine,
With blushes borrowed from the wine
I'll wanton 'mid the dancing train,
And live my follies o'er again.

—*Id.*

Cornelius Nepos, I think, mentions among the admirable qualities of the great Epaminondas that he had an extraordinary talent for music and dancing. Epaminondas accomplishing his jig must be accepted as a pleasing and instructive figure in the history of the dance.

Lucian says that a dancer must have some skill as an actor, and some acquaintance with mythology—the reason being that the dances at the festivals of the gods partook of the character of pantomime, and represented the most picturesque events and passages in the popular religion. Religious knowledge is happily no longer regarded as a necessary qualification for the dance; and, in point of fact, nothing is commonly more foreign to the minds of those who excel in it.

It is related of Aristides the Just that he danced at an entertainment given by Dionysius the Tyrant, and Plato, who was also a guest, probably confronted him in the set.

The “dance of the wine-press,” described by Longinus, was

originally modest and proper, but seems to have become in the process of time—and probably by the stealthy participation of disguised prudes—a kind of *can-can*.

In the high-noon of human civilization—in the time of Pericles at Athens—dancing seems to have been regarded as a civilizing and refining amusement in which the gravest dignitaries and most renowned worthies joined with indubitable alacrity, if problematic advantage. Socrates himself—at an advanced age, too—was persuaded by the virtuous Aspasia to cut his caper with the rest of them.

Horace (Ode IX, Book I,) exhorts the youth not to despise the dance:

Nec dulcis amores
Sperne puer, neque tu choreas.

Which may be freely translated thus:

Boy, In Love's game don't miss a trick,
Nor be in the dance a walking stick.

In Ode IV, Book I, he says:

Jam Cytherea choros ducit, imminente Luna
Junctaeque Nymphis Gratiae decentes
Alterno terrum quatiant pede; etc.

At moonrise, Venus and her joyous band
Of Nymphs and Graces leg it o'er the land.

In Ode XXXVI, Book I (supposed to have been written when Numida returned from the war in Spain, with Augustus, and referring to which an old commentator says: “We may judge with how much tenderness Horace loved his friends, when he celebrates their return with sacrifices, songs, and dances”) Horace writes:

Cressa ne careat pulchra dies nota;
Neu promptae modus amphorae,
Neu morem in Salium sit requies pedum; etc.

Let not the day forego its mark,
Nor lack the wine-jug's honest bark;
Like Salian priests we'll toss our toes—
Choose partners for the dance—here goes!

It has been hastily inferred that, in the time of Cicero, dancing was not held in good repute among the Romans; but I prefer to consider his ungracious dictum (in *De Amicitia*, I think,) “*Nemo sobrius saltat*”—no sober man dances—as merely the spiteful and

envious fling of a man who could not himself dance, and am disposed to congratulate the golden youth of the Eternal City on the absence of the solemn, consequential and egotistic orator from their festivals and merrymakings, whence his shining talents would have been so many several justifications for his forcible extrusion. No doubt his eminence procured him many invitations to balls of the period, and some of these he probably felt constrained to accept; but it is highly unlikely that he was often solicited to dance; he probably wiled away the tedious hours of inaction by instructing the fibrous virgins and gouty bucks in the principles of jurisprudence. Cicero as a wall-flower is an interesting object, and, turning to another branch of our subject, in this picturesque attitude we leave him. Left talking.

VI

CAIRO REVISITED

HAVING glanced, briefly, and as through a glass darkly, at the dance as it existed in the earliest tunes of which we have knowledge in the country whence, through devious and partly obliterated channels, we derived much of our civilization, let us hastily survey some of its modern methods in the same region—supplying thereby some small means of comparison to the reader who may care to note the changes undergone and the features preserved.

We find the most notable, if not the only, purely Egyptian dancer of our time in the *Almé* or *Ghowazee*. The former name is derived from the original calling of this class—that of reciting poetry to the inmates of the harem; the latter they acquired by dancing at the festivals of the Ghors, or Memlooks. Reasonably modest at first, the dancing of the *Almé* became, in the course of time, so conspicuously indelicate that great numbers of the softer sex persuaded themselves to its acquirement and practice; and a certain viceregal Prude once contracted the powers of the whole Cairo contingent of Awâlim into the pent-up Utica of the town of Esuch, some five hundred miles removed from the viceregal dissenting eye. For a brief season the order was enforced; then the sprightly sinners danced out of bounds, and their successors can now be found by the foreign student of Egyptian morals without the fatigue and expense of a long journey up the Nile.

The professional dress of the *Almé* consists of a short embroidered jacket, fitting closely to the arms and back, but frankly unreserved in front; long loose trousers of silk sufficiently opaque somewhat to soften the severity of the lower limbs; a Cashmere shawl bound about the waist and a light turban of

muslin embroidered with gold. The long black hair, starred with small coins, falls abundantly over the shoulders. The eyelids are sabled with kohl; and such other paints, oils, varnishes and dyestuffs are used as the fair one—who is a trifle dark, by the way—may have proved for herself, or accepted on the superior judgment of her European sisters. Altogether, the girl's outer and visible aspect is not unattractive to the eye of the traveler, however faulty to the eye of the traveler's wife. When about to dance, the Almé puts on a lighter and more diaphanous dress, eschews her slippers, and with a slow and measured step advances to the centre of the room—her lithe figure undulating with a grace peculiarly serpentine. The music is that of a reed pipe or a tambourine—a number of attendants assisting with castanets. Perhaps the “argument” of her dance will be a love-passage with an imaginary young Arab. The coyness of a first meeting by chance, her gradual warming into passion, their separation, followed by her tears and dejection, the hope of meeting soon again and, finally, the intoxication of being held once more in his arms—all are delineated with a fidelity and detail surprising to whatever of judgment the masculine spectator may have the good fortune to retain.

One of the prime favorites is the “wasp dance,” allied to the Tarantella. Although less pleasing in motive than that described, the wasp dance gives opportunity for movements of even superior significance—or, as one may say, suggestures. The girl stands in a pensive posture, her hands demurely clasped in front, her head poised a little on one side. Suddenly a wasp is heard to approach, and by her gestures is seen to have stung her on the breast. She then darts hither and thither in pursuit of that audacious insect, assuming all manner of provoking attitudes, until, finally, the wasp having been caught and miserably exterminated, the girl resumes her innocent smile and modest pose.

VII

JAPAN WEAR AND BOMBAY DUCKS

THROUGHOUT Asia, dancing is marked by certain characteristics which do not greatly differ, save in degree, among the various peoples who practice it. With few exceptions, it is confined to the superior sex, and these ladies, I am sorry to confess, have not derived as great moral advantage from the monopoly as an advocate of dancing would prefer to record.

Dancing—the rhythmical movement of the limbs and body to music—is, as I have endeavored to point out, instinctive; hardly a people, savage or refined, but has certain forms of it. When, from any cause, the men abstain from its execution it has commonly not

the character of grace and agility as its dominant feature, but is distinguished by soft, voluptuous movements, suggestive posturing, and all the wiles by which the performer knows she can best please the other sex; the most forthright and effective means to that commendable end being evocation of man's baser nature. The Japanese men are anti-dancers from necessity of costume, if nothing else, and the effect is much the same as elsewhere under the same conditions: the women dance, the men gloat and the gods grieve.

There are two kinds of dances in Japan: the one not only lewd, but—to speak with accurate adjustment of word to fact—beastly; in the other grace is the dominating element, and decency as cold as a snow-storm. Of the former class, the “Chon Nookee” is the most popular. It is, however, less a dance than an exhibition, and its patrons are the wicked, the dissolute and the European. It is commonly given at some entertainment to which respectable women have not the condescension to be invited—such as a dinner party of some wealthy gentleman's gentlemen friends. The dinner—served on the floor—having been impatiently tucked away, and the candies, cakes, hot saki and other necessary addenda of a Japanese dinner brought in, the “Chon Nookee” is demanded, and with a modest demeanor, worn as becomingly as if it were their every-day habit, the performers glide in, seating themselves coyly on the floor, in two rows. Each dancing girl is appareled in such captivating bravery as her purse can buy or her charms exact. The folds of her varicolored gowns crossing her bosom makes combinations of rich, warm hues, which it were folly not to admire and peril to admire too much. The faces of these girls are in many instances exceedingly pretty, but with that natural—and, be it humbly submitted, not very creditable—tendency of the sex to revision and correction of nature's handiwork, they plaster them with pigments dear to the sign-painter, and temper the red glory of their lips with a bronze preparation which the flattered brass-founder would no doubt deem kissable utterly. The music is made by beating a drum and twanging a kind of guitar, the musician chanting the while to an exceedingly simple air, words which, in deference to the possible prejudices of those readers who may be on terms of familiarity with the Japanese language, I have deemed it proper to omit—with an apology to the Prudes for the absence of an appendix in which they might be given without offense. (I had it in mind to insert the music here, but am told by credible authority that in Japan music is moral or immoral without reference to the words that may be sung with it. So I omit—with reluctance—the score, as well as the words.)

The chanting having proceeded for a few minutes, the girls take up the song and enter spiritedly into the dance. One challenges another, and at a certain stage of the lively song with the

sharp cry "*Hoi!*" makes a motion with her hand. Failure on the part of the other instantaneously and exactly to copy this gesture entails the forfeiture of a garment, which is at once frankly removed. Cold and mechanical at the outset, the music grows spirited as the girls grow nude, and the dancers themselves become strangely excited as they warm to the work, taking, the while, generous potations of saki to assist their enthusiasm.

Let it not be supposed that in all this there is anything of passion; it is with these women nothing more than the mere mental exaltation produced by music, exercise and drink. With the spectators (I have heard) it fares somewhat otherwise.

When modesty's last rag has been discarded, the girls as if suddenly abashed at their own audacity, fly like startled fawns from the room, leaving their patrons to make a settlement with conscience and arrange the terms upon which that monitor will consent to the performance of the rest of the dance. For the dance proper—or improper—is now about to begin. If the first part seemed somewhat tropical, comparison with what follows will acquit it of that demerit. The combinations of the dance are infinitely varied, and so long as willing witnesses remain—which, in simple justice to manly fortitude it should be added, is a good while—so long will the "Chon Nookee" present a new and unexpected phase; but it is thought expedient that no more of them be presented here, and if the reader has done me the honor to have enough of it, we will pass to the consideration of another class of dances.

Of this class those most in favor are the Fan and Umbrella dances, performed, usually, by young girls trained almost from infancy. The Japanese are passionately fond of these beautiful exhibitions of grace, and no manner of festivity is satisfactorily celebrated without them. The musicians, all girls, commonly six or eight in number, play on the guitar, a small ivory wand being used, instead of the fingers, to strike the strings. The dancer, a girl of some thirteen years, is elaborately habited as a page. Confined by the closely folded robe as by fetters, the feet and legs are not much used, the feet, indeed, never leaving the floor. Time is marked by undulations of the body, waving the arms, and deft manipulation of the fan. The supple figure bends and sways like a reed in the wind, advances and recedes, one movement succeeding another by transitions singularly graceful, the arms describing innumerable curves, and the fan so skillfully handled as to seem instinct with a life and liberty of its own. Nothing more pure, more devoid of evil suggestion, can be imagined. It is a sad fact that the poor children trained to the execution of this harmless and pleasing dance are destined, in their riper years, to give their charms and graces to the service of the devil in the "Chon Nookee." The umbrella dance is similar to the one just described, the main difference being the use

of a small, gaily-colored umbrella in place of the fan.

Crossing from Japan to China, the Prude will find a condition of things which, for iron severity of morals, is perhaps unparalleled—no dancing whatever, by either profligate or virtuous women. To whatever original cause we may attribute this peculiarity, it seems eternal; for the women of the upper classes have an ineradicable habit of so mutilating their feet that even the polite and comparatively harmless accomplishment of walking is beyond their power; those of the lower orders have not sense enough to dance; and that men should dance alone is a proposition of such free and forthright idiocy as to be but obscurely conceivable to any understanding not having the gift of maniacal inspiration, or the normal advantage of original incapacity. Altogether, we may rightly consider China the heaven-appointed *habitat* of people who dislike the dance.

In Siam, what little is known of dancing is confined to the people of Laos. The women are meek-eyed, spiritless creatures, crushed under the heavy domination of the stronger sex. Naturally, their music and dancing are of a plaintive, almost doleful character, not without a certain cloying sweetness, however. The dancing is as graceful as the pudgy little bodies of the women are capable of achieving—a little more pleasing than the capering of a butcher's block, but not quite so much so as that of a wash-tub. Its greatest merit is the steely rigor of its decorum. The dancers, however, like ourselves, are a shade less appallingly proper off the floor than on it.

In no part of the world, probably, is the condition of women more consummately deplorable than in India; and, in consequence, nowhere than in the dances of that country is manifested a more simple unconsciousness or frank disregard of decency. As by nature, and according to the light that is in him, the Hindu is indolent and licentious, so, in accurately matching degree, are the dancing girls innocent of morality, and uninfected with shame. It would be difficult more keenly to insult a respectable Hindu woman than to accuse her of having danced, while the man who should affect the society of the females justly so charged would incur the lasting detestation of his race. The dancing girls are of two orders of infamy—those who serve in the temples, and are hence called Devo-Dasi, slaves of the gods, and the Nautch girls, who dance in a secular sort for hire. Frequently a mother will make a vow to dedicate her unborn babe, if it have the obedience to be a girl, to the service of some particular god; in this way, and by the daughters born to themselves, are the ranks of the Devo-Dasi recruited. The sons of these miserable creatures are taught to play upon musical instruments for their mothers and sisters to dance by. As the ordinary Hindu woman is careless about the exposure of her charms, so these dancers take intelligent and

mischievous advantage of the social situation by immodestly concealing their own. The Devo-Dasi actually go to the length of wearing clothes! Each temple has a band of eight or ten of these girls, who celebrate their saltatory rites morning and evening. Advancing at the head of the religious procession, they move themselves in an easy and graceful manner, with gradual transition to a more sensuous and voluptuous motion, suiting their action to the religious frame of mind of the devout, until their well-rounded limbs and lithe figures express a degree of piety consonant with the purpose of the particular occasion. They attend all public ceremonies and festivals, executing their audacious dances impartially for gods and men.

The Nautch girls are purchased in infancy, and as carefully trained in their worldly way as the Devo-Dasi for the diviner function, being about equally depraved. All the large cities contain full sets of these girls, with attendant musicians, ready for hire at festivals of any kind, and by leaving orders parties are served at their residences with fidelity and dispatch. Commonly they dance two at a time, but frequently some wealthy gentleman will secure the services of a hundred or more to assist him through the day without resorting to questionable expedients of time-killing. Their dances require strict attention, from the circumstance that their feet—like those of the immortal equestrienne of Banbury Cross—are hung with small bells, which must be made to sound in concert with the notes of the musicians. In attitude and gesture they are almost as bad as their pious sisters of the temples. The endeavor is to express the passions of love, hope, jealousy, despair, etc., and they eke out this mimicry with chanted songs in every way worthy of the movements of which they are the explanatory notes. These are the only women in Hindustan whom it is thought worth while to teach to read and write. If they would but make as noble use of their intellectual as they do of their physical education, they might perhaps produce books as moral as *The Dance of Death*.

In Persia and Asia Minor, the dances and dancers are nearly alike. In both countries the Georgian and Circassian slaves who have been taught the art of pleasing, are bought by the wealthy for their amusement and that of their wives and concubines. Some of the performances are pure in motive and modest in execution, but most of them are interesting otherwise. The beautiful young Circassian slave, clad in loose robes of diaphanous texture, takes position, castanets in hand, on a square rug, and to the music of a kind of violin goes through the figures of her dance, her whiteness giving her an added indelicacy which the European spectator misses in the capering of her berry-brown sisters-in-sin of other climes.

The dunce of the Georgian is more spirited. Her dress is a brief skirt, reaching barely to the knees, and a low-cut chemise. In

her night-black hair is wreathed a bright-red scarf or string of pearls. The music, at first low and slow, increases by degrees in rapidity and volume, then falls away almost to silence, again swells and quickens, and so alternates, the motions of the dancer's willowy and obedient figure accurately according, now seeming to swim languidly, and anon her little feet having their will of her, and fluttering in midair like a couple of birds. She is an engaging creature; her ways are ways of pleasantness, but whether all her paths are peace depends somewhat, it is reasonable to conjecture, upon the circumspection of her daily walk and conversation when relegated to the custody of her master's wives.

In some parts of Persia the dancing of boys appareled as women is held in high favor, hut exactly what wholesome human sentiment it addresses I am not prepared to say.

VIII

IN THE BOTTOM OF THE CRUCIBLE

FROM the rapid and imperfect review of certain characteristic oriental dances in the chapters immediately preceding—or rather from the studies some of whose minor results those chapters embody—I make deduction of a few significant facts, to which facts of contrary significance seem exceptional. In the first place, it is to be noted that in countries where woman is conspicuously degraded the dance is correspondingly depraved. By “the dance,” I mean, of course, those characteristic and typical performances which have permanent place in the social life of the people. Amongst all nations the dance exists in certain loose and unrecognized forms, which are the outgrowth of the moment—creatures of caprice, posing and pranking their brief and inglorious season, to be superseded by some newer favorite, born of some newer accident or fancy. A fair type of these ephemeral dances—the comets of the saltatory system—in so far as they can have a type, is the now familiar *Can-Can* of the Jardin Mabille—a dance the captivating naughtiness of which has given it wide currency in our generation, the successors to whose aged rakes and broken bawds it will fail to please and would probably make unhappy. Dances of this character, neither national, universal, nor enduring, have little value to the student of anything but anatomy and lingerie. By study of a thousand, the product of as many years, it might be possible to trace the thread upon which such beads are strung—indeed, it is pretty obvious without research; but considered singly they have nothing of profit to the investigator, who will do well to contemplate without reflection or perform without question, as the bent of his mind may be observant or

experimental.

Dancing, then, is indelicate where the women are depraved; and to this it must be added that the women are depraved where the men are indolent. We need not trouble ourselves to consider too curiously as to cause and effect. Whether in countries where man is too lazy to be manly, woman practices deferential adjustment of her virtues to the loose exactions of his tolerance, or whether for ladies of indifferent modesty their lords will not make exertion—these are questions for the ethnologist. It concerns our purpose only to note that the male who sits cross-legged on a rug and permits his female to do the dancing for both gets a quality distinctly inferior to that enjoyed by his more energetic brother, willing himself to take a leg at the game. Doubtless the lazy fellow prefers the loose gamboling of nude girls to the decent grace and moderation of a better art; but this, I submit, is an error of taste resulting from imperfect instruction.

And here we are confronted with the ever-recurrent question: Is dancing immoral? The reader who has done me the honor attentively to consider the brief descriptions of certain dances hereinbefore presented will, it is believed, be now prepared to answer that some sorts of dancing indubitably are—a bright and shining example of the type being the exploit wherein women alone perform and men alone admire. But one of the arguments by which it is sought to prove dancing immoral in itself—namely, that it provokes evil passions—we are now able to analyze with the necessary discrimination, assigning to it its just weight, and tracing its real bearing on the question. Dances like those described (with, I hope a certain delicacy and reticence) are undoubtedly disturbing to the spectator. They have in that circumstance their *raison d'être*. As to that, then, there can be no two opinions. But observe: the male oriental voluptuary does not himself dance. Why? Partly, no doubt, because of his immortal indolence, but mainly, I venture to think, because he wishes to enjoy his reprehensible emotion, and this can not coexist with muscular activity. If the reader—through either immunity from improper emotion or unfamiliarity with muscular activity—entertains a doubt of this, his family physician will be happy to remove it. Nothing is more certain than that the dancing girls of oriental countries themselves feel nothing of what they have the skill to simulate; and the ballet-dancer of our own stage is icily unconcerned while kicking together the smouldering embers in the heart of the wigged and corseted old beau below her, and playing the duse's delight with the disobedient imagination of the he Prude posted in the nooks and shadows thoughtfully provided for him. Stendahl frankly informs us: "I have had much experience with the *danseuses* of the — Theatre at Valence. I am convinced that they are, for the most part, very chaste. It is because their occupation is too fatiguing."

The same author, by the way, says elsewhere :

I would wish, if I were legislator, that they should adopt in France, as in Germany, the custom of *soirées dansantes*. Four times a month the young girls go with their mothers to a ball, beginning at seven o'clock, ending at midnight, and requiring, for all expense, a violin and some glasses of water. In an adjacent room, the mothers, perhaps a little jealous of the happy education of their daughters, play at cards; in a third, the fathers find the newspapers and talk politics. Between midnight and one o'clock all the family are reunited and have regained the paternal roof. The young girls learn to know the young men; the fatuity, and the indiscretion that follows it, become quickly odious; in a word, they learn how to choose a husband. Some young girls have unfortunate love affairs, but the number of deceived husbands and unhappy households (*mauvaises ménages*) diminishes in immense proportion.

For an iron education in cold virtue there is no school like the position of sitting-master to the wall-flowers at a church-sociable; but it is humbly conjectured that even the austere morality of a bald-headed Prude might receive an added iciness if he would but attend one of these simple dancing-bouts disguised as a sweet young girl.

IX

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE

NEARLY all the great writers of antiquity and of the medieval period who have mentioned dancing at all have done so in terms of unmistakable favor; of modern famous authors, they only have condemned it from whose work, or from what is known of their personal character, we may lastly infer an equal aversion to pretty much everything in the way of pleasure that a Christian needs not die in order to enjoy. English literature—I use the word in its noble sense, to exclude all manner of preaching, whether clerical or lay—is full of the dance; the sound of merry-makers footing it featly to the music runs like an undertone through all the variations of its theme and fills all its pauses.

In the “Miller’s Tale,” Chaucer mentions dancing among the accomplishments of the parish clerk, along with blood-letting and the drawing of legal documents:

A merry child he was, so God me save;
Wel coude he leten blood and clippe and shave.
And make a chartre of land, and a quitance;
In twenty maners coude he trip and dance,
After the scole of Oxenforde tho,
And with his legges casten to and fro.²

Milton, the greatest of the Puritans—intellectual ancestry of the

modern degenerate Prudes—had a wholesome love of the dance, and nowhere is his pen so joyous as in its description in the well-known passage from “Comus” which, should it occur to my memory while delivering a funeral oration, I am sure I could not forbear to quote, albeit this, our present argument, is but little furthered by its context:

Meanwhile welcome joy and feast,
Midnight shout and revelry,
Tipsy dance and jollity.
Braid your locks with rosy twine,
Dropping odors, dropping wine,
Rigor now is gone to bed.
And advice, with scrupulous head,
Strict age and sour severity,
With their grave saws in slumber lie.
We, that are of purer lire,
Imitate the starry quire,
Who, in their nightly watching spheres,
Lead in swift round the months and years.
The sounds and seas with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move:
And on the tawny sands and shelves,
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.

If Milton was not himself a good dancer—and as to that point my memory is unstored with instance or authority—it will at least be conceded that he was an admirable reporter, with his heart in the business. Somewhat to lessen the force of the objection that he puts the foregoing lines into a not very respectable mouth, on a not altogether reputable occasion, I append the following passage from the same poem, supposed to be spoken by the good spirit who had brought a lady and her two brothers through many perils, restoring them to their parents:

Noble lord and lady bright,
I have brought ye new delight:
Here behold, so goodly grown,
Three fair branches of your own.
Heaven hath timely tried their youth,
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,
And sent them here through hard assays
With a crown of deathless praise,
To triumph in victorious dance,
O'er sensual folly and intemperance.

The lines on dancing—lines which themselves dance—in “L’Allegro,” are too familiar; I dare not permit myself the enjoyment of quotation.

Lord Herbert of Cherbury, one of the most finished gentlemen of his time otherwise, laments in his autobiography that

he had never learned to dance, because that accomplishment “doth fashion the body, and gives one a good presence and address in all companies, since it disposeth the limbs to a kind of *souplesse* (as the French call it) and agility, insomuch as they seem to have the use of their legs, arms, and bodies more than many others who, standing stiff and stark in their postures, seem as if they were taken in their joints, or had not the perfect use of their members.” Altogether, a very grave objection to dancing, in the opinion of those who discountenance it, and I take great credit for candor in presenting his lordship’s indictment.

In the following pertinent passage from Lemontey I do not remember the opinion he quotes from Locke, but his own is sufficiently to the point:

The dance is for young women what the chase is for young men; a protecting school of wisdom—a preservative of the growing passions. The celebrated Locke, who made virtue the sole end of education, expressly recommends teaching children to dance as early as they are able to learn. Dancing carries within itself an eminently cooling quality, and all over the world the tempests of the heart await, to break forth, the repose of the limbs.

In “The Traveler,” Goldsmith says:

Alike all ages; dames of ancient days
Have led their children through the mirthful maze,
And the gay grandsire, skilled in gestic lore,
Has frisked beneath the burden of three score.

To the Prudes, in all soberness—Is it likely, considering the stubborn conservatism of age, that these dames, well-seasoned in the habit, will leave it off directly, or the impenitent old grandsire abate one jot or tittle of his friskiness in the near future? Is it a reasonable hope? Is the outlook from the watch-towers of Philistia an encouraging one?

X

THEY ALL DANCE

Fountains dance down to the river,
Rivers to the ocean,
Summer leaflets dance and quiver
To the breeze’s motion.
Nothing in the world is single—
All things, by a simple rule,
Nods and steps and graces mingle
As at dancing-school.

See, the shadows on the mountain

Pirouette with one another;
See, the leaf upon the fountain
Dances with its leaflet brother.
See, the moonlight on the earth,
Flecking forest, gleam and glance!
What are all these dancings worth
If I may not dance?

—*After Shelley.*

Dance? Why not? The dance is natural, it is innocent, wholesome, enjoyable. It has the sanction of religion, philosophy, science. It is approved by the sacred writings of all ages and nations—of Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam; of Zoroaster and Confucius. Not an altar, from Jupiter to Jesus, around which the votaries have not danced with religious zeal and indubitable profit to mind and body. Fire-worshippers of Persia and Peru danced about the visible sign and manifestation to their deity. Dervishes dance in frenzy, and the Shakers jump up and come down hard through excess of the Spirit. All the gods have danced with all the goddesses—round dances, too. The lively divinities created by the Greeks in their own image danced divinely, as became them. Old Thor stormed and thundered down the icy halls of the Scandinavian mythology to the music of runic rhymes, and the souls of slain heroes in Valhalla take to their toes in celebration of their valorous deeds done in the body upon the bodies of their enemies. Angels dance before the Great White Throne to harps attuned by angel hands, and the Master of the Revels—who arranges the music of the spheres—looks approvingly on. Dancing is of divine institution.

The elves and fairies “dance delicate measures” in the light of the moon and stars. The troll dances his gruesome jig on lonely hills: the gnome executes his little pigeon-wing in the obscure subterrene by the glimmer of a diamond. Nature’s untaught children dance in wood and glade, stimulated of leg by the sunshine with which they are soaked top-full—the same quickening emanation that inspires the growing tree and upheaves the hill. And, if I err not, there is sound Scripture for the belief that these self-same eminences have capacity to skip for joy. The peasant dances—a trifle clumsily—at harvest feast when the grain is garnered. The stars in heaven dance visibly; the firefly dances in emulation of the stars. The sunshine dances on the waters. The humming bird and the bee dance about the flowers, which dance to the breeze. The innocent lamb, type of the White Christ, dances on the green; and the matronly cow perpetrates an occasional stiff enormity when she fancies herself unobserved. All the sportive rollickings of all the animals, from the agile fawn to the unwieldy behemoth, are dances taught them by nature.

I am not here making an argument for dancing; I only assert its

goodness, confessing its abuse. We do not argue the wholesomeness of sunshine and cold water; we assert it, admitting that sunstroke is mischievous and that copious potations of freezing water will founder a superheated horse, and urge the hot blood to the head of an imprudent man similarly prepared, killing him, as is right. We do not build syllogisms to prove that grains and fruits of the earth are of God's best bounty to man; we allow that bad whisky may—with difficulty—be distilled from rye to spoil the toper's nose, and that hydrocyanic acid can be got out of the bloomy peach. It were folly to prove that Science and Invention are our very good friends, yet the sapper who has had the misfortune to be blown to rags by the mine he was preparing for his enemy will not deny that gunpowder has aptitudes of mischief; and from the point of view of a nigger ordered upon the safety-valve of a racing steamboat, the vapor of water is a thing accurst. Shall we condemn music because the lute makes "lascivious pleasing?" Or poetry because some amorous bard tells in warm rhyme the story of the passions, and Swinburne has had the goodness to make vice offensive with his hymns in its praise? Or sculpture because from the guiltless marble may be wrought a drunken Silenus or a lecherous satyr?—painting because the untamed fancies of a painter sometimes break tether and run riot on his canvas? Because the orator may provoke the wild passions of the mob, shall there be no more public speaking?—no further acting because the actor may be pleased to saw the air, or the actress display her ultimate inch of leg? Shall we upset the pulpit because poor dear Mr. Tilton had a prettier wife than poor, dear Mr. Beecher? The bench had its Jeffrey, yet it is necessary that we have the deliveries of judgment between ourselves and the litigious. The medical profession has nursed poisoners enough to have baned all the rats of Christendom; but the resolute patient must still have his prescription—if he die for it. Shall we disband our armies because in the hand of an ambitious madman a field-marshal's baton may brain a helpless State?—our navies because in ships pirates have "sailed the seas over?" Let us not commit the vulgarity of condemning the dance because of its possibilities of perversion by the vicious and the profligate. Let us not utter us in hot bosh and baking nonsense, but cleave to reason and the sweet sense of things.

Dancing never made a good girl bad, nor turned a wholesome young man to evil ways. "Opportunity!" simpers the tedious virgin past the wall-flower of her youth. "Opportunity!" cackles the *blasé* beau who has outlasted his legs and gone deaconing in a church.

Opportunity, indeed! There is opportunity in church and school-room, in social intercourse. There is opportunity in libraries, art-galleries, picnics, street-cars, Bible-classes and at fairs and matinées. Opportunity—rare, delicious opportunity, not

innocently to be ignored—in moonlight rambles by still streams. Opportunity, such as it is, behind the old gentleman's turned back, and beneath the good mother's spectacled nose. You shall sooner draw out leviathan with a hook, or bind Arcturus and his sons, than baffle the upthrust of Opportunity's many heads. Opportunity is a veritable Hydra, Argus and Briareus rolled into one. He has a hundred heads to plan his poachings, a hundred eyes to spy the land, a hundred hands to set his snares and springes. In the country where young girls are habitually unattended in the street; where the function of chaperon is commonly, and, it should be added, intelligently performed by some capable young male; where the young women receive evening calls from young men concerning whose presence in the parlor mamma in the nursery and papa at the "office"—poor, overworked papa!—give themselves precious little trouble,—this prate of ballroom opportunity is singularly and engagingly idiotic. The worthy people who hold such language may justly boast themselves superior to reason and impregnable to light. The only effective reply to these creatures would be a cuffing; the well-meant objections of another class merit the refutation of distinct characterization. It is the old talk of devotees about sin, of toppers concerning water, temperance men of gin; and, albeit it is neither wise nor witty, it is becoming in us at whom they rail to deal mercifully with them. In some otherwise estimable souls one of these harmless brain-cracks may be a right lovable trait of character.

Issues of a social import as great as a raid against dancing have been raised ere now. Will the coming man smoke? Will the coming man drink wine? These tremendous and imperative problems only recently agitated some of the "thoughtful minds" in our midst. By degrees they lost their preëminence; they were seen to be in process of solution without social cataclysm; they have, in a manner, been referred for disposal to the coming man himself: that is to say, they have been dropped, and are today as dead as Julius Caesar. The present hour has, in its turn, produced its own awful problem: Will the coming woman waltz?

As a question of mere fact the answer is patent: She will. Dancing will be good for her; she will like it; so she is going to waltz. But the question may rather be put—to borrow phraseology current among her critics: Had she oughter?—from a moral point of view, now. From a moral point, then, let us seek from analogy some light on the question of what, from its actual, practical bearings, may be dignified by the name Conundrum.

Ought a man not to smoke?—from a moral point of view. The economical view-point, the view point of convenience, and all the rest of them, are not now in question; the simple question is: Is it immoral to smoke? And again—still from the moral point of view: Is it immoral to drink wine? Is it immoral to play at cards?—to visit

theaters? (In Boston you go to some

harmless "Museum."

Where folks who like plays may religiously see 'em.)

Finally, then—and always from the same elevated view-point: Is it immoral to waltz?

The suggestions here started will not be further pursued in this place. It is quite pertinent now to note that we do smoke because we like it; and do drink wine because we like it; and do waltz because we like it, and have the added consciousness that it is a duty. I am sorry for a fellow-creature—male—who knows not the comfort of a cigar; sorry and concerned for him who is innocent of the knowledge of good and evil that lurk respectively in Chambertin and cheap "claret." Nor is my compassion altogether free from a sense of superiority to the object of it—superiority untainted, howbeit, by truculence. I perceive that life has been bestowed upon him for purposes inscrutable to me, though dimly hinting its own justification as a warning or awful example. So, too, of the men and women—"beings erect, and walking upon two [uneducated] legs"—whose unsophisticated toes have never, inspired by the rosy, threaded the labyrinth of the mazy ere courting the kindly offices of the balmy. It is only human to grieve for them, poor things!

But if their throbbing bunions, encased in clumsy high-lows, be obtruded to trip us in our dance, shall we not stamp on them? Yea, verily, while we have a heel to crunch with and a leg to grind it home.

XI

LUST, QUOTH'A!

YOU have danced? Ah, good. You have waltzed? Better. You have felt the hot blood hound through your veins, as your beautiful partner, compliant to the lightest pressure of your finger-tips, her breath responsive, matched her every motion with yours? Best of all—for you have served in the temple—you are of the priesthood of manhood. You cannot misunderstand, you will not deliver false oracle.

Do you remember your first waltz with the lovely woman whom you had longed like a man but feared like a boy to touch—even so much as the hem of her garment? Can you recall the time, place and circumstance? Has not the very first bar of the music that whirled you away been singing itself in your memory ever since? Do you recall the face you then looked into, the eyes that

seemed deeper than a mountain tarn, the figure that you clasped, the beating of the heart, the warm breath that mingled with your own? Can you faintly, as in a dream—*blasé* old dancer that you are—invoke a reminiscence of the delirium that stormed your soul, expelling the dull demon in possession? Was it lust, as the Prudes aver—the poor dear Prudes, with the feel of the cold wall familiar to the leathery backs of them?

It was the gratification—the decent, honorable, legal gratification—of the passion for rhythm; the unconditional surrender to the supreme law of periodicity, under conditions of exact observance by all external things. The notes of the music repeat and supplement each other; the lights burn with answering flame at sequent distances; the walls, the windows, doors, mouldings, frescoes, iterate their lines, their levels, and panels, interminable of combination and similarity; the inlaid floor matches its angles, multiplies its figures, does over again at this point what it did at that; the groups of dancers deploy in couples, aggregate in groups, and again deploy, evoking endless resemblances. And all this rhythm and recurrence, borne in upon the brain—itsself rhythmic—through intermittent senses, is converted into motion, and the mind, yielding utterly to its environment, knows the happiness of faith, the ecstasy of compliance, the rapture of congruity. And this the dull dunces—the eyeless, earless, brainless and bloodless callosities of cavil—are pleased to call lust!

O ye, who teach the ingenuous youth of nations
The Boston Dip, the German and the Glide,
I pray you guard them upon all occasions
From contact of the palpitating side;
Requiring that their virtuous gyrations
Shall interpose a space a furlong wide
Between the partners, lest their thoughts grow lewd—
So shall we satisfy the exacting Prude.

—*Israfel Brown.*

XII

OUR GRANDMOTHERS' LEGS

IT IS depressing to realize how little most of us know of the dancing of our ancestors. I would give value to behold the execution of a coranto and inspect the steps of a cinque-pace, having assurance that the performances assuming these names were veritably identical with their memorable originals. We possess the means of verifying somewhat as to the nature of the minuet; but after what fashion did our revered grandfather do his rigadon and his gavot? What manner of thing was that pirouette

in the deft execution of which he felt an honest exultation? And what were the steps of his contra (or country) and Cossack dances? What tune was that—"The Devil amongst the Fiddlers"—for which he clamored, to inspire his feats of leg?

In our fathers' time we read:

I wore my blue coat and brass buttons, very high in the neck, short in the waist and sleeves, nankeen trousers and white silk stockings, and a white waistcoat. I performed all the steps accurately and with great agility.

Which, it appears, gained the attention of the company. And it well might, for the year was 1830, and the mode of performing the cotillion of the period was undergoing the metamorphosis of which the perfect development has been familiar to ourselves. In its next stage the male celebrant is represented to us as "hopping about with a face expressive of intense solemnity, dancing as if a quadrille"—mark the newer word—"were not a thing to be laughed at, but a severe trial to the feelings." There is a smack of ancient history about this, too; it lurks in the word "hopping." In the perfected development of this dance as known to ourselves, no stress of caricature would describe the movement as a hopping. But our grandfather not only hopped, he did more. He sprang from the floor and quivered. In midair he crossed his feet twice and even three times, before alighting. And our budding grandmother beheld, and experienced flutterings of the bosom at his manly achievements. Some memory of these feats survived in the performances of the male ballet-dancers—a breed now happily extinct. A fine old lady—she lives, aged eighty-two—showed me once the exercise of "setting to your partner," performed in her youth; and truly it was right marvelous. She literally bounced hither and thither, effecting a twisting in and out of the feet, a patting and a flickering of the toes incredibly intricate. For the celebration of these rites her partner would array himself in morocco pumps with cunningly contrived buckles of silver, silk stockings, salmon-colored silk breeches tied with abundance of riband, exuberant frills, or "chitterlings," which puffed out at the neck and bosom not unlike the wattles of a he-turkey; and under his arms—as the fowl roasted might have carried its gizzard—our grandfather pressed the flattened simulacrum of a cocked hat. At this interval of time charity requires us to drop over the lady's own costume a veil that, tried by our canons of propriety, it sadly needed. She was young and thoughtless, the good grandmother; she was conscious of the possession of charms and concealed them not.

To the setting of these costumes, manners and practices, there was imported from Germany a dance called Waltz, which as I conceive, was the first of our "round" dances. It was welcomed by most persons who could dance, and by some superior souls who could not. Among the latter, the late Lord Byron—whose

participation in the dance was barred by an unhappy physical disability—addressed the new-comer in characteristic verse. Some of the lines in this ingenious nobleman’s apostrophe are not altogether intelligible, when applied to any dance that we know by the name of waltz. For example:

Pleased round the chalky floor, how well they trip,
One hand^s reposing on the royal hip,
The other to the shoulder no less royal
Ascending with affection truly loyal.

These lines imply an attitude unknown to contemporary waltzers, but the description involves no poetic license. Our dear grandmothers (giddy, giddy girls!) did their waltz that way. Let me quote:

The lady takes the gentleman round the neck with one arm, resting against his shoulder. During the motion, the dancers are continually changing their relative situations: now the gentleman brings his arm about the lady’s neck, and the lady takes him round the waist.

At another point, the lady may “lean gently on his shoulder,” their arms (as it appears) “entwining.” This description is by an eyewitness, whose observation is taken, not at the rather debauched court of the Prince Regent, but at the simple republican assemblies of New York. The observer is the gentle Irving, writing in 1807. Occasional noteworthy experiences they must have had—those modest, blooming grandmothers—for, it is to be borne in mind, tipsiness was rather usual with dancing gentlemen in the fine old days of Port and Madeira; and the blithe, white-armed grandmothers themselves did sip their punch, to a man. However, we may forbear criticism. We, at least, owe nothing but reverent gratitude to a generation from which we derive life, waltzing and the memory of Madeira. Even when read, as it needs should be read, in the light of that prose description of the dance to which it was addressed, Lord Byron’s welcome to the waltz will be recognized as one more illustration of a set of hoary and moss-grown truths.

As parlor-soldiers, graced with fancy-scars,
Rehearse their bravery in imagined wars;
As paupers, gathered in congenial flocks,
Babble of banks, insurances, and stocks;
As each if oft’nest eloquent of what
He hates or covets, but possesses not;
As cowards talk of pluck; misers of waste;
Scoundrels of honor; country clowns of taste;
Ladies of logic; devotees of sin;
Toppers of water; temperance men of gin—

my lord Byron sang of waltzing. Let us forgive and—remembering his poor foot—pity him. Yet the opinions of famous persons possess an interest that is akin, in the minds of many plain folk, to weight. Let us, then, incline an ear to another: “Laura was fond of waltzing, as every brisk and innocent young girl should be,” wrote he than whom none has written more nobly in our time—he who “could appreciate good women and describe them; and draw them more truly than any novelist in the language, except Miss Austen.” The same sentiment with reference to dancing appears in many places in his immortal pages. In his younger days as *attaché* of legation in Germany, Mr. Thackeray became a practiced waltzer. As a censor he thus possesses over Lord Byron whatever advantage may accrue from knowledge of the subject whereof he wrote.

We are happily not called upon to institute a comparison of character between the two distinguished moralists, though the same, drawn masterly, might not be devoid of entertainment and instruction. But two or three other points of distinction should be kept in mind as having sensible relation to the question of competency to bear witness. Byron wrote of the women of a corrupted court; Thackeray of the women of that society indicated by the phrase “Persons whom one meets”—and meets *now*. Byron wrote of an obsolete dance, described by Irving in terms of decided strength; Thackeray wrote of our own waltz. In turning off his brilliant and witty verses it is unlikely that any care as to their truthfulness disturbed the glassy copiousness of the Byronic utterance; this child of nature did never consider too curiously of justice, moderation and such inventions of the schools. The keynote of all the other wrote is given by his faithful pen when it avers that it never “signed the page that registered a lie.” Byron was a “gentleman of wit and pleasure about town”; Thackeray the father of daughters. However, all this is perhaps little to the purpose. We owe no trifling debt to Lord Byron for his sparkling and spirited lines, and by no good dancer would they be “willingly let die.” Poetry, music, dancing—they are one art. The muses are sisters, yet they do not quarrel. Of a truth, even as was Laura, so every brisk and innocent young girl should be. And it is safe to predict that she will be. If she would enjoy the advantage of belonging to Our Set she must be.

As a rule, the ideas of the folk who cherish a prejudice against dancing are crude rather than unclean—the outcome much more of ignorance than salacity. Of course there are exceptions. In my great work on *The Prude* all will be attended to with due discrimination in apportionment of censure. At present the spirit of the dance makes merry with my pen, for from yonder “stately pleasure-dome” (decreed by one Kubla Khan, formerly of The Big Bonanza Mining Company) the strains of the Blue Danube float

out upon the night. Avaunt, miscreants! lest we chase ye with flying feet and do our little dance upon your unwholesome carcasses. Already the toes of our partners begin to twiddle beneath their petticoats. Come, then, Stoopid—can't you move? No!—they change it to a galop—and eke the good old Sturm. Firm and steady, now, fair partner mine, whiles we run that *gobemouche* down and trample him miserably. There: light and softly again—the servants will remove the remains.

And hark! that witching strain once more:



¹It may be noted here that the popular conception of this poet as a frivolous sensualist is unsustainable by evidence and repudiated by all having knowledge of the matter. Although love and wine were his constant themes, there is good ground for the belief that he wrote of them with greater abandon than he indulged in them—a not uncommon practice of the poet-folk, by the way, and one to which those who sing of deeds of arms are perhaps especially addicted. The great age which Anacreon attained points to a temperate life; and he more than once denounces intoxication with as great zeal as a modern reformer who has eschewed the flagon for the trencher. According to Anacreon, drunkenness is “the vice of barbarians;” though, for the matter of that, it is difficult to say what achievable vice is not. In Ode LXII, he sings:

Fill me, boy, as deep a draught
As e'er was filled, as e'er was quaffed:
But let the water amply flow
To cool the grape's intemperate glow.
For though the bowl's the grave of sadness,
Ne'er let it be the birth of madness;
No! banish from our board to-night
The revelries of rude delight;
To Scythians leave these wild excesses,
Ours be the joy that soothes and blesses!
And, while the temperate bowl we wreath,
In concert let our voices breathe,
Beguiling every hour along
With harmony of soul and song.

Maximus of Tyre, speaking of Polycrates the Tyrant (tyrant, be it remembered, meant only usurper, not oppressor) considered the happiness of that potentate secure because he had a powerful navy and such a friend as Anacreon—the word navy naturally suggesting cold water, and cold water, Anacreon.

²On this passage Tyrwhit makes the following judicious comment: “The school of Oxford seems to have been in much the same estimation for its dancing as that of Stratford for its French”—alluding, of course, to what is said in the Prologue, of the French spoken by the Prioress:

And French she spoke, full fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford-atte-bowe,
For French of Paris was to hire unknowe.

³*I.e.* one of the lady's hands.