# J. E. Crawford Flitch

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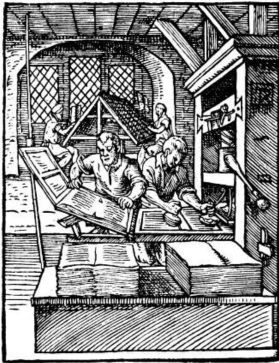

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# INTRODUCTION

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It is not unlikely that when the art historian of the future comes to treat of the artistic activity of the first decade of the twentieth century, he will remark as one of its most notable accomplishments a renaissance of the art of the Dance.

That this renaissance is an accomplished fact, is a matter of common knowledge. Within a relatively short period there have appeared several great dancers, who must necessarily have been preparing themselves for a considerable time previously to their appearance, yet as it were in secret, without cognisance of one another, with a common aim, but without a common plan. Contemporaries in time, they have been as far removed in space as the East is from the West. In all movements which touch the spirit, this circumstance of the simultaneous but independent manifestation of a common impulse is at once the most general and the most unaccountable. The still small voice whispers into space and those of a delicate hearing hear and respond. We content ourselves by repeating the explanation, which is no explanation, that the movement is “in the air.”

It follows, therefore, that he who sets out to relate adequately the story of the Dance in recent years should have qualified himself by being present at many different points, almost at one and the same time, ready to take account of its various exhibitions. Criticism of the Dance makes severer demands, at any rate physically, than criticism of literature. Dancers, even the most peripatetic,

do not circulate with the same freedom as philosophers and novelists. Mahomet must always go to the mountain. It is true that all the roads of modern art lead to Paris, and some are continued as far as London. But the critic, even if he lies in wait at either of these centres, cannot always count on catching the bird of passage on the wing. To the quality of ubiquity I make no claim. And I may as well confess now as never that I saw Russia only when it came to Covent Garden. For the omission in this book, therefore, of a description of the performances of certain dancers, I have no better excuse to offer than the fact that I have never seen them. Silence in many cases must be taken to mean not my ignoring of their art, but my ignorance of it. I think I may claim, however, that the names that are omitted will be found to be famous rather on account of some personal quality in the dancer than on account of her influence on the development of the Dance.

There are other peculiar difficulties which beset the critic of the Dance. I do not refer to the difficulty of passing judgment upon a fugitive art that leaves nothing behind it but an echo of applause, for with the dancers of the past I have little concern. There is the difficulty of discriminating between the executant and the composer—a difficulty greater in dancing than in music, since the dancer is more than an executant of the art, she is herself the medium of it. In the popular eye she has in fact always quite eclipsed the choregrapher. Criticism is in doubt as to the measure of her share in the creation of the design—an uncertainty that cannot be resolved by any reference to a score. Further, it is in continual danger of being misled by the glamour of

personal qualities—physical beauty, for example—which are strictly extraneous to the art. (Taglioni, it should be remembered, was probably the plainest as well as the greatest of dancers.) In no art, therefore, is personal prejudice established so readily or on grounds of such doubtful artistic validity.

The Dance enjoys no immunity from the clash of schools. Indeed, partisanship is the more bitter as principles of criticism are less determined. The respective upholders of the school of the ballet and of the natural or classical style of dancing are barely on speaking terms. To the advocates of the old school the new classical dancer is little better than a freak performer; to the austere classicist the ballet-dancer is but a smiling automaton, and both agree in refusing to recognise the skirt-dancer as a dancer at all.

To the exponents of conflicting styles I have endeavoured to do justice. If I have failed, it is of no great moment, since criticism of the Dance is still so inchoate that the opinion of the expert—and the responsibilities of his office I unhesitatingly refuse—has little more authority, except on questions of pure technique, than that of an expression of personal preference. I care little if the reader tears to tatters any hazardous conclusions upon which I have ventured. Such denials I expect. Almost I welcome them. But I care much if by anything that I have said the reader is provoked to formulate a serious criticism of his own and to refer his judgment to the abiding principles of art.

# CHAPTER I

# THE ANCIENT AND MODERN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DANCE

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IN latter, if not in former times, Dancing has commonly been regarded as the little sister of the Arts.

Gracious, wayward, beguiling, it has been indulged as the amusement of a trifling hour. It has ranked high among the amenities of life, but low in the hierarchy of the sincere ministers of beauty. The liberal arts have looked askance at its intrusion into their company. Dignity, seriousness of intention, fitness to express grave emotion, power to touch the heights and depths of the spirit have been denied to it. It has suffered the disdain which is the habitual attitude of grown men towards whatever appears to them to savour of the capricious and the childish. Charm, of course, has been granted it—the butterfly charm of triviality.

It has been discussed earnestly only to be condemned. Little mercy has the moralist ever shown to the art of the dance, but he has at least done it this much justice—he has taken it seriously. To the puritan of all times all the arts have been more or less suspect, but with regard to dancing he has never had any doubts at all. He has damned it with bell, book and candle. Indeed the logic of his own argument has left him no alternative. For dancing is the life of the senses burning with its most flamelike intensity. The appeal of all

the arts is by their very nature sensuous, but in none is this appeal so direct and compelling as in the dance.

Happily the warping and misconceived morality of former generations is a thing of the past. The old opposition of sense to spirit is discredited as a false antithesis. It has been displaced by the more handsome creed that “all good things are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul.” Beauty is a refiner’s fire, and the beauty that enters in through the doorway of the senses cannot soil but only cleanse the spirit.

Nowadays the dance has less to fear from the hostility of the moralist than from the indifference of the artist. And perhaps the difficulty of restoring it to its ancient and rightful rank becomes thereby greater. It is easier to convince an angry opponent than the man who smiles indulgently at everything you have to say and then drops quietly off to sleep.

It is a true if unfortunate fact that the majority of people, at all events so far as the Anglo-Saxon race is concerned, not only do not appreciate the full beauty and meaning of dancing but show little or no desire ever to understand it. When they do not despise it as puerile, or actively resent it as immoral, they merely tolerate its performance as constituting the inevitable dull portion of a pantomime or the superfluous item in a music-hall programme. That dancing should ever have entered deeply into the religious and artistic life of nations is utterly inconceivable to them. To become proficient in the art for the sake of money or even for the love of admiration does not seem to them altogether unreasonable; but to dance as the world danced

long ago, for the love of God—well, that falls into the portion of unintelligible ideas. Dancing has altogether ceased to play, indeed it never has played, a rôle of any importance in their lives. It means nothing more than paying occasionally to see the performance of some seven nights' wonder at a prominent music-hall, or, more usually, gyrating languidly on a beeswaxed floor to waltz time or bounding along kangaroo-like to the swinging melody of a popular two-step.

It is not the purpose of this book to present even an outline of the history of dancing, but in pleading for the "high seriousness" of the Dance as art it is desirable to consider for a moment the place which it once held in the ancient world—for this place, if I read the signs of the times aright, it is about to hold again.

The root of dancing is one with the root of all the arts, namely—ecstasy. Scorned as it has been by the sister arts of Music, Painting and Sculpture, it can boast a longer lineage than theirs, for the dance is more spontaneous than they. All the arts must needs be founded in emotion, but the moment of passion is usually long past before the labour of creation begins. The emotion is "recollected in tranquillity." But the raw material, if one may call it so, of the dance is the human body, and all human emotion expresses itself most spontaneously in bodily gesture. With children and simple peoples who have never learnt that it is incorrect to display their emotions, feeling is immediately translated into action. For a child words are never enough to express the heart's delight—as may be seen at any street corner when music is in the wind. The whole body becomes a lively instrument for joy to play upon. Joy for joy's sake only, however, is not yet

art. “A child dancing for its own delight,” says Ruskin, “a lamb leaping or a fawn at play, are happy and holy creatures; but they are not artists. An artist is a person who has submitted to a law which it was painful to obey, that he may bestow a delight which it is gracious to bestow.” It is only when the emotion becomes self-conscious and seeks to communicate itself, that it evokes the help of formal rhythm—and where there is rhythm there is the alpha, if not the omega, of art.

This deep ecstasy out of which the dance springs, as a fountain from a well, is not necessarily joy. Often it is the ecstasy of love—for the dance, as Lucian said, is as old as love, the oldest of the gods. It may be the ecstasy of worship or the ecstasy of grief. From the nature of the emotion out of which it springs the dance takes its character—voluptuous, solemn, bacchic, mournful, as the case may be. Whenever the passions of primitive peoples were deeply moved, they evolved a dance to express them. In the mystic ritual dance they found some expression for that divine unrest, when the winds in the great forests or the serenity of the multitudinous stars strangely stirred the heart to a sense of the nearness of the spiritual order; when the triumphing warriors returned after driving back the onslaught of a hostile tribe, the sudden sense of relief from the fear of extermination could not but find vent in the dance of victory; around the bier of the chief, in sorrow, fear, and uncertainty, they dance the dances of death; in joy when they stored up for another year the kindly fruits of the earth they danced the harvest and vintage dances; and

always and everywhere was danced the eternal pantomime of love.

In a passage which is none the less illuminating if its truth is perhaps imaginative rather than historical, Mr Max Beerbohm aptly illustrates the spontaneity of the dance and its development out of the ecstasy of some happy moment. “Some Thessalian vintner, say, suddenly danced for sheer joy that the earth was so bounteous; and his fellow-vintners, sharing his joy, danced with him; and ere the breath was spent they remembered who it was that had given them such cause for merry-making, and they caught leaves from the vine and twined them in their hair, and from the fig-tree and the fir-tree they snatched branches, and waved them this way and that, as they danced, in honour of him who was lord of these trees and of this wondrous vine. Thereafter this dance of joy became a custom, ever to be observed at certain periods of the year. It took on, beneath its joyousness, a formal solemnity, it was danced slowly around an altar of stone whereon wood and salt were burning—burning with little flames that were pale in the sunlight. Formal hymns were chanted around this altar. And some youth, clad in leopard’s skin and wreathed with ivy, masqueraded as the god himself, and spoke words appropriate to that august character.”

It was doubtless owing to its close connection with religion that the dance in ancient times was invested with so great dignity. It was a ceremonial before it became an amusement. Thus it is in its sacred character that we meet with the earliest instances of it. It had its place in the solemn rites of the Hebrew and the Egyptian. The Egyptian

dances were full of esoteric meaning. The mystical circle of dancers round the altar interpreted the revolutions of the celestial bodies, the music of the spheres. It is significant that the name given to the dancing-women was *Awalim*, the wise or learned ones. Their dancing appears to have been no less elaborately technical than it was symbolic. From the painted records that have come down to us, it would appear that they were not unfamiliar with many of the movements of the modern ballet. There is little doubt that the Egyptian spectator of three or four thousand years ago delighted in the same pirouette as may be seen on the stage of St Petersburg and Milan to-day.

If Egypt was the seed-ground of the arts, it was in Greece that they flowered. As we should naturally expect, it was there that the art of rhythmic gesture achieved its most perfect expression. Thoroughly to appreciate the curious poses of the ancient dances of India and Egypt it would be necessary to understand the exact spiritual meaning of which those attitudes and gestures were but the symbol. But the dances of Greece, by their supreme beauty of movement and their power of rendering all the gamut of human emotion, are of universal appeal. There the dance escaped from its tutelage to religion and was made free of the kingdom of art. It had its part in that imperishable achievement of Greece—the revelation of the full glory and beauty of the "human form divine." In its turn it nourished the other arts. Greek sculpture drew no little of its inspiration from the dance, and its admirable gestures, thus caught in the fugitive moment and eternalised in stone, have enriched the world's heritage of beauty for all time.

In the Greek view, the dance was properly accompanied by music and song—song being the speech of music and dance the gesture of song. The three formed together a single imitative art, the aim of which was to present a definite emotion or idea. The story is told of Sostratus refusing to dance the dance of “Liberty” before the conqueror of his native town. “It would not be fitting for me,” he said, “to dance the ‘liberty’ which my native town has lost.” The Greeks never regarded dancing as a mere frivolous entertainment. From its power of affecting the emotions, and with them the character, they attributed to it a grave importance. In constructing his ideal republic, Plato went so far as to advocate its regulation by the State. The action of the State, let it be observed, was not to be a mere prohibition of degrading performances; it was actively to foster and prescribe the best dances with a view to elevating and perfecting the character of the citizens. Nothing could be stranger to a modern mind than this attitude of the ancient world to the dance; yet if it be true—and none I think will care to deny it—that dancing determines the emotions and that the emotions of a people determine its character, what could be more reasonable?

It is difficult to realise now to what an extent the whole life of the ancient world was coloured by the dance. It occupied as great a part as music, literature and the drama occupy in the life of to-day—perhaps a greater, for whereas in Western Europe there are many who care for none of these things, in Egypt, in Greece and in Rome, the dance touched the life of all classes and at every point. No ceremony of importance was conducted without dancing. It

had its place in the rites of religion, at weddings and funerals, at private feasts and at public triumphs, in military exercises and in the theatre. It gave the theme to sculpture and painting. It went hand in hand with music. Indeed when we think of the ancient world we almost perforce think of it dancing. In the dance is summed up all the grace and gaiety of that old pagan life which was once lived on the sunlit shores of the Mediterranean, and which we are now wistfully and painfully beginning to attempt to recapture.

It is not a little strange that the dance should have fallen from its high estate as the handmaid of religion and hierarch of beauty to be the doubtful amusement of the café and the music-hall. In some measure undoubtedly its decline was due to the growing licentiousness in which it became involved. Homer dignified it with the epithet “irreproachable,” but in Cicero’s time it had already become so degenerate that he could say, “No sane man dances unless he is mad.” Sallust was even more emphatic when he told a lady of his acquaintance that she danced with too much skill to be virtuous. The Catholic Church at first not only tolerated but actually incorporated the dance in Christian worship, and survivals of the ancient ritual dance exist in the churches of Spain to this day. But as the character of the dances became more equivocal they were condemned. Little by little the dance fell into disrepute.

But the moralist mistakes when he supposes that the dance stands in a different category from the other arts by reason of a special taint. Like all the other arts it reflects the morals of the time. Among peoples of simple faith and primitive virtue, the dance has always been marked by a

certain strict and hieratic quality. It was so among the austere Romans of the early republic, and among the Christians of the first centuries. When manners decay, the dance becomes decadent also. It is not the dissoluteness of the dance that poisons the morals of the age; it is the corruption of the age that poisons the dance. The sensual character of so many eastern dances is the effect and not the cause of the sensuality of the race. If the dance suffers from any general relaxation of morality more swiftly and more disastrously than any of the other arts, it is because it expresses the emotions with such fidelity and emphasis. It is the most subtle and the most accurate index of the character of a people.

The dancing that is seen on the stage of to-day, however, is never reprehensible, and seldom even vulgar, and the fact that in former ages of looser living the dance became contaminated does not adequately explain the disesteem with which it appears, until recently, to have been regarded. The true reason seems to lie in the popular belief, not that dancing is less incorruptible, but that it is less serious than the other arts.

This fallacy—for such I take it to be—is doubtless due in part to the fact that when we speak of dancing we inevitably associate it with the ball-room. The word carries with it a train of images and recollections connected with the languorous cadence of waltz music, the perfume of conservatories, shady corners, champagne and ices, and the premature arrival of dawn. We can scarcely avoid thinking of it as merely the amusement of our lighter hours. But between the dancing of the ball-room and the dancing

of art there is about as little connection as between the snow-man that children make on a winter’s afternoon and the sculpture of the Parthenon. The one is an amusement, more or less graceful as the case may be, the other is an inspiration and a science. In the dancing of a mixed company at an evening party there is as little relation to art as there would be in an exhibition of pictures by a group of beginners, who had not yet mastered the elementary rules of drawing. If the performers derive any pleasure out of their respective exhibitions, there is an end of the whole matter and an excuse for it.

It is perhaps because everybody is more or less an amateur dancer that dancing has been lightly assumed to be a facile accomplishment which can easily be acquired after a few lessons, and a little practice. No misconception could be further from the truth. Probably there is no art that necessitates more prolonged and painful study. The dancer must be “caught young,” if she is to excel. She must spend the whole of her youth in unremitting toil. She will be confronted with a bewilderingly elaborate technique. A steel resolution and a kind of passion for her calling must be hers, if she is not to flinch from the severity even of an elementary training.

Yet if dancing demanded nothing more than physical effort and mental application, it could not claim the seriousness of art. The dexterous execution of a number of intricate steps has no more value than that of any other *tour de force*. Soulless dancing has as little power to move the spectator as the feats of a clever acrobat. There can be no great dancing without emotion. Unless the dancer has the

capacity for unusual emotion, and is also gifted with the power of emotional expression, which is the beginning and end of all great dancing, the performance never rises to anything more inspiring than a dreary and unpleasing display of mechanical accomplishment. If the dancer has nothing in her to express, she dances in vain. Great dancing demands deep sensibility and a subtle responsiveness to the strong rhythms of life, together with the power of translating these emotions into beauty of bodily movement. Dancing can be taught just as much and just as little as any other art. The great dancer is born.

But probably the seriousness of great art has been denied to dancing because of a common misapprehension as to what that seriousness consists in. It is almost always assumed that the seriousness of art depends upon its subject-matter. Serious art, it is supposed, must have a “message.” It must be concerned with actual problems, social or religious. It must in some way be oppressed with the burden of contemporary life. But an art which has nothing to say, no conundrums to ask, no solutions to offer —what claim can that have upon our serious attention?

It is forgotten that it is not the subject that makes art serious or trivial, but the mood. There are problem pictures over which the public wrinkles its brows that are frivolous as a picture post-card from the point of view of art. And there are pictures of the bric-à-brac of a room, or a table spread for a meal, that are as grave as tragedy. It all depends upon the quality of the emotion that has gone to the making of them. The dance expresses the most serious thing in life—that is, ecstasy. All dull things are trivial. Art which has only

the interest of contemporary problems is ephemeral, for when the problem is solved, the interest vanishes. The dance is the expression of the moods, and the moods are eternal. It has its source in passion, and where there is passion there is life at its utmost and seriousness at its highest.

In the present revival and development of the dance there is something at once significant and hopeful. It is not perhaps too conjectural to discern in it the hint of a reaction against one of the least agreeable tendencies in much of present-day art. It would seem that the arts are tending to become more and more enmeshed in contemporary affairs. They are exchanging the artistic conscience for a social conscience. When we ask for beauty they give us advice. Our serious novels are blue-books. Their writers appear to have no other interest than exposing the weak places of the social order. Drama has long since abandoned itself almost entirely to a painstaking study of marriage and divorce, and the problem picture we have always with us. Art has taken for its task the solution of the query, What's wrong with the world? It is furiously justifying its existence by hurrying to the rescue of the politician and the social reformer.

Into this vexed and anxious company of the arts the Dance strays a little timidly, bringing with it the serenity and grace of a less troubled age. It cannot produce the passport of discontent, without which it seems doubtful whether it is entitled to be admitted. It can contribute neither message nor criticism. It seeks not to reform us but only to please. It recalls us to the joy of life which the other arts had almost persuaded us to forget. It has but a single purpose—to

quicken our pulses with beauty and to renew our life with its own untiring ecstasy.

# CHAPTER II

# THE RISE OF THE BALLET

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ANY account of the modern renaissance of dancing must needs begin with the ballet. In one sense it is in the ballet that the dance attains its completest mode of expression. It may be regarded as the limit of its evolution, its most complex and elaborate statement. The more orderly sequence would be to trace the simpler forms of dancing through the various stages of their evolution until they arrive at their ultimate development in the ballet. The concern of this book, however, is not with the history of the dance, but rather with the interest which it has for the present time as an art-form. And it is with the dance as ballet that the awakening of this interest begins.

If the dance is essentially the art of democracy, springing out of the gladness of the crowd, the ballet in its origin is aristocratic. It was the diversion of courts before it became the delight of the populace.

In spite of its lavish production of masterpieces of art, the Renaissance would nevertheless have been incomplete without the ballet; for the ballet provided a perfectly fitting expression for two of the peculiar characteristics of the age—its love of pageant and its love of mythological allegory. If nothing akin to the ballet had ever existed in the world before, the fifteenth century would have been compelled to

invent it. Invent it it did, and although there were precedents in the mysteries and interludes of the Middle Ages and in the old Roman saturnalia and pantomimi, the invention gave a new art-form to the world.

The ballet of the court was a mixed entertainment, consisting of poetry, music and dancing, in which princes and nobles took part. A poet was commissioned to write the verses, a musician to compose the score, a ballet-master to arrange the steps, and a painter to devise the artistic effects. These splendid court entertainments originated in Italy. The gorgeous spectacular display given in honour of the marriage of Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, in 1489, made a sensation not only in Italy but throughout Europe. The pageantry of the court ballet appealed to the heart of the splendour-loving Medici. Catherine de Medici introduced it into France.

It was in France that the *ballet de la cour* found its home. Henri IV. and Louis XIII. were both lovers of the ballet, while Louis XIV. may be said to have had a passion for it. The great cardinals, Richelieu and Mazarin, were its patrons. The first historian of the ballet, Le Père Ménestrier, gives an account of a “moral ballet” that was danced on Richelieu’s birthday in 1634. The theme was *Truth, the Enemy of Seeming, upheld by Time*. It opened, we are told, with “a chorus of those False Rumours and Suspicions which usher in Seeming and Falsehood. They were represented by actors dressed as cocks and hens, who sang a dialogue, partly Italian, partly French, with a refrain of clucking and crowing. After this song the background opened and Seeming appeared, seated upon a huge cloud and accompanied by

the Winds. She had the wings and the great tail of a peacock, and was covered with mirrors. She hatched eggs, from which issued Pernicious Lies, Deceptions, Frauds, Agreeable Lies, Flatteries, Intrigues, Ridiculous Lies, Jocosities, Little Fibs.

"The Deceptions were inconspicuously clad in dark colours, with serpents hidden among flowers. The Frauds, clothed in fowlers' nets, had bladders which they burst while dancing. The Flatteries were disguised as apes; the Intrigues as crayfishers, carrying lanterns on their heads and in their hands; the Ridiculous Lies as crippled beggars on wooden legs.

"Then Time, having put to flight Seeming with her train of Lies, had the nest opened from which these had issued; and there was disclosed a great hour-glass. And out of this hour-glass Time raised up Truth, who summoned the Hours and danced the grand ballet with them."

But for the rather strident moral emphasis we seem to be breathing the atmosphere of Leicester Square! What has usually been regarded as a latter-day corruption of the ballet—the intrusion of a mass of irrelevant properties and stage-mechanism—appears to have been a kind of original sin which attached to it even in its origin.

In the reign of Louis XIV. the ballet passed definitely from the court to the theatre. In the earlier part of his reign the king himself frequently appeared in the ballet, usually taking the part of a god; but in course of time *le Grand Monarque* put on flesh and exchanged the rôle of an actor for that of a spectator. In 1661 was founded the *Académie royale de musique et de danse*, with Quinault as its first

director, and the ballet henceforth took possession of the stage.

But before it assumed the form in which we know it, the ballet had to pass through several transformations. Originally the ballet, like the play, had been performed exclusively by men. The parts of bacchantes and nymphs had been taken by youths of slight and graceful build, and the use of masks, which at this time was general, assisted the convention. But in a ballet given at Saint-Germain in 1681, entitled *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, Lulli, the composer, introduced the innovation of female dancers. The fashion became immediately popular. The part of the male dancer grew continually less important until in the ballets of the latter part of the nineteenth century it became altogether negligible, to be revived again in the Russian ballet of our own day.

The next step was the abolition of the mask. This did not take place until nearly a hundred years later. The custom of wearing the mask had its origin in the classical theatre and formed an essential part of the ballet from the Renaissance onwards. In 1772 Rameau's opera *Castor and Pollux* was given in Paris, the part of Apollo being taken by Gætano Vestris, who appeared, according to the fashion of the time, in a mask and an enormous full-bottomed black wig. One night he was unable to perform and Gardel, one of the leading dancers of the day, consented to act as a substitute, but only on condition that he was allowed to discard the mask and wig and appear in his own long fair hair. The happy innovation pleased the public and from that day the fashion of the mask was doomed.

But the character of the ballet was chiefly affected by the revolution in costume. In the earlier days of the ballet the dancers were dressed in the elaborate and fulsome costume of the period—the women in hooped petticoats falling to the ankle, with their powdered hair piled up a foot or more upon their heads, the men in long-skirted coats set out from their hips with padding. So long as this costume was worn the dance was necessarily confined almost entirely to the dignified and gliding movements of the minuet. It permitted none of the airy and intricate steps which are peculiar to the technique of the ballet proper. Noverre, the eighteenth-century *maître de ballet*, who is chiefly responsible for giving the ballet its present form, wrote as follows:—“I wish to reduce by three quarters the ridiculous paniers of our *danseuses*. They are opposed equally to the freedom, the quickness, and the prompt and animated action of the dance. They deprive the figure of its elegance and of the just proportions which it ought to possess. They diminish the beauty of the arms; they *bury*, so to speak, the graces. They embarrass and distract the dancer to such a degree that the movement of her panier sometimes occupies her more seriously than that of her limbs.”

Mademoiselle de Camargo, the famous dancer of the first half of the eighteenth century, started the innovation in dress. She was the first to execute the entrechat, a light and brilliant step during the performance of which the dancer rapidly crosses the feet while in mid-air. In her dances, therefore, she took the precaution of wearing the *caleçon*, from which the tight-fitting fleshing of the ballet-dancer was subsequently evolved. This reform in costume brought

about a transformation in the dance. When the limbs were freed from the thraldom of clothes, the movements of the ballet became swifter and more complex. Its technique was developed by the introduction of pirouettes, entrechats, jetés-battus, ballones. From an elegant accomplishment in which the lords and ladies of the court could take part, the ballet passed into a serious science, demanding the exclusive devotion of the performer. The reign of the amateur was over; that of the artist began.

To Noverre, whom Garrick called the "Shakespeare of dance," is chiefly due the creation of the ballet as an art-work, single, complete and harmonious in itself. Until his time it had existed principally as an auxiliary to opera. In the ballet-opera, which had reigned supreme on the stage hitherto, and has never in fact been entirely abandoned, the dances interpolated between the acts had borne little relation to the argument of the play. They were merely a diversion of quite secondary interest. The opera was not created for them but they for the opera. The revolution which Noverre effected was the creation of the *ballet d'action*, the unravelling of a plot by dancing and gesture pure and simple. For Noverre the ballet was something much more serious than a mere saltatory display. It was an æsthetic composition which demanded the harmonious co-operation of a number of arts. "The master of the ballet," he said, "must study the works of painters and sculptors, he must know anatomy.... Everything which subserves the ends of painting must also be of service to the dance." He insisted upon the importance to the dancer of a knowledge of pantomime and himself studied closely the methods of

Garrick. He deprecated the performance of the dance to any haphazard arrangement of lively airs. Music must be an integral portion of the ballet, written specially for it and informed with the spirit of the action. The costumes and the *décor* of the theatre must also be treated with a view to obtaining one single artistic effect. Thus Noverre succeeded in creating a new theatrical formula. He laid down the main lines along which the ballet has subsequently developed.

Although the English may claim to have been a nation of dancers in the old pre-Puritan days, dancing has certainly never been native to the English stage. The most brilliant of the dancers in the ballets that are produced upon the British stage to-day are foreign, and it has been so from the first. The ballet was late in coming to England. It sprang somewhat suddenly and dazzlingly to life upon the London stage in 1734. In that year Mademoiselle Sallé, who had already achieved fame in Paris, appeared at Covent Garden in the ballet of *Pygmalion and Galatea*. Like all the greatest dancers, she was a woman of distinguished personality. She counted Locke among her friends. Handel wrote specially for her the ballet of *Terpsichore*. Voltaire vacillated between his admiration of her and of her rival, Camargo, whom he apostrophised thus:

“Ah! Camargo, que vous êtes brillante!
Mais que Sallé, grand Dieu, est ravissante!
Que vos pas sont légers et que les siens sont doux!
Elle est inimitable et vous êtes nouvelle!
Les nymphes sautent comme vous,
Mais les Grâces dansent comme elle!”

Her dancing was full of expression and characterised by a certain simple dignity of motion; very rapid measures and eccentric movements she never attempted. She assisted in the reform of costume which Mademoiselle de Camargo had initiated. The *Mercure de France* noted that she appeared at Covent Garden “sans panier, sans jupe, sans corps, échevelée et sans aucun ornement sur la tête.”

Her success was immediate and tumultuous. The public was frenzied with delight—whether at this first surprising revelation of the ballet or at the vision of the ravishing figure, “échevelée et sans jupe,” it is impossible to say. And the enthusiasm of the British public in the eighteenth century appears to have had a Latin quality of abandon, which suggests the inference that the British character is not more but less emotional than it was. The crowds around the doors of the theatre, we are told, fought for a sight of the ballerina. The spectators had to force their way to the doors sword in hand. And, in the manner of Spaniards applauding a popular matador at a bull-fight, the Londoners showered upon the stage purses filled with guineas and jewels, which the cupids and satyrs of the troupe gathered up, keeping time to the music!

Seven years later England saw the greatest dancer of the century—perhaps the greatest *danseur* who has ever lived—Gætano Vestris. He was by birth an Italian and styled himself, with a better knowledge of his own accomplishments than of the pronunciation of the French language, “le diou de la danse.” His amazing vanity was the source of innumerable anecdotes. “This century has produced but three great men,” he used to say, “myself, Voltaire and Frederick the Great.” One night in coming from the opera a portly lady happened to tread rather heavily upon his foot. She apologised, and hoped she had not hurt him very much. “Me, madam!” exclaimed the god of the dance, “me! You have only put Paris into mourning for a fortnight!” His son Auguste-Armand inherited almost all his father’s talent. Gætano was wont to say of him, “If Auguste does not continue to float in mid-air, it is only out of consideration for his less gifted fellow-mortals.”

As England never produced a great school of dancing, the vicissitudes of the ballet in this country fluctuated with its fortunes abroad. The French Revolution brought about the break-up, in 1789, of the *Communeauté des Maîtres à danser* founded by Louis XIV. Whenever the spirit of a people has been caught up in the great winds of emotion which sweep over the world with an invariable periodicity, the dance has always been the most immediate expression of the popular excitement. Perhaps France never danced so madly as during the Revolution. Paris danced between the massacres. The revolutionary spirit embodied itself in the Carmagnole. But it was the dance of the people, not the dance of art, that flourished during the Revolution. The

*grand ballet*, in spite of an attempt to make it a vehicle for political ideas, languished. Among his multitudinous interests, however, Napoleon appears to have included a concern for the art of dancing, and in his enumeration of the requisites of his Egyptian expedition “a troupe of ballet girls” figures among the quota of cannon and ammunition.

A consequence of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, which does not usually figure in the pages of the historian, was that the supply of Parisian *danseuses* for the English stage was cut off for a generation or more. Even for some years after the peace, the French were inclined to keep their best performers for themselves and sent over to England only their discarded favourites. The golden period of the ballet in England began in the twenties of the nineteenth century and lasted until the fifties. In 1821 a determined effort was made to secure some of the most dazzling stars of the Parisian ballet. The difficulties to be overcome were not light, for, as the Parisian dancers were trained in an academy maintained by the state, none could leave the country without the permission of the Government. The British ambassador was himself charged with the negotiations. After many pourparlers, a treaty was drawn up, signed and sealed, by which one of the two high-contracting parties agreed to loan to the other two first and two second dancers from the Academy, while the other in return was to pledge itself not to attempt to import any other dancer without the Academy’s consent.

The first two to arrive were the *danseur* Albert and the *première danseuse* Noblet, who were engaged at a salary of £1700 and £1500 respectively. They took London by storm.

They were the idols of society; the fashionable world could think and talk of nothing but their dancing. The reign of the ballet had begun. Already in the first season the cost of the ballet exceeded that of the opera by some £2000. No other form of theatrical art approached the ballet in popularity. The King's Theatre, afterwards transformed and renamed Her Majesty's, kept a permanent *corps de ballet*. The Haymarket, Her Majesty's, and Covent Garden nightly drew crowded houses to witness displays of the most accomplished dancing that had ever been seen on the English stage. With the advent of Taglioni enthusiasm reached its utmost limits.

For about a quarter of a century England was enraptured with the ballet. It is impossible for us to attempt to envisage the early Victorian era without the ballet entering prominently into the picture. It appears to present the just embodiment of the formal but naïve gaiety, the untroubled imagination, the somewhat vulgarian æstheticism of the age. The ballerina, with her straightly parted hair, her rose wreath, her innocent affectations, is the complement to the whiskered dandy of the D'Orsay period. The ballet seems to be as closely attached to early Victorianism as are Louis Quinze furniture or Chelsea porcelain shepherdesses to their respective periods. It is not altogether easy for us to regard it otherwise than as a revival. Even now the ballet, in its costumes, its music, its *décor*, is not free from a tendency to hark back to the thirties and forties of the last century.