

The most interesting and amusing part of the matter, as has been said, is the complete identity of the gestures for denoting the same kind of circumstances, even if they are used by most diverse people; just as the words of a language are alike for every one and liable to such modifications as are brought about by a slight difference in accent or education. And yet these standing forms of gesticulation which are universally observed are certainly the outcome of no convention; they are natural and original, a true language of nature, which may have been strengthened by imitation and custom. It is incumbent on an actor, as is well known, and on a public speaker, to a less extent, to make a careful study of gesture--a study which must principally consist in the observation and imitation of others, for the matter cannot very well be based on abstract rules; with the exception of some quite general leading principles--as, for instance, that the gesture must not follow the word, but rather immediately precede it, in order to announce it and thereby rouse attention.

The English have a peculiar contempt for gesticulation, and regard it as something undignified and common; this seems to me to be only one of those silly prejudices of English fastidiousness. For it is a language which nature has given to every one and which every one understands; therefore to abolish and forbid it for no other reason than to gratify that so much extolled, gentlemanly feeling, is a very dubious thing to do.

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