

## A HISTORY OF DANCING.\*

Was it Molière who said that the destiny of nations depended upon the art of dancing? Of course one who has ever danced would fret under the restrictions of such a statement; and certainly no one need be reminded that Louis Quatorze himself danced in twenty-seven ballets, that Richelieu executed a saraband to gain the favour of Anne of Austria, or that Napoleon fitted out his Egyptian expedition with Terpsichorean accessories, in order to have a proper sense of the dignity and noble pedigree of the dance. M. Vuillier, however, in showing how spontaneous and elemental it is, and how intimately related its history is with that of poetry, singing, kissing, and even hair-dressing, gives one a new sense of its artfulness and beauty.

Indeed, this should be an exhilarating volume even to one who does not dance. Its twenty full-page plates and four hundred text illustrations are as informing as they are exquisite, and atone for a

\* A History of Dancing. From the French of Gaston Vuillier. New York: D. Appleton & Co. \$12.00.

want of proportion discoverable in the accompanying text. There are reproductions of statuary ranging from the Tanagra figurines, which suggest that the Greeks had their Chérets and Caran d'Aches as well as their Phidias, to the inspiring Bacchante and Carpeaux Dance; of the rural dreams of Watteau and Teniers; of frescoes Egyptian and Parisian; of vases and bas-reliefs with their dancing nymphs and boys; of old prints and engravings, and a host of more recent lithographs, some of which are very quaint and amusing, as, for instance, Vernier's "lively polka," Victor Maurin's Neapolitan dancers supporting their partners with one hand in mid-air, and the sketch from a mediæval manuscript of Bacchus dancing down the vintage in a large tub. Amid village weddings and peasant balls, after so much *pavane*, *bolero* and *branle*, Doré's barrel-organ with a train of wizened youngsters, and Whistler's spindle-legged Connie Gilchrist, and even Stewart's "Cotillon" seem a little out of key. One is inclined to exclaim with Goncourt: "For Heaven's sake, pretend at least to be enjoying yourselves." The pictorial part of the history has an overmastering jollity which brooks no infringement.

The letter-press provided by M. Vuillier is cleverly and harmoniously compiled. His outlook is distinctly Parisian. He devotes by far the greater portion of his space to dances and dancers of France, than which no land has contributed more picturesquely to the choreographic art. With little pretence of generalising, he shows that Queen Catherine devised a whirl of midnight gaieties to mask her own dark schemes; that under *le Roi Soleil* dances were too ceremonial to be thoroughly enjoyable; that the Golden Age of the minuet was the reign of Louis XV. as the lively gavotte was ascendant in that of Louis XVI.; and that in the theatre of the Empire, men dancers were as popular as women. But he pays slight attention to the dances of primitive races or of the East, which happily have been expounded by Dr. Grosse, of Freiburg, and Mrs. Lillie Grove in the Badminton Library. Unlike Dr. Grosse, M. Vuillier starts with no thesis, and so far from marshalling facts and emphasising results, leaves in the air a score of inevitable questions.

Dr. Grosse favoured the practical and

cultural origin of the dance. It enabled lovers, he said with Lacroix, to discover whether their partners were sound and healthy. While M. Vuillier quotes from the famous *Polka Almanack* to the effect that the country dance is especially suited to the sanguine, the galop to the bilious, the waltz to the lymphatic, and the polka to the nervous, he leaves alone for the most part the physical aspect of the matter and furnishes many evidences of a religious origin. Under the Pharaohs the dance was symbolic of sidereal motion. The Nautch girls of India perform a ritual ceremony, and the Great Spirit is invoked by American Indians even in their war dances. In the Spanish theatre, in the days of Philip IV., allegorical and mythological subjects were developed "with immense success." For centuries, in Portugal, itinerant ballets celebrated on all saints' days. But one reads of dramatico-gastronomic dances as well as astrological and ecclesiastical.

While the distinction between ancient and modern dancing is not accentuated, one quickly perceives the fatuity of drawing a hard and fast line. Doubtless David ran and skipped, rather than danced, before the Ark; but Salome has been the inspiration of artists. If in the thirteenth century the sexes first joined in the dance and men and women have always danced separately in India and Persia, it must be remembered that the Greeks had long since gone through the whole gamut of masculine, feminine, and mixed dances, and that Gaditanian darlings (*deliciæ Gaditanæ*) had created a *furor* in ancient Rome no less than Pylades and Bathyllus. If modern theatrical dancing originated with the ballet of the wise and foolish virgins in the castle of St. Angelo, under Sixtus IV., ancient theatrical dancing was introduced by the Roman Emperor Augustus. The dance Homer described as engraved on the shield of Achilles is today performed in Greece. From these facts it will be seen that an evolution of dancing must be the despair of an historian. Yet M. Vuillier might, without inconvenience, have drawn more parallels and probed the subject deeper than he did. One likes to know, for example, that the Spanish fandango is in impetuosity akin to the Italian tarantella, which owes its name to the tarantula, a spider whose bite was supposed

to be cured only by dancing ; and that the tourdion differs from the gaillarde as a gliding does from a jumping step. Indeed, the *danse basse* and the *danse haute* are terms that classify almost all dances ranging from grave to gay.

M. Vuillier has a becoming lightness of touch, and sympathises acutely with the Frenchman in China who spied an advertisement of the Bal Mabilie on a newspaper wrapped about a pair of shoes, or with staid provincial magistrates haunted by Bohemian memories. He does not shed crocodile tears because Mademoiselle Guimard, La Tagliani, Queen Pomaré, and Markowski died in poverty. Did they not "have their day"? If perchance a dancer took himself rather seriously, calling his son the "god of dancing" and himself the son's "inspired creator," or won "Bravos!" away from Mozart's divine music, the narrator does not add that superfluous remark which is sure to spoil the story.

The same restraint appears in the following account of the founding of Dantzic :

"It is said that a bishop who owned a property on the shores of the Baltic Sea gave permission to his flock to dance, on condition that they should only use the space enclosed by joining in a large ring the hands of all the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages. On this space was afterward built a town, says the legend, the town of Dantzic, or City of Dancing."

Many Americans will be surprised to learn that we have "inaugurated dancing cars on railways to beguile the tedium of the long journey between San Francisco and New York." Also (p. 378) that the Barrison sisters are "artistes"! And did Moses cause "a solemn ballet" to be danced after the passage of the Red Sea?

*George Merriam Hyde.*