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W. H. Woakes

**AN ESSAY
ON THE ATTITUDES
DERIVED FROM GESTURE
TO BE ATTENDED TO
IN DANCING,
WITH
OBSERVATIONS ON THE ART:**

**ALSO,
The Etiquette
OF THE
ENGLISH BALL ROOM;**

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HEREFORD.

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TO HIS PUPILS,
FOR WHOSE USE
IT WAS EXPRESSLY WRITTEN,
AND
FOR WHOSE IMPROVEMENT
IT IS NOW SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC,
THIS WORK
IS DEDICATED,
WITH UNFEIGNED WISHES FOR THEIR WELFARE.

BY THE AUTHOR.

HEREFORD:
April 30th, 1825.



PREFACE.

In submitting the following pages to the public the author deems it necessary to apologize for his temerity in undertaking a work, which merits a more able pen than he is competent to wield. But, should its perusal accelerate in any degree the progress of his pupils, the summit of his ambition will be attained; for he is proud to add, that his happiness is always increased in proportion to their improvement.

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THE
ENGLISH
BALL ROOM.

IT is proverbial on the Continent, that the English Style of Dancing is the most ungraceful of any nation in Europe; and I must confess that I have often been a little chagrined, when in Paris I have compared the English with the French Ball Room.

The easy and elegant movements of the Parisian dancer are so infinitely superior to the unnatural and awkward movements of the English one, that we

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must not murmur at the foreigner, whose risible faculties be agitated, when witnessing the performances of the latter. But whence proceeds this disparagement? Is it that the English have neither taste nor talent for elegant dancing? I think we might with safety answer negatively. During the long course of my professional duties, I have always held it to be imperative to ascertain the true cause of the inferiority of the English Ball Room; and I am now convinced, that the principal cause arises from the want of an established system of Dancing, which should be adopted by every teacher. If there were such a system, our Ball Room would exhibit a very different scene to that which it does at present; instead of the numberless styles and disagreeable confusion, we are now obliged to witness, all the

dancers would then be guided by fixed rules, which must produce the most delightful harmony. Elegant dancing and grammatical language are alike; both must be governed by established rules, however taste may modify the movements of the dancer, or the sentence of the speaker. Thus no person can be said to speak grammatically, who is repeatedly breaking the fundamental rules of Syntax, nor can any one be termed an elegant dancer, whose movements are always made in straight instead of waving lines.—It is, therefore, truly lamentable, that the styles of dancing, taught in this kingdom are as numerous as the Teachers of the Art; and consequently, that a correct and beautiful style cannot be found in the English Ball Room.

But though this variety of systems is the primary cause of the inferiority of our Dancing, yet there is a secondary one, which militates greatly against our improvement; viz : *vulgar prejudice*.

Music and Dancing are particularly unfortunate in one respect; namely, the facility with which bad performers overpower the efforts of good ones; thus, in a concert, one unskilful player will introduce sufficient discord to destroy all the harmony which can be produced by twenty, who are skilful: the effect is precisely the same in dancing. How often in the English Ball Room, do we see persons, who, from an overstrained politeness, yield to the selfishness and ill humour of bad dancers. If a Quadrille, forsooth, be attempted, vulgar prejudice rises to oppose it in the shape

of *caustic* old maids, *cultivated* young ladies, and *clownish* boors ; and thus must we submit every winter to the toil of a monotonous country dance. Whether the enlightened nineteenth century will pass away without such personages being expelled from every respectable Ball Room, I cannot possibly decide ; but surely it is a national disgrace, that their conduct should be tolerated, for it is in direct opposition to that which presents elegant and beautiful Dancing.

In conclusion, I would persuade those who prefer the elegant glidings of the Quadrille, or Swedish Dance, to the hurried step and awkward confusion of the Country Dance, to determine resolutely to remain inactive spectators, whenever the latter *jigging* be continued, during the whole of the even-

ing; and I will venture to assert, that the superiority of the French over the English Ball Room will then, and not until then, in a great measure vanish.

ON THE UTILITY OF DANCING.

Many persons are entirely ignorant of the physical advantages, as well as the mental amusements, which might be derived from the knowledge and exercise of the polite art of Dancing. But let us see what, on this subject, are the opinions of many famous writers.

Several Greek authors have written on the utility of Dancing, particularly Lucian, Pliny, Athenæus, and Plutarch; Plato has many passages in his Com-

monwealth in commendation of the art ; and the grave Motesquieu has also written on it ; Socrates learnt when advanced in years, and was delighted with the advantages arising from it ; yet some of our modern moralists still look upon Dancing as a ludicrous and frivolous amusement ; but men of talent, whose names stand high in the literary world, have been of opinion, that no person should be an absolute stranger to the art in question ; it combines exercise with amusement, and there are few children but what require some assistance of the art to rectify their imperfections.

Lord Herbert Cherburg^v says,—page 45, History of his Life,—“ That Dancing should be learned first, as that, which doth fashion the body, gives one a good

presence in, and address to all companies, since it disposeth the limbs to a kind of souplesse (as the French call it) and agility, insomuch, as they who learn it seem to have the use of their legs, arms, and bodies, more than any 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. I speak not this yet, as if I would have a youth never standing still in company, but only that when he hath occasion to stir, his motions may be comely and graceful; that he may learn how to come in and go out of a room where company is, how to make bows handsomely, according to the several degrees of persons he shall encounter, how to pull off and hold his hat, and many other things which become men."

Quintilian, the admired instructor of youth, recommended the talent of Dancing; Mr. Locke, in his Treatise of Education, says,—“ Nothing appears to me to give children so much confidence and behaviour, so as to raise them to the conversation of those above their age, as Dancing.” He also in another part says,—“ Dancing being that which gives graceful motions to all our lives, and above all things, manliness, and a becoming confidence to young children; I think it cannot be learned too early.” Chevalier de Ramsey, (the author of *Cyrus's Travels*) in his Plan of Education for a young Prince, in speaking of Dancing, he says,—“ This ought not to be neglected, because upon the external figure and appearance depends often the regard we have for the internal qualities of the mind.”

The Spectator, (vol. 8. No. 466,) in reasoning on the Art in question, observes,—“ The business of Dancing is to display beauty, and for that reason all distortion and mimickries, as such, are what raise aversion instead of pleasure ; but things that are in themselves excellent, are ever attended with imposture and false imitation. Thus, as in poetry, there are labouring fools who write acrostics ; there are pretenders in Dancing, who think merely to do what others cannot, is to excel.”

In another part he says,—“ It may perhaps appear odd, that I who set up for a mighty lover, at least of virtue, should take so much pains to recommend what the soberer part of mankind look upon to be a trifle ; but, under favour of the soberer part of mankind, I think

they have not enough considered the matter, and for that reason only disesteem it. I must also, in my own justification, say, that I attempt to bring into the service of honoured virtue every thing in nature that can pretend to give elegant delight. If the delight of a free fortune were under proper regulations, this truth would not want much argument to support it; but it would be obvious to every man, that there is a strict affinity between all things that are truly laudable and beautiful, from the highest sentiment of the soul to the most indifferent gesture of the body."

The few authorities given, I hope will be sufficient to prove the utility of the art in question, and may also shew the absurdity of those snarling philosophers, who undervalue all accomplishments they do not themselves possess.

ON DEPARTMENT, &c.

USEFUL HINTS TO PUPILS.

To promenade or walk gracefully, the steps should be moderate in proportion to the height of the person, and if you advance with the left leg, it must come to the ground with a straight knee, bearing the weight of the body on the advanced leg, the right heel should be raised a little from the ground, a trifling exertion of the muscles, united with the motion of the right heel, will move the body forward, leaving the right leg perfectly free to pass forward ; the arms to

hang loose and easy, observing that when the right leg is brought forward, the left arm should also move forward, and *vice versa*.

Either in walking or dancing, the head should be properly situated, erect and free, the neck and shoulders will then appear in their true proportion, and in their proper places, the chest broad and full, and the back straight, the whole will therefore form an easy motion to the hips, without which neither the knees nor feet can have a true command:

If the head is improperly situated by projecting forward, it destroys the true proportion of the neck, which may take some time to remedy, and the shoulders frequently, by the head so situated, are drawn out of their proper places, which

not only renders the chest narrow, and the breast hollow, but prevents the freedom of breathing, the back will get heavy and burthensome, which will evidently impede the movements of the knees and feet. The feet should be turned outwards, but not more than the knees, which cannot be acquired unless the hips are somewhat turned; without giving the least distortion to the waist.

An easy management of the arms and hands are of great utility in dancing, although some have contracted very disagreeable habits, such as holding the hands of another too tight, folding the arms when standing, working of the hands up and down, projecting of the elbows, spreading their arms to an enormous extent when leading down the middle, &c. adjusting their dress, viewing

themselves or others, a constant scraping and bowing on all occasions, turning out the feet too much in walking and dancing, or jirking of the body, which only shews affectation.

A gay but modest and open countenance is required on all occasions, also ease in the various attitudes ; therefore both ladies and gentlemen cannot attend too particularly to the management of their bodies. Either entering a room, retiring, or passing, it is requisite to make your obedience in an easy and elegant manner, also at presenting any thing, (but without affectation) the taking off or putting on the hat should also be performed in a becoming manner, yet some have an indolent and careless manner of entering, an unbecoming and ignoble lounge, with their backs

nearly double, and their toes turned to an enormous extent, &c. Whether it is done with a view to be free and easy, I will not pretend to say, but it is certainly offensive to the eyes of those who have the least politeness.

In giving both hands, the shoulders should remain perfectly easy, raising both arms at the same time, each bending a little circular, sufficiently to prevent the elbows forming a point; the fingers should not be quite close, nor too far apart; in withdrawing the arms, they should bend in the same easy manner, observing not to drop the elbows first; and in those figures where you change hands, be sure that you do not change suddenly, and without the least motion of the head; yet the arms and hands are of little use without the expression

of the eyes and countenance, which, if combined, gives effect to the motions of the body truly pleasing.

In leading down the middle, in any style of dancing, the gentleman should pay attention to his partner's mode of stepping, but some I have seen, who actually drag their partners along as it were by force.

The steps should be performed in a light and easy manner, without the appearance of study, for the whole grace of the movements vanish when it is perceived to be an art.

It is not only the well regulated step, but also a true performance of the figures, that tends to give that ease, elegance, and vivacity, that are indispen-

sibly necessary in the polite art; neither can any persons dance well, who, like figurantes, introduce their brilliant caperings to the injury of other persons legs.

Persons should also avoid looking at their feet, for whenever it is seen, it generally excites contempt, and is only fit for those who wish to assume a false affected air.

In conducting the lady to or from the dance, the gentleman should take the ladies left hand within his right. (The lady should be on the right of the gentleman.)

The Dancing Master's duty is to erase all disagreeable habits, which are generally caused by contraries; but this he

must effect without the least force, for although it is impossible to give grace, yet every endeavour must be made to make an opening for the pleasing productions of nature. I have no doubt but it is the wish of every one, to have it in their power to be genteel and graceful in the carriage of their persons, could it be attained without trouble; yet, I imagine, there are many that would neither mind trouble nor expense, to erase a stiff and awkward deportment of the body; for there is a certain degree of behaviour and address, which is necessary to be observed by all persons, in every station in life, therefore it should not be neglected at any age.

Young ladies are particularly requested not to cluster together for the purpose of talking or laughing when a

stranger enters, for it not only distresses the new comer, but shews an air of levity and ill breeding on their part, that robs them of that delicacy and politeness which they should possess.

RULES

FOR THE

FORMING OF ATTITUDES.

RULE I.—The positions of the arms and person should be thus formed; the body must be facing the front of the chamber, or before a looking glass, the shoulders placed so as not to obstruct the easy extension of the muscles; the elbows well rounded so as to permit the arms to form two easy curves. The wrists pliant, the backs of the hands directed to the front, the thumb placed on the first joint of the second finger, the third and fourth fingers kept a little distance apart, the knees perfectly firm, and the feet in the first position.

II.—In whatever direction the arms move, they must always preserve a curve position, and that curve must be formed from the elbow, for whenever, instead of a curved, the arms attain an angular position, the beauty of an attitude is destroyed.

III.—The wrist must never pass above the head, the hand and fingers are allowed occasionally to move on a line with, or a little beyond the head.

IV.—In forming attitudes, the arms and person should never gain cramped and stiff positions, for the greatest ease ought to be preserved, for unless attitudes are formed with ease, the effect they produce on spectators, is painfully unpleasant; elegance in dancing, as in general motion, is the result of ease,

and without the latter, the former never can be attained.

V.—The greatest care is required, in changing from one attitude to another, for if the least deviation from the preceding observations be evinced, the effect of the attitude will be utterly destroyed.

ATTITUDES DERIVED FROM GESTURE.

I.—From the preparatory position, the hands incline towards the front of the person; the arms then gradually rise in front of the person (the fingers on one hand nearly touching those of the other) until the hands come in a line with the breast, at which time the

elbows must be exactly level with the shoulders, the wrists very slightly bent, and the arms elegantly curved. The hands then slowly separate to each side, (the elbows and wrists still retaining their last position) until they come to their greatest extension, from the extension the arms gradually fall, until they again come to the preparatory position, which completes the attitude.

II.—From the former position, the hands incline towards the front of the person, the fingers nearly touching, the arms are then raised until the hands come on a line with the breast; (the two first movements are precisely the same as in attitude 1st.) the arms continue their direction upwards, until the elbows come on a line with the lower part of the face, the hands at the same time

being parallel with the forehead, the fingers of each hand should nearly touch, the elbows well rounded ; the arms then gradually leave each other, and fall to the side, continuing their direction downward until the elbow comes upon a line with the shoulder, and the arms arrived at that their greatest extension, they then fall (as in attitude 1st.) slowly into the preparatory position.

III.—From the preparatory position, the head turns in an oblique direction over the right shoulder ; the waist yields to the pressure of the head and shoulders, the eyes must be directed a little upwards, the right hand meantime slowly rises in a direction towards the left shoulder, until the wrist of the right arm comes on a line with the left breast, the hand continues its progress upwards,

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and the elbow, not being raised above the level of the shoulder, curves the arm as the wrist comes on a line with the forehead, from which the hand and wrist slowly fall to the greatest extension aside, the elbow following the rule prescribed in attitude 2nd. After which the arm gradually descends, until it resumes the preparatory position, the head, which of course is directed to the right, must turn to the front as the primitive position is regained.

The same attitude is repeated with the left arm, the head taking a direction over the left shoulder, and the same rules relative to the right arm must be attended to by the left.

N. B.—The arm, which is not employed, must be kept in a good position,

while the contrary one passes round the person.

IV.—This attitude is formed in the same manner throughout all the movements, as the preceding one, with this exception, that the head is directed over the left shoulder during the time that the right arm moves round the body, and *vice versa*: the head taking a contrary position to that towards which the arm moves.

V.—From the preparatory position, the right foot points to the side in the second position, the head assumes the same direction, as in attitude 3rd, the right arm then moves slowly upwards, until it comes on a line with the left breast, at the same time the right foot moves from the 2nd position aside to

the 4th in front, (the weight of the body then resting on the leg) while the left is only supported slightly on the toe, the right arm continues its progress upwards until it comes on a line with the forehead, and, while the right arm rises, the left also ascends, and, when the right becomes parallel with the forehead, the left hand will be also parallel with the right breast; the right hand and arm then pass slowly down to the side, and the left moves slowly in a direction under the shoulder to the side, and both arms at the same time come to their greatest extension, whilst the head turns towards the front of the room (or glass) from the extension, the arms gradually fall into the preparatory position, and the left foot moves from the fourth position behind to the second aside, the toe being well pointed. The same to be repeated on the contrary side.

N. B.—This is a very difficult attitude to form gracefully, and great care is required in the practice of it.

Many others may be derived, but I shall forbear to treat on them, because, when Primitives can be well executed, Derivations will be easily attained.

Thus I have briefly described the method of illustrating the various attitudes before-mentioned, and by endeavouring to deduce a fundamental system for their attainment, I have hazarded a theory, the only merit of which is its originality; and I am of decided opinion, that nothing can afford a greater gratification to the true lovers of Terpsichore, than to behold the figures of her votaries graduate into elegant positions.

THE
ETIQUETTE
 OF THE
BALL ROOM.

The Master of the Ceremonies* should be distinguished by some external mark of office, most commonly a Sash, Riband, or Bow.

A number, specifying the place in a dance, should be presented to each lady

* It is the custom on the Continent, at all public and generally at private Balls, to engage a MAITRE DE DANSE, to act as Conductor, and, if it were adopted in this country, much of the present confusion in dancing of the figures would be consequently prevented.

or gentleman* on entering the room by the M. C.

The loss of a number may be remedied by application to the M. C. or they cannot claim their place in the dance.

Persons, selecting a tune for a figure, should be careful in selecting such as have the same number of parts as the figure requires, and also acquaint the M. C. of the figure and tune, that he may give directions to the different sets, and to the Musicians.

The Master of the Ceremonies can object to any call that affords reasonable ground of complaint, such as length or difficulty of figure; but the couple whose call is rejected, have the liberty of

* Some Conductors give the ladies the numbers, others the Gentlemen, but I conceive the latter to be more correct, particularly if any altercation takes place, for it would be unpleasant for a lady to argue about her situation; in short, many would rather put up with the inconvenience.

calling another dance less objectionable and more suitable to the ability of the company.

The M. C. would find it more preferable to have their rules suspended in a conspicuous part of the room, in which should be particularly expressed what species of dancing is permitted to be performed and in what succession.

The most frequent arrangement of Dancing is to commence with two Country Dances, then a set of Quadrilles, afterwards a Spanish Dance or Swedish Dance occasionally being substituted for a Country Dance.

Any lady or Gentleman wishing to dance, and not being provided with a partner, should apply to the M. C.

No person should leave the set till the dance is finished.

When the M. C. calls the number, those that retain them should answer.

Any lady, if disengaged, refusing to dance with a gentleman, will be under the penalty of not joining the next dance (and, according to some rules, the whole of the evening) unless indisposition is the cause.

Ladies, not availing themselves of the privilege of naming the dance, will take their place at the bottom, the set next in order then having the nomination.

No lady can pass from one set to another, nor can a transfer of numbers take

place, without permission of the M. C.

No dance should be called twice the same evening, unless by particular desire of the company.

No lady or gentleman during any dance to change the figure.

If the company are so numerous as to require a division of three or four sets, they are distinguished thus: A set, B set, C set, D set.—The rotation of the calls are generally thus: No. 1. A set, calls first—No. 1. B set, calls second—No. 1. C set, calls third—No. 1. D set, calls fourth. Then No. 2. set A calls, and so on in rotation from one set to the other.

It is usual after the leading couple

have performed the figures down three couples, for those at the top to begin, and generally it is sufficient, but, if the dance should be composed of more than three figures, to prevent confusion and to give the necessary distinctness to each performance, a wider separation is recommended.

The dance is finished when the first couple have gone down a second time.

Two ladies cannot dance together if there be gentlemen without partners—the same rule is to be observed by the gentlemen—the ladies dancing together may take a call but the gentlemen cannot, therefore must go to the bottom.

In all disputes, the persons concerned should leave the room with the M. C.

(whose authority is unquestionable, and decisions final,) and not return till both parties are reconciled.

Persons, not attending when their number is called, must stand at the bottom during that dance, the same to be observed if they stand up after the dance has began, nor should any person permit another to stand above them after the set is formed.

Persons, joining the dance after the first couple have been down it, may stand before the said couple that called the dance.

It is highly improper for a person to call a dance, and leave the room immediately after it is finished, or even sit down when they get to the bottom of the dance.

The customary mode of changing partners is between every two dances; if a Quadrille or any other dance be introduced, partners are also changed.

Persons performing the figure twice with the same couple, must drop one couple, or should they stop, must also drop a couple.

Any couple calling a dance, and not able to perform it, are at liberty to call another; but, if the same difficulty occurs, they must let the next couple call.

All persons, on entering an Assembly Room, should observe whether their rules vary, which will require the same attention as those given, for there are few rooms, but what have some bye laws.

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Those ladies and gentlemen, who are continually in conversation with each other, had better retire from the set, which will prevent others being annoyed, and their ill manners observed.

No person is permitted to dance in boots or gaiters, nor should any one attempt to enter so equipped; an opera dress alone is proper for a Ball Room.

Naval and Military Officers must be admitted as exceptions, and a Cavalry Officer in boots and spurs cannot be objected to.

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Finis.

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BY W. H. WOAKES,

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