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IT



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S. B. CHESTER

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OF THE TANGO

BY

S. BEACH CHESTER

AUTHOR OF "THE IDEAL SINNER," "DÎNERS À DEUX," ETC.

LONDON

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TO THE
HON. HELEN DOUGLAS-SCOTT-MONTAGU

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Señor Juan Barrasa and partner, showing the
fascinating step "La Rueda" (The wheel) *Frontispiece*

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L left
R right
 Gentleman
 Lady

KEY TO DIAGRAMS.

SECRETS OF THE TANGO.*

I

THE TANGO TEMPEST

WHETHER the Tango is due to insanity, or whether the insanity is due to the Tango, it is impossible to say! But the Tango lives, thrives and flourishes in thousands of heads which govern feet, large and small—feet which dance to Paradise or perdition, as the case may be. Even the German Emperor, who has lost much of his former glory as a notorious person, threatens to re-enter the arena of fame, again, by his association, or disassociation, with the Tango! It has been boldly asserted that His Imperial Majesty objects to the Tango; that he has threatened to cashier any of his officers who dance it; that German garrisons tremble and quake—and dance in secret frenzy! Beyond this one dares not go. Certainly, it seems unquestionable that His Majesty William II. has made it clear that no officer of his shall dance the Tango—in uniform at least. Therefore the Tango is now notorious. Every poster in London touches the Tango; every man touches his pocket to see the Tango. Even the corset parade at

* I shall be pleased to give whatever assistance is necessary to anyone applying to me for special information.

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one of the music halls threatened to become extinct—without the Tango! The Tango, *le vrai* Tango, has taken the world by storm and beaten *le vrai* highkick, *le vrai* cakewalk, and all manner of other dances from *la danse des Apaches* to *la danse des Faubourgs*, from the Boston to the Maxixe. *La danse du ventre* has been overshadowed and forgotten. A polite waltz is unheard of now. A quadrille belongs to the century of the minuet. Skirt dancing is a tame memory. The dances from Russia have been shelved; the graceful capers of women with diaphanous garments are merely a deadly bore. There is nothing left but the Tango, and it is quite the greatest of all. *Le beau monde*, *le demi monde* and the respectable *bourgeoisie* are obsessed—with the Tango. The Argentine is a famous newspaper place for street railways, meat extract and industrial enterprise, yet it lives at present only as the source of the Tango, the charming Tango, the fascinating, hypnotic dance, which makes war news a detail and the fall of a Government—a farce. The utter abandon needful to grasp the true Tango spirit seems the second nature of to-day. Every man, woman and child is well equipped. An endowment greater than genius, a universal spark creating a universal fire, the Tango tendency rules easily, gracefully and effectively countless hordes of people, hitherto given to no greater vice—than a week-end at Brighton or a month at Monte Carlo. Now it is the Tango. The Tango anywhere. Since it is *everywhere*, all men are satisfied, and the women, too. It is whispered that the Vatican has been stirred by the Tango, angrily, no doubt! Indeed, who or what has *not* been stirred by the Tango? That is the question! Whether it stirs arms or legs, heads or hearts, muscles or flesh, it stirs *something*—always. Greatest and most pronounced of successes, it is immaterial whether esteem or execration is its root. It is a success,



Senor Juan Barrasa and partner showing
"EL CORTE."

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a *succés fou*, and that is enough. There is one peerless quality about it, and it lies in the marvellous fact that there is no *best* Tango dancer! There are a dozen on the same pinnacle, all perfect, in a sense. There are hundreds on a par, thousands on one plane. There is no best dancer. Nor, for the matter of that, is there a worst! Myriads are mightily bad—good, kind, excitable people, otherwise—but, among them, there is no *worst*! By the process of cause and effect they are happy, happy in their mad mediocrity. Those who excel are also happy, so no one is left to care. The world revolves no longer. It sways rhythmically to the Tango. The sun never sets on the Tango. From China to Peru, or, rather, from the Argentine to Paris, it is the same story, not an old story, but a new story, to us, the story of the Tango. Where is the morbid death dance, where is the flighty polka, where, in truth, is anything except the Tango? Theatres, restaurants, music halls, town houses, country houses, flats, maisonnettes—all have their Tango tangles. It is certainly very wonderful and not a little disturbing to some to see Nations naïvely nudging each other on account of the Tango Tea. Surely the time has now arrived to deal with this extraordinary subject? To strike it with a volley of words and make it sway more wildly? Frenzied fiction may excite and madden. Sensuous phenomena may heighten the blood-pressure. Perfume may quell reason. But the Tango does most of all. It makes an apathetic country, famed for its phlegm, its *sang froid*, rage and writhe in newspaper ecstasy! Cabinet Ministers watch the Tango as they have never watched the frowning faces of their opponents. Delectably pretty women, moulded in the latest shape, move gracefully, sensuously, in appealingly subtle incitement. And inartistic men become more human, more natural, under the influence of the Tango. The greatest

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lover becomes still greater; the lesser lights more luminous. The Tango, seductive, bewitching, is responsible. That is what some say. It is an art, yet it is a science also. As an engulfing, cataclysmic proposition it is far ahead of polo or yachting; its soft tentacles extend in all directions, squeezing vitality into the bondage of pleasure. The War Dance of the Red Indian, the Highland Fling, the Irish Jig—all are interred. Arabian dances have been lost in the Arabian Nights. The merely Monmartre efforts at the Moulin Rouge are forgotten. Fabulous fancies of the imagination are easily eclipsed in one mighty, overwhelming reality, the Tango of to-day. Whether it is the *Tango Argentin* or the *Tango Londinien*, it is the Tango all the same! Perhaps it is an expression of Dame Nature. According to one authority it is an expression of the Devil! If it is the lady, she is supremely pretty, while if it is the Devil, he is quite an attractive person! As an expression of both it is the expression of born lovers, beings above mankind, yet with the magnetism to draw the world in their wake. And this, in truth, has been done.

Two hundred steps have been conceded to the Tango; more may exist in the creative dancers who have taken London by storm. At the Queen's Theatre one has seen many variations of an entirely polite kind. Barrasa and Marquis are remarkable exponents of the dance. Their graceful movements, facial quiet, and self-command produce a highly satisfactory effect. Barrasa, a South American to his finger tips, shows an artistic appreciation of his *métier*. His Argentine Tango is fit for ball-room dancing. Whereas in his Parisian variation of the dance he and his partner move delicately about the stage with a restraint which would carry them safely across thin ice. The steps are dainty, almost indescribable. Sometimes the pair dance together, yet apart—in imitation of the Spanish

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Tango—merely going through pretty, harmonious movements, which sweep them round the stage like grave-faced dolls animated by a peculiarly exact force, unseen, mysterious. Tango music, quite unbarbaric, differing in every way from ragtime, inspires a subtlety undreamt of in purely material minds. Just as the military band will rouse a soldier's blood to vigour of thought and action, so the Tango music seems to create movements of delicate response in the dancers from Buenos Aires. Marquis and Miss Clayton do a Brazilian Maxixe, which, by the way, in their performance is a singularly graceful cousin of the Tango. In one of the attitudes the man gets behind his partner, dancing round with her while holding her hand up, thus producing the effect of a guitar made out of her arms. It is a charming picture, rivalling anything in grace and beauty. Miss Clayton wears a fur-trimmed dress and a hat with a single plume. In herself and her costume she differs very slightly from hundreds of women one sees about in the afternoon. Were it not for a distinction in a few fine points, Marquis might pass for a native of Madrid or Lisbon. But the points in question make him a South American unmistakably. In the men of his race there is always the suggestion of some blood mixed with the Spanish or Portuguese, an effect produced as a rule by climatic conditions. Just as there is often a suggestion of the Red Indian in the features of a North American of English descent, so the South American suggests a wilder, more outlandish race than that of Spain. In Miss Clayton we see a fair girl, English, quite English, who reflects with admirable art the phases of her partner's work. She is an accomplished dancer, exercising the most perfect control, combined with a complete expression of temperament. No subtlety of movement seems too difficult for her to execute.

It is easy to search for suggestive poses in almost any

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dance, to find in the sinuous movements of the body licentious meanings; but even to the worldly person such ideas are forgotten in the attention demanded by the eye. Then, again, at the Queen's Theatre, from which the Tango has spread broadcast over London, over England, a fine sense of propriety is noticeable everywhere—to the very dresses worn by the models in the dress parade! There is nothing which could give offence to the most exigent demands of a highly conventional ball hostess. Some of the Tango variations are mincingly proper, suggesting no more offensive thing than a well-behaved cat walking on hot bricks! The movements in this variation are utterly devoid of sexual or sensual interpretation. Polaire, in *la danse des Faubourgs*, was infinitely more sensuous, more expressive of sex attracting sex, than Marquis and Miss Clayton, for instance, both of whom seem to excel in their respect for English ideas. Their appreciation of a London audience may come as a matter of regret to some people. However, the Tango can be found in forms which indicate all kinds of sexual expression. Bizarre, fantastic, steps have crept into the original dance which the natives of the Argentine were insufficiently finished in their temperament to create. Sensuous phenomena do not differ much the world over in their primitive state. But developed, one goes to the centres of antiquity, if not of civilisation—according to our standards. One discovers wonderfully graceful dances among the peoples of Northern Africa, but what are they to some of the secret feats of women in our very midst, either in Paris or in London? Is it not more likely that the Tango at its inception—when danced into being by the rough *gauchos* of the Argentine—was little else than a crude cowboy dance—produced by the musical inclinations of a naturally artistic people? As a matter of history, it reached the county of Buenos Aires in 1886, causing

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a *furor* in the city soon afterwards. It was then composed of forty steps, this real Tango, which have been increased in number, largely. In the finished, complex Tango we see on the stage, the steps show the evidence of evolution. To the spurred men in heavy boots and the rough maidens of the Argentine country, it is impossible to attribute such polished, finicky work. It is just as difficult to imagine *gauchos* and their women dancing the existing Tango as to imagine a bespectacled "schoolmarm" of New England gaily inventing the Boston, the Bunny Hug, or the Turkey Trot! Newport is in New England, though it has as little in common with the Nonconformist Conscience as Trouville or Biarritz! It is therefore to the "advanced" section of a community that we must look for new pleasures, or, rather, for the development or variation of old ones. That is why it is necessary to explain that the Tango, originating in "the wilds," was brought to its present highly complex and even delicate state by passing through many phases of worldly life, with Buenos Aires as a forcing-bed. From the Argentine city to Paris—though a long distance in ocean miles—is an easy and natural transition, since South Americans flock to France, like bees after honey, or locusts in search of a crop. There is a saying that all good Americans go to Paris when they die. *South* Americans go there—alive! It was in Paris, at any rate, that the European craze for the Tango began. Probably that is why Marquis and Barrasa and other South American dancers pay the French capital the pretty compliment of dancing the Parisian Tango. The Parisienne in her supremely sensuous capacity is able, very often, to complete or perfect an exotic conception, producing effects which amount to fine art. That she has had her hand—or, more correctly, her body and her feet—in advancing the Argentine dance is as certain as the

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sun will rise. Indirectly, too, she has given inspiration to masculine exponents of the Tango, South Americans who have given her an idea, only to have it handed back in the shape of a work of art, seductive, charming, intensely *chic*. No doubt, London, too, imbued with new tendencies, will add to the steps of the Tango. If the Tango encircles the globe it will increase like a snowball, accumulating steps as it moves along. Petersburg and Peking may aid in this maturing process of development. Petersburg is already said to have done so. The boot of a *moujik* may become indispensable to certain varieties of Tango dancing, just as the swathed and distorted foot of a Chinaman may form part and parcel of a particular step! It is all just conceivable, or inconceivable, as the case may be! The rapid rate at which it has progressed, triumphantly, thus far, shows that the gliding dance of the Argentine has qualities of unique appeal. The tight, small-waisted corsets of ten or a dozen years ago might have acted to a great extent as a barrier to the Tango. Nowadays with the much less pronounced outlines of the figure, women have a better opportunity to increase the number of their movements in a corseted condition. Miss Clayton, a representative Tango dancer, though intensely graceful and perforce, well-made, shows an utter disregard of hip and waist outline. She is said to wear no corsets at all. Yet, when I saw her, her costume was *chic* and tasteful. She was pretty and womanly in her appearance. Though altogether quite delightful, she lacked what the corsets of ten years ago would have made a fine figure, possibly a very fine figure, who knows? With such a display of her natural superiority over less perfectly shaped women would she still be able to go through the many steps and actions associated with the present Tango dancing? It has been asserted in a

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popular weekly paper that "fifty corset saleswomen have declared war on the Tango, the hugs and flops, and all the rest of the raggy, saggy dances. They did so after they saw three ladies—stout, thin and medium—put on corsets. They say that the Tango develops the hip-bones excessively, throws the hip-bones forward, and causes rolls and rolls of fat to form at various points. In fact, the modern dances would make a potato-sack of a Greek goddess." But this is merely the expression of a popular paper, after all. The *Evening Standard*, on the other hand, says, "Tango figures are a feature of the newest fashions now being designed in Paris. The very newest creation are designed for corsetless figures. They approach so closely to the cylindrical in shape as to be almost devoid of curves, especially viewed in profile, and such waist as is permitted to remain is very large and placed high up under the armpits. To assist the general appearance of shapelessness, padding is introduced where waist used to be, in the manner shown in early Flemish pictures. It was a world-wide vogue at that time, and bids fair, state the dress authorities, to be equally popular again. The largeness and unusual height of the waist is said to be partly attributable to the popularity of the wide crushed girdle effect now so common."

It is difficult to assert at this stage just what physical effect constant Tango dancing would really produce. Probably, a dancer's heart! Who, apart from teachers or persons given to endless practice of the dance, are likely to so exercise themselves that their *bones* yield to the strain? If it were suggested, however, that special risks of internal displacements are attached to dancing the Tango, some weight might be allowed the statement.

The *Daily Mail* has given space to an indignant Colonial, or quasi-Colonial, for a particularly crashing outburst, labelled "Tango Morality." The very title is a morbid

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freak of the imagination, since we might as well write on "Motoring Morality," or "Yachting Morality," or "Hotel Morality," or, as the writer evidently wishes to imply a reproach by his title, on "Tango Immorality." The scheme of thought or imagination necessary to write an article like "Tango Morality," is unfortunate. The writer frankly admits that he has been away from England for some years, and, we may add, his words savour a little of Rip Van Winkle's awakening. He bases his observations from the point of view of a fine, sweet, virtue-loving geographical division, known as South Africa! Untainted and uncontaminated by the vile influences to which London is daily subject, and to which, he gives us to understand, London has already succumbed, South Africa stands out as a clean, modest centre of home life and domestic purity. With all the robust mental activity derivable in this charming land of his, he starts out to batter down the ephemeral fancies of our Babylonian metropolis. He is kinder to the Provinces, which he exemplifies by citing Cheltenham!* Perhaps he knows the Cotswold hunting-centre and the virtue of the people who go there better than other writers, possibly he does not know it as well! But, passing his infelicitous choice of a provincial town, he leaves us confronted with an epigram, or a simile, which is really quite good for a person uninfluenced by the decadent genius of London. "Costumes," he remarks, "are cut into at both ends, and show two extremities of undressed women, with the gleaming lines approaching each other more and more each day, just like the Cape to Cairo Railway, only swifter

*"The Duchess of Westminster, who is residing at Ettington Park, near Stratford-on-Avon, was present on Saturday afternoon at the first Tango tea held in Stratford, her Grace presiding at one of the tables. Artists from Cheltenham provided the entertainment."—(*Evening Standard*, December 15th, 1913).



Senor Juan Barrasa and partner showing
"LA CRUZ."

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in their march." This satire on the appearance of smart women in a ball-room—presumably a *Tango ball-room*—is brilliant! It might be re-written into a fine line of comedy. The late Lionel Decle, who was the first person to go from the Cape to Cairo, overland, on a definite mission, would have been the first, too, to appreciate the Tango moralist's apt simile. As a matter of fact, though the prevailing fashions are not so attractive as they were some years ago, to many persons, even closely connected with London women, it is a very wild effort at caricature to suggest such inroads—as the Cape to Cairo cuts! If the South African had objected to an assortment of young women walking about at a place of public entertainment in uncovered corsets he might have found a more fertile ground for his disapproval. His choice, however, fell upon certain smart women, shall we say, of the *beau monde*, as opposed to the *demi monde*, and these unfortunate victims of his sarcasm no doubt writhed in their beds in torment—when they read his letter. "Four years ago," he says, "I could tell a fashionable woman by the amount of clothing she put on; now I know her by what she does not put on." This is a good line, but is it a true one? It may be assumed, at any rate, to have some subtle bearing on the Tango! What is more important, it actually has such a bearing, just as my present deviations lead back to the same subject. The Tango is pre-eminently a dance calculated to display women and their dresses. Women, therefore, of this Tango dress epoch, form a harmonious variation of the main theme, or perhaps it is *vice versa*.

One is relieved to hear that "Nobody can deny the beauty of the Englishwoman, with her fresh skin, charmingly unorthodox angles, and altogether elusive grace." But, on the other hand, it is sickeningly limited to say that "nature intended the Englishwoman to be rather a

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dignified person, so that, apart from her *natural instincts of self-consciousness*, this ragtime-tango-hobble walk does not suit her." There is no woman in the wide world less self-conscious than an Englishwoman of birth. As to the "ragtime-tango-hobble walk," it is more suggestive of the stage than the drawing-room. Again, even, on the stage itself, the dresses worn by the leading exponents of the dance are anything but seriously restricted. The mincing movements, so far as one can judge from the exhibitions at the Queen's Theatre, and in the lesser places of entertainment, too, belong to the Tango—and not to the dresses worn by the dancers. It appears to be a fundamental error on the part of many casual observers, this idea of cause and effect. The cause is the dance, not the dress. And we find the effect in the steps. It might be presumed, remotely, that a "hobble skirt" would tend to assist an unfinished dancer to acquire a sense of the restraint necessary to dance the Tango. But in practice the restricted skirt area would soon bring down the fair dancer. If comparative corset freedom is desirable for the purposes of the dance, why on earth should the Tango demand the anomalous handicap of tightly-skirted legs? * Consequently the association of the "hobble skirt" with the Argentine dance is unreasonable. It is altogether too far-fetched, though useful as a newspaper jibe. One might just as well say that because M. Léon Bakst—the original designer of many fantastic Russian ballet effects—makes orange-red the colour basis of his Tango costume schemes, orange-red, is, therefore, inseparable from the dance. It is merely the sheerest nonsense, like the statement in the same article that "Englishwomen's necks, it is surprising

* I am told by Señor Barrasa, lately of the Queen's Theatre Company, that corsets are *impossible* in the Brazilian Maxixe.

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to note, are extraordinarily dark." Such a preposterous declaration is unworthy of an observer in any but the unwashed 'class! It is, indeed, beyond understanding, since the white necks of pretty Englishwomen are almost a by-word on the Continent. Sallowiness is the one great fault among French and Italian women, Latins generally, but certainly not among the pretty women of the British Isles. As the writer on Tango morality says: "I started talking of the Tango, and here I am on the subject of necks!"

The woman of to-day has become entangled in a sense with the Tango. The two go together, for the moment, at least, and while they remain companions one has a bearing on the other. One can make hats, sashes, corsets, shoes, and perfume, relevant to the different steps. The women of London, like the women of every other place, from those in the naked Kaffir's kraal to the ornaments of the most exclusive *salon*, take an interest in anything which brings out their feeling or their fancies. It has been said many times that man has a sex, while woman is a sex. It is true. The Tango is a delightful vehicle for the expression of sex, not a vulgar picture of vice or of vampirism. It is high up above the disagreeable reminders of brutality. It is too dainty and too complex, too finished, as we see it to-day in its best form, to suggest coarse collisions or horrid memories. It brings one rather into touch with the fine art of dancing. The delicately sensuous spell in which it envelopes one is as pleasant as the vaguely opium-ised tobacco of a good Egyptian cigarette. It makes its impression on the mind, as well as on the senses. Both yield unreluctantly, soothingly; the nerves of modern life are forgotten, lost, for the time being. The contortions and gyrations of Eastern dancers eagerly displaying their moving flesh are unwanted. They neither satisfy desire—

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appease craving—nor do they soothe or stimulate. The Tango rests. It is restful to watch. That is to say the Tango as it is danced in London as opposed to the rough Tango of Montmartre and the Quartier Latin.

“Before the Tango or any other innovation of its kind can succeed in England you will have to eliminate, or at least utterly change, the essentially sober nature of the English people.” Again, it is the same newspaper authority who indulges in this expression of views. The Tango *has* succeeded. Its success, in truth, is phenomenal. No dance, or dance-music, even the wildest ragtime, has caused such blazing popularity in London. Tangoism is the ruling spirit of the day and night everywhere. In its polished ball-room phase it must inevitably reach a pinnacle of triumph, if for no other reason than that of fitting the lovelier types of Englishwomen to a nicety. What in the world is the writer thinking of when he says: “And, so long as London remains English, of what use is it trying to superimpose upon a solid foundation of British respectability and dignity the dances and the morals of a sensuous, sun-baked Latinity, or the movements and gestures of the American negro or Bowery tough?” (A “tough,” by the way, is certainly a New York description of an *apache* or hooligan, but in connection with the *Bowery* district “boy” is invariably used.) In the first place, in the Tango demonstrations which I have witnessed at popular resorts in the West-End there is no earthly suggestion of an American negro’s walk or Bowery boy’s swagger, or, for the matter of that, any of the menacing mannerisms of a Paris *apache*. To the tall, fragile, graceful Englishwoman, with blue eyes, dark eye-lashes, and very fair hair—the loveliest of all the world’s types, in its best form—there is no more appropriate dance than the Tango or the guitar-like attitudes of the Brazilian Maxixe. It fits these dainty

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creatures to perfection, as perfectly as their gloves or their corsets; indeed, as well almost as their smiling red lips or exquisite complexions. The frenzies of the cabaret dancing are inconsiderable; we should not associate them with the ball-room Tango. The Tango is a successful dance; it has penetrated far and wide. It has moved and influenced the amusement-hunting people of England. It is pretty, it is artistic, it is pleasant to see. But it is a dance, after all. Why it should be pilloried one does not quite see. It amuses. It does no more harm than any other dance. Every dance is dangerous to certain people. The dangers exist without dances. No women are safe with some men, just as no men are safe with some women. In Society and out of it it is all a question of temperament or experience. The Tango will no more be responsible for lost happiness than a *dîners à deux*, or a *tête-à-tête*, or the meeting of two pairs of eyes. The conditions and opportunities it creates are less exciting than a pretty dress or a good figure at a house party. If it leads to perdition, or if it leads to Paradise, fifty other things would do as much. The sensuous phenomena of the age are somewhat more sensuous perhaps than ever before, but this fact does not trace its origin back to any Argentine or Brazilian dances. The dances are the outcome of the sensuous phenomena rather than the sensuous phenomena are the outcome of the dances. The supply is the sequel to the demand. The tendencies of humanity are not to be held in check by sermonic representations or satirical outbursts. Women and death are the only things worth thinking about, when it is all said and done, and the fictions of an earlier era have been swept away by the tide. If people are frank enough to admit their pleasures, it is surely less immoral than to hide them behind a screen? That seems to be the reason why London follows Paris and does as it pleases. It is

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still somewhat provincial in its restaurant regulations, but otherwise it is more natural, more human, and, in consequence, more completely absurd than before! It is no worse than Paris, and not as bad as New York. It is merely a great community a little inflamed in the pleasure instinct. For those people whose minds turn to morbid thoughts there are morbid things. For those who seek gaiety, there is gaiety. For those who want knowledge there is knowledge of every kind. All rests on individual temperament. When there are many temperaments alike, then these temperaments seek the same expression. If a dance carries an appeal, let the appeal be satisfied. There is no more steadying influence than a surfeit of amusement. The Tango is prettier than Russian ballet dancing. Since it has ball-room possibilities, it deserves to succeed generally. It is quickly doing so now. As to its influence, it is nothing to cigarettes! The world went mad over ping-pong. That was ten or twelve years ago. But the world has survived. Let the world survive again, and with it the Tango and guitar-like Maxixe.



A TANGO TEA.

II

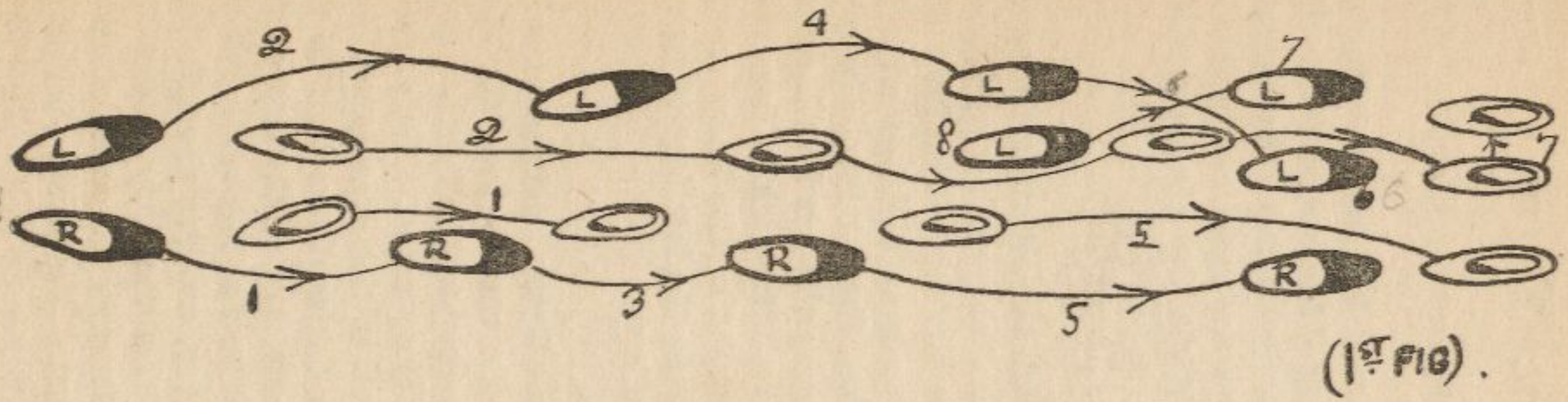
THE ACTUAL DANCE

(With Steps and Sketches by Señor Juan Barrasa, lately of the Queen's Theatre Company.)

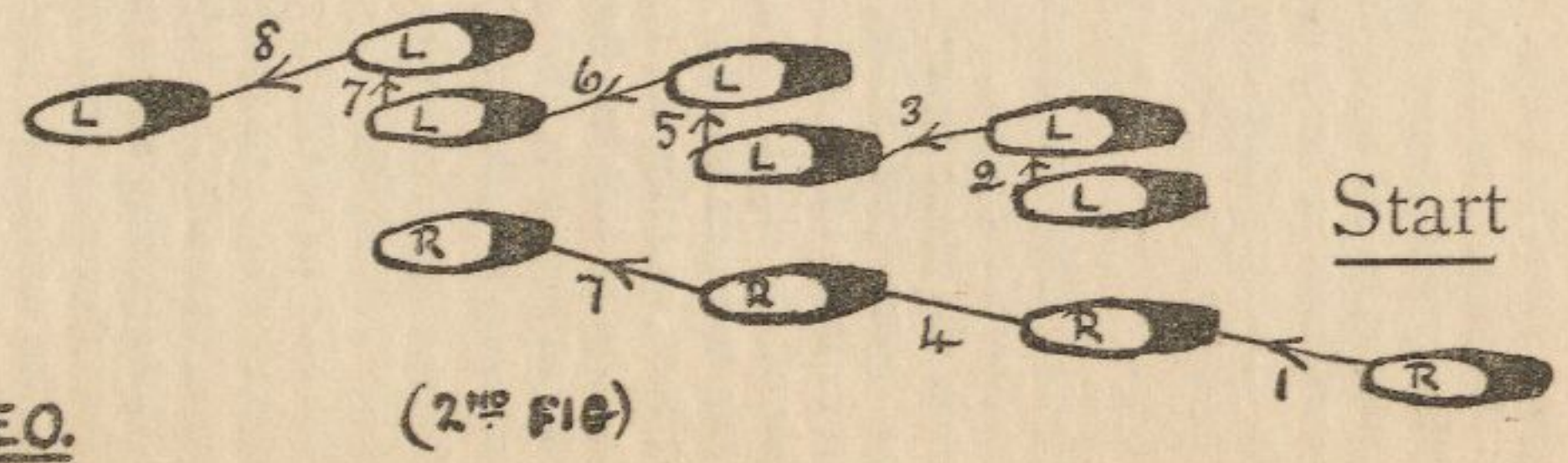
THE question of dance values is difficult to estimate exactly. The strangely temperamental work of Sahary-Djeli is often in one's mind, even when she is not in our midst. Deyo, a dancer I saw in Philadelphia, in *The Country Girl*, the last time I was in America, now eleven or twelve years ago, made a lasting impression with her art. Loie Fuller, whom we remember in the Paris and London of a not very remote past, had a great *cachet*. Sahary-Djeli, with her "Perfume Dance," her "Death Dance," her "Salome," and her "Desert Dance," a fine exotic set, stands in no calculable relationship to the Tango dancers of the day, nor to the Russian dancers of yesterday. Yet the Russians were the best in Russia and the Tangoists are the best, too, we can get. The reason why the Tango is likely to live is because it is possible to dance it oneself. Just as one goes to see models in dresses at Paquin's or Worth's, so one goes to see the Argentine dancers dance the Tango. In the case of the dressmakers' models one is out to buy a dress. In the case of the Tango one may be out to learn the dance. One grasps its picturesque possibilities quickly enough; when this has been done there seems little left to do save to learn the steps. A personal achievement is

Secrets of the Tango

generally more satisfying than witnessing other people's efforts. At least it seems to be the attitude of humanity in most directions. With a clear idea of the steps, the Tango becomes an easy possibility to anyone with an ear for music and some sense of dancing. It is complex only in some of its forms, certainly not in those which Señor Juan Barrasa has amiably given me. Señor Barrasa has danced the Tango on his father's estates in the Argentine since he was a boy of twelve. He is one of the very foremost exponents of the dance in England, where he receives salaries which in the aggregate exceed the pay of a Cabinet Minister. Young and good-looking, he is of the educated class, with an Argentine General for a grandfather. He came to London to study, and now he is teaching—the Tango! It all happened swiftly, this sudden change of rôle from student to dancer. The change to him meant work to play, or perhaps it was the other way about, for the Tango may be more exacting than one thinks—professionally it probably is. He asserts that the Tango is peculiarly Argentine. Even the Chilians, who live so near the great Republic, cannot get all the movements perfectly, though, of course, they can get the steps. Señor Barrasa—he bears another name in private life—dances twenty steps in one of his Tangoes, and a like number in a second Tango, both dances exemplifying intensely graceful work. He has made two statements, which will be of some interest to women, certainly. Corsets can always be worn with the Tango, whereas with the Brazilian Maxixe corsets are more or less impossible. He also says there is a strong impression that the real Argentine Tango is unfitted for ball-room dancing. He assures me that the real dance is infinitely better adapted to the ball-room than the spurious inventions of London and Paris. With such an excellent authority



25



EL PASEO.

Diagram No. 1.

Secrets of the Tango

to support this view, it seems worth recording, definitely, before going into the steps.

Señor Barrasa has made some sketches to illustrate more perfectly the precise meaning of the instructions which I now propose to set out. These instructions, by the way, are his own, and as he is perhaps the most representative dancer in London, they can be given the utmost credit.

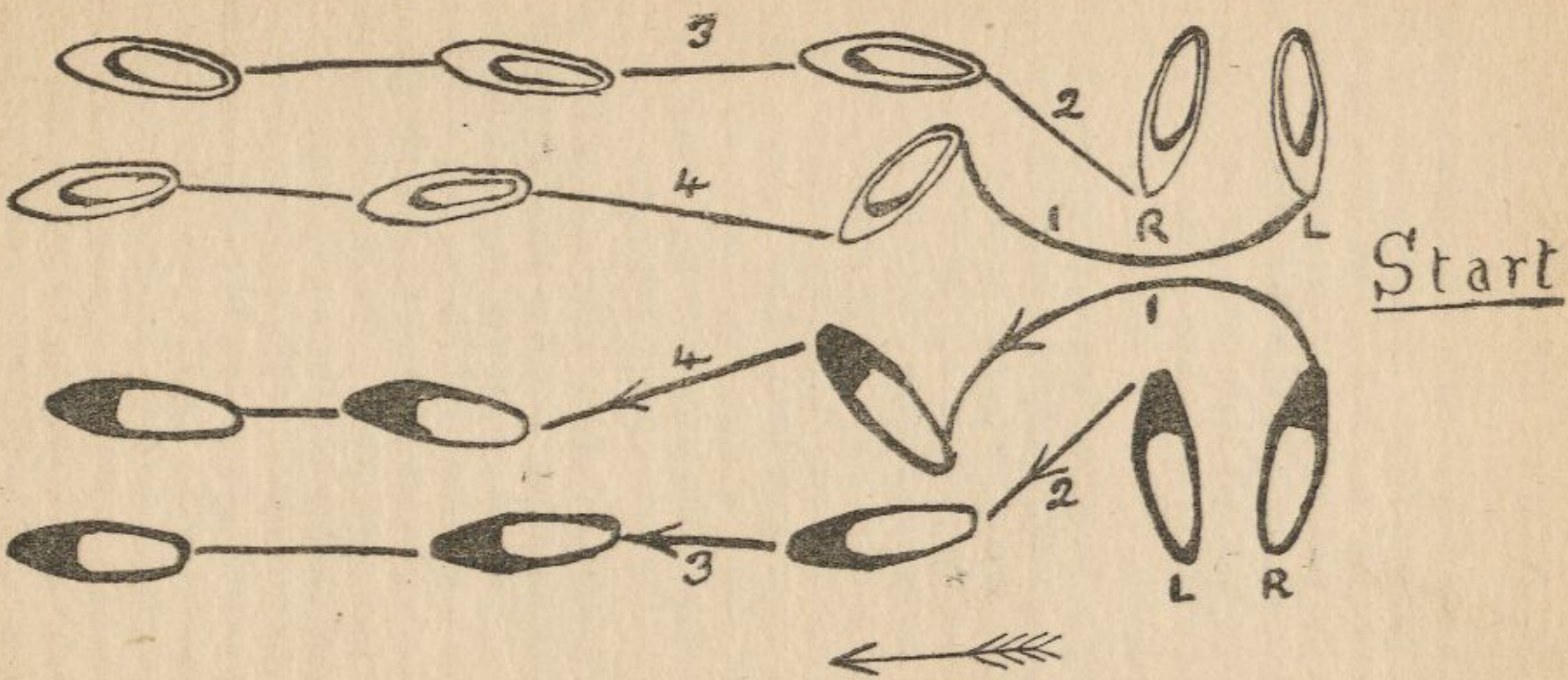
EL PASEO

1st Figure: The man starts with the right foot forward, and takes five slow steps. When doing each step, his heel must touch the floor first; then his toe. The lady does the same figure backwards. The man finishes with his right foot in front of the left. Then the left foot is brought to the side of the right. Whereupon the left foot is moved just a little towards the left, and a little kick is done with the right foot, putting all the weight of the body on this foot. As soon as this has been done the left foot is moved backwards, as shown in sketch (p. 25).

This last step is called *El Corte*.

2nd Figure: After doing the first figure, the man is with his left foot behind the right. He then brings the right foot by the side of the left. Whereupon the left is moved to the left as before and the *corte* is repeated. This can be done several times. The lady makes the same steps, but forwards, though she starts with the opposite foot to the man. When the man does the *corte*, say at the end of the first figure, he moves his left foot to the left and puts the weight of the body on his right leg, moving the left foot backwards. While he is doing this the lady moves her right foot to the right and goes through the same steps as the man, but with the opposite feet. He finishes with the left foot behind the right.

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CORTE DE LADO,

5TH FIG.

Diagram No. 2.

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3rd Figure (*Corte de la Dama*) : This figure may be done at the end of the 2nd figure. The lady is with her right foot in advance of the left. The man then stands still, and gently pushes his partner away. When this has been done the lady brings her right foot behind the left, sliding her left foot towards her right. Then the man brings her towards him again. This may be done several times.

4th Figure (*La Cruz*) : After a *corte* the man is with his right foot forward and the lady is with her left foot forward. The man crosses the right foot in front of the left, while at the same time the lady crosses her left foot in front of right. Then her partner crosses his left foot in front of his right foot, and simultaneously the lady crosses her right foot behind her left. This may be done repeatedly. When several steps have been taken forward they stop for a moment, doing a little dip. Afterwards the man starts backwards and the lady forwards, both doing similar steps. Thus the figure may end (See p. 37).

5th Figure (*Corte de Lado*) : After a *corte* the partners bring their feet together, bending their legs a little to produce a dip. Then they start sideways, doing the *corte* forwards. The man must hold his partner with his right hand on her back (not on the waist). All the movements must be slow to insure grace. The first step that they do is shown by the Number 1 in the sketch (See p. 27). That is to say, the man crosses his right foot across his left while the lady crosses her left foot across her right. After this the man brings his left foot by the side of the right, and at the same time the lady brings her right foot by the side of her left foot. Both dancers are sideways, with their feet nearly together. Then the *corte* is done. The man kicks with his right foot and brings his left forward, while the lady kicks

EL OCHO.

(GENTLEMAN'S STEP)

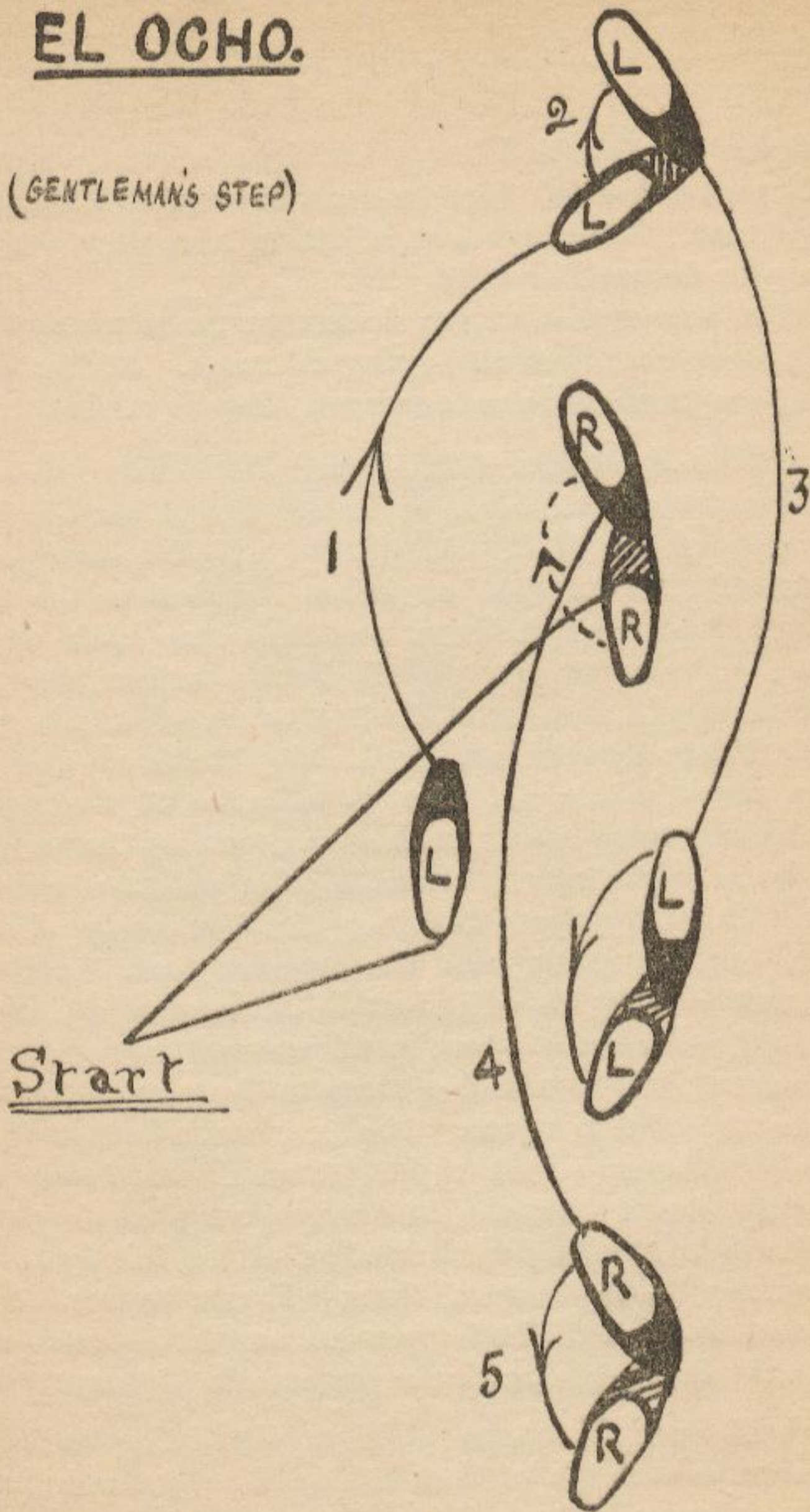


Diagram No. 3.

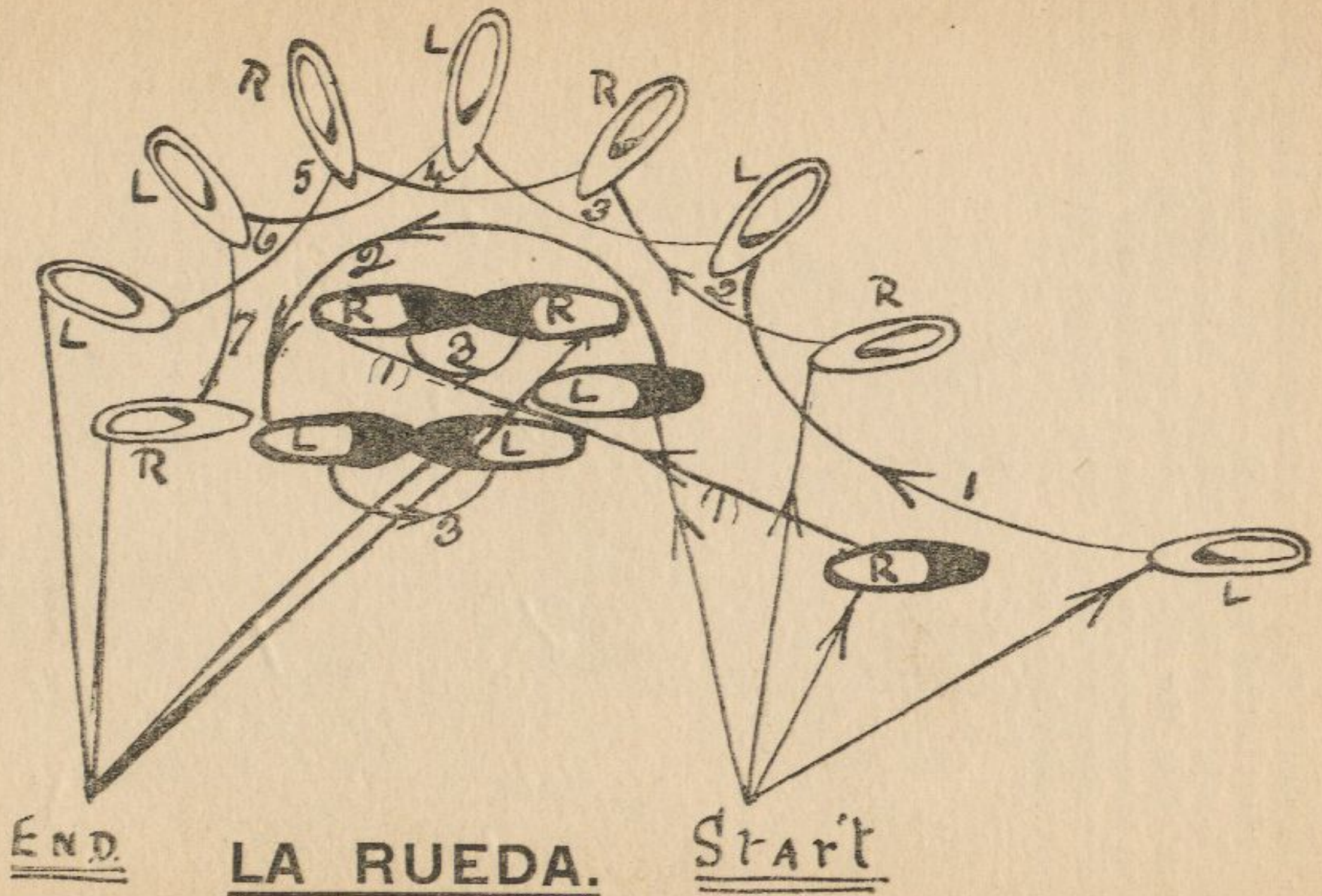
Secrets of the Tango

with her left foot and brings her right forward. Next, the lady moves her left foot forward, the man advancing his right foot. When his foot is beside hers they are ready again to do another *corte*.

After the *corte* has been done four times a short *paseo* may be executed—always going sideways. At the end of this *paseo* the figure *el ocho* (scissors) may be carried out.

El Ocho Argentino.—6th Figure (*El Ocho*): On completion of the *paseo* sideways the lady is with her left foot in advance of her right, while the man is with his right foot in front. The partners' steps are identical in this figure, except that they perform the back step with opposite feet (See Diagram No. 3). To better explain, the man's right foot is in advance of the left, as stated, and he moves his left foot forward, sliding it along the floor, and when it is about eighteen inches in advance of the right he practically turns round on his toes, putting the weight of the body on the right foot and kicking with the heel of the left. The lady does this step simultaneously with the man, but she starts with the opposite foot. After this the man is with his right foot in advance of the left and the lady with her left foot in advance of her right. Both are looking in opposite directions to those applying at the beginning of this figure. The gentleman brings his left foot in advance of the right (3), and immediately slides his right foot (4) forward, and turns on his toes backwards to the right, kicking with the heel of the left foot. This figure can be done several times. It can be finished with a *corte*, after which both partners are facing each other, and may start again with the promenade (*el paseo*).

7th Figure (*La Rueda*): After a *corte* going backwards, the man is with his left foot behind the right and the lady is facing him with her right foot in advance of left, as shown



LA RUEDA.

Diagram No. 4.

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in the sketch, No 4. When the gentleman has brought his right foot behind and near the left (1), he then brings his left foot behind the right foot (2). When the feet are near each other the right is made to cross the left. Then the man turns slowly on his toes, while the lady turns round. Her partner thereupon takes rhythmic steps and the figure ends with a *corte*.

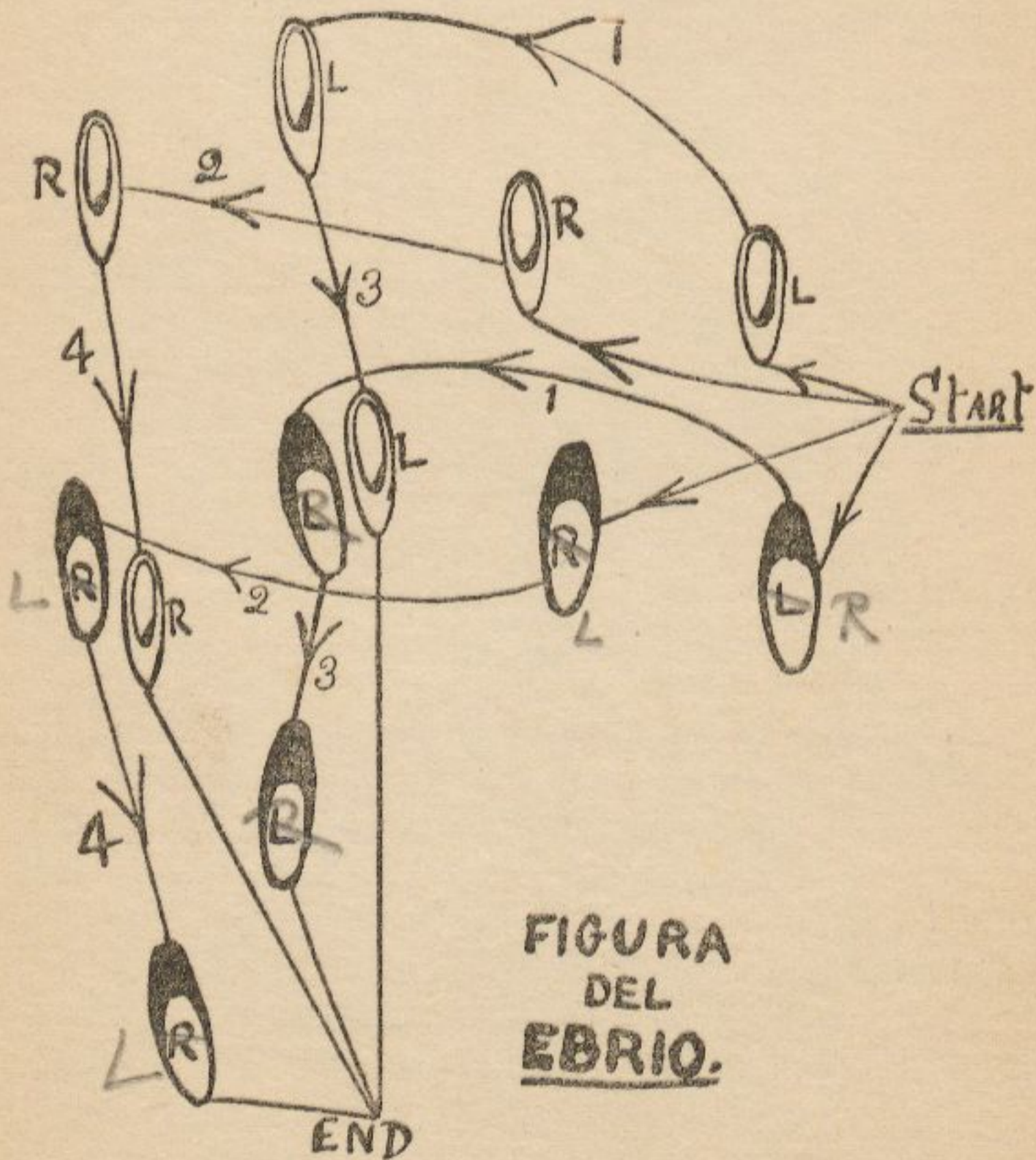
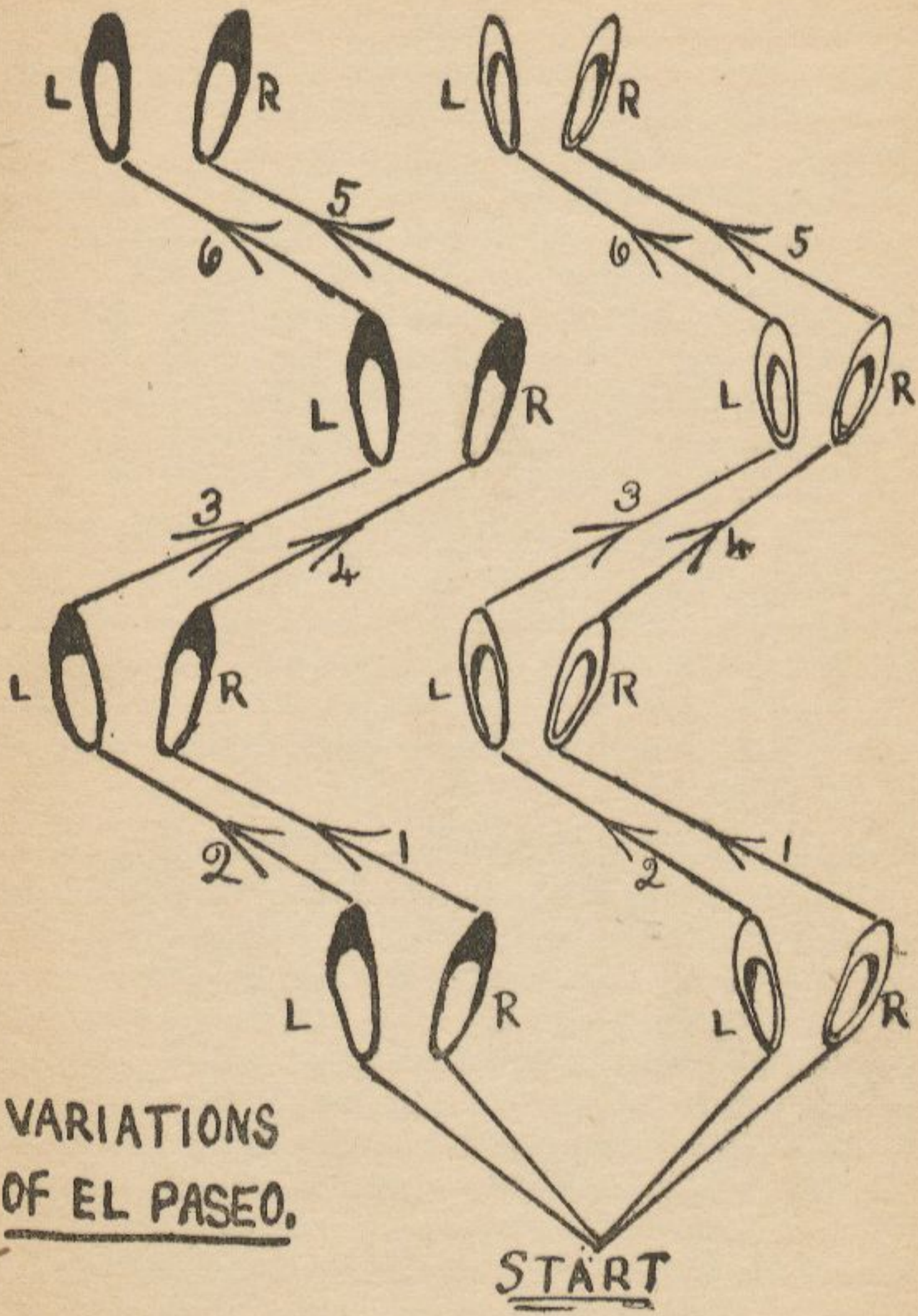


Diagram No. 5.



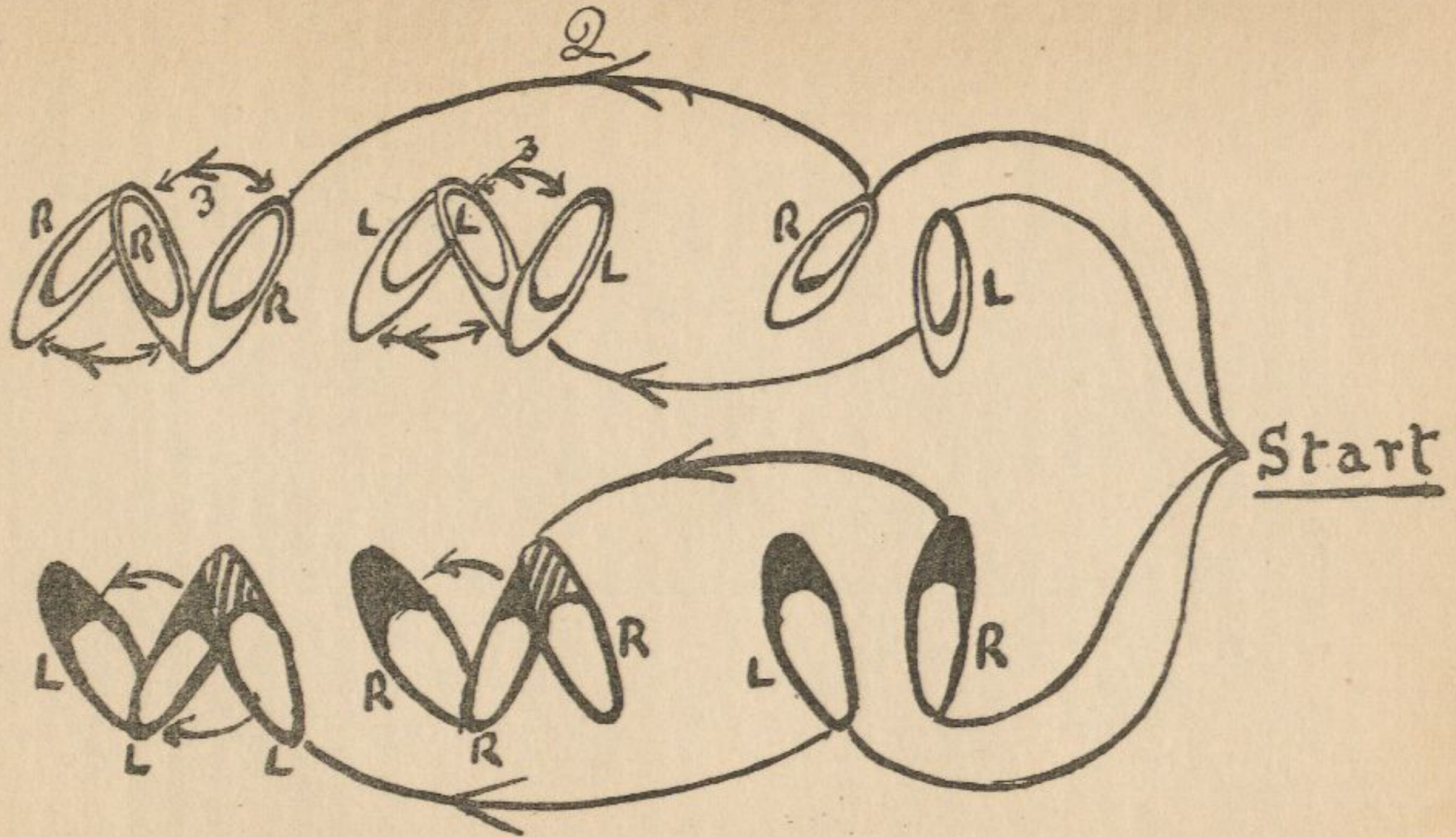
VARIATIONS
OF EL PASEO.

Secrets of the Tango

8th Figure (*La Media Luna*): The *media luna* practically consists of two *cortes*, one forward and one backwards. This figure is generally done after a *paseo*, the man walking forward. Afterwards both partners bring their feet together, doing a dip, followed by a *corte*. The man kicks with his right foot and moves the left backwards. The lady does the opposite. Then her partner brings his right foot beside the left, twelve inches separating his feet, while she moves her left foot forward near his right foot. Whereupon the man kicks with his left foot, bringing his right forward. The lady does the opposite. This may be repeated several times.

To the foregoing steps Señor Barrasa has added, at my request, some further Tango figures, not variations of the Brazilian Maxixe, but the real Argentine dance, of which he is such a graceful exponent. He begins this fresh series with the *Figura del Ebrío*. For purposes of convenience it may follow the previous figures in numerical order, thus:

9th Figure (*Figura del Ebrío*): In this figure the man is, at the beginning, with his left foot a little in advance of the right. Then he places the weight of his body on the left foot. Afterwards, he lifts his right leg and crosses it in front of the left (1), at the same time the lady crossing her left foot behind her right (1), as shown in the sketch. Then the man moves his left foot (2) towards the left, and places it about eighteen inches from the right, a little behind the same. When this is done his left foot is moved backwards (3), and then the left is moved about twelve inches behind the right, when all the weight of the body is put on this foot—the left foot. The lady follows the steps of her partner. This will easily be understood from the sketch (See p. 32).



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02

LA FIGURE CRIOLLA.

Diagram No. 7.

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10th Figure (Variations of *El Pasco*): The partners start this figure sideways. The man holds the lady with his right hand on her back, and with his left hand he holds her right hand. At the start he places the weight of his body on the left foot; she does the same thing; then he kicks with his left foot, his partner doing likewise; and immediately afterwards he moves the right to the left, a little across the left, in fact, when both put the weight of the body on their right feet, and after bringing the left by the side of the right they kick their right feet. The dancers may continue this figure as long as they please (See diagram No. 6.)

11th Figure (*La Figura Criolla*): This figure may be done after a *corte*. The partners bring their feet together, doing a little dip. Whereupon the man starts with his right foot, bringing it across his left (1); at the same time the lady crosses her left foot over the right. Then the partners bring their feet together, the lady's left foot being brought beside the right, and the man's right foot being brought beside his left, about three inches apart. When this has been done they both lift themselves on their toes, moving their heels to the left, and carry out similar movements. Careful attention to the sketch will make the figure clear (See p. 35).

12th Figure (Variations of *La Cruz*): In this figure the partners start with their feet together (as shown in the sketch), the body backwards. The man moves his right in front and across his left (1), while simultaneously the lady moves her left foot across and behind her right. Then the man moves his left foot across his right, as shown (2), and the lady brings her right foot across and behind her left (2). Then the partners bring their feet together (see (3) sketch, p. 37). Afterwards they dip by bending at the

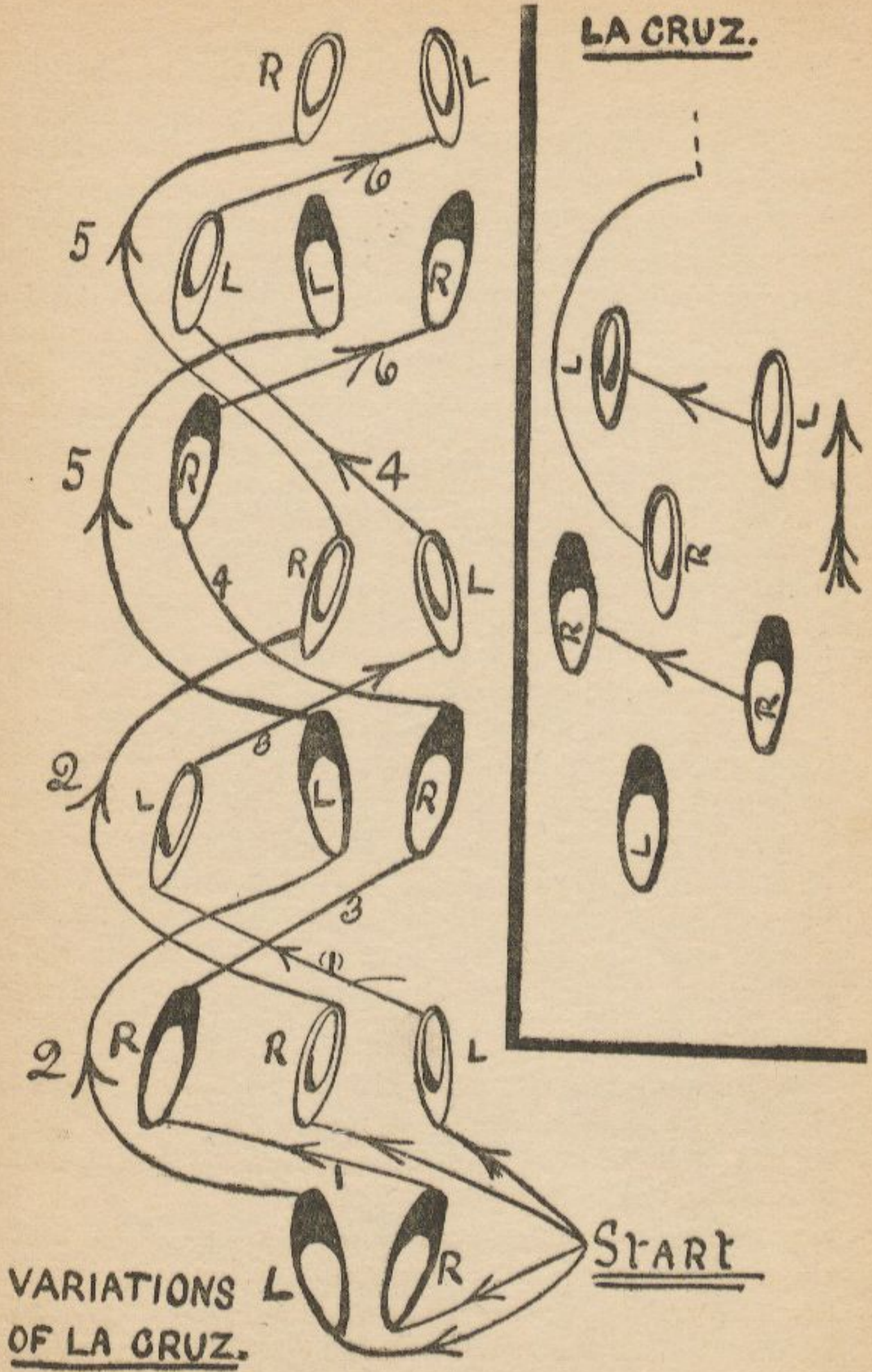


Diagram No. 8.

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knees, and the figure may be started again. Alternatively, instead of a dip, a *corte* may be done.

From the above instructions it will be possible for anyone to gather exactly what Señor Barrasa wishes to convey. By a study of the various sketches, too, the process of learning the dance becomes easier. In the matter of Tango music he supports the *Joaquina*, *El Esquinaso*, and *El Irresistible*. They are all three effective airs, since they tend to inspire in the true dancer the feeling necessary to acquire the dance. Perfection comes with practice and attention to details. The Tango is like almost everything else: it can be conquered with ordinary perseverance.

Señor Barrasa has been kind enough to answer a set of commonplace questions in an original way. His answers, with the questions that prompted them, are given below:

Q. What are your feelings about the Tango?

A. The Tango is really a fascinating dance, and all its movements must be done quite slowly. The movements must be done from the hip downwards.

Q. Do you consider it suitable for the ball-room?

A. Some newspapers have said that the original Tango is not suitable for the ball-room; but I, who have danced it for eight years or more—since I was quite a child—can assert without fear of making a mistake that the real Tango is more suitable for ball-room dancing than the Tango which is being danced so much in London. The real Argentine Tango has practically not been seen in London, and, far from being an indecent dance, it is singularly pretty when correctly done.

Q. What do you think of the gyrations executed at some of the theatres?

A. Most of the steps of the Tango danced at the London theatres do not belong to the proper Tango, and it is true that many of them seem little else than acrobatic feats.

The Actual Dance

But the steps of the real Tango are not exaggerated at all—quite the contrary. One distinction between the real Tango and all other dances lies in the fact that it is danced very much more slowly. Every step must be danced very slowly indeed. The music, too, must be played very slowly. For my own part, I strongly support, even for the stage, the real Argentine Tango, which is, in my opinion, the prettiest variety. Many steps danced by professional dancers as Tango steps are not Tango steps at all, but merely their own inventions.

Q. Do you think the English mania for the Tango is likely to be prolonged. Will it, do you think, last?

A. I feel quite sure it will not end with the winter, but will increase for some time. It may last for many years.

Q. Do you think the Tango will penetrate Hunt balls, etc.?

A. Oh, yes; I have no doubt whatever that it will be danced at all sorts of balls, just the same as ragtime, etc. If it does not appear much in the dance programmes as yet, it is because few people know it intimately enough to dance. What people want to do when they go to a dance is to dance. Let them now learn the Tango!

Q. What peculiarity do you note in Tango music?

A. Tango music is played very quickly with the right hand and very slowly with the left. Dancers must always follow the time of the left—the slow time.

Q. Can you add any little special mark of distinction to the *corte* beyond the description you have given for purposes of instruction?

A. *El corte* means slipping backwards or forwards with either foot and giving a tread with the opposite foot.

Q. And in connection with the *Media Luna*—the crescent?

A. Tread with both feet backwards and forwards.

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Q. Is the guitar-like attitude of the man and woman's arms, in one of the dances one sees, associated with the Tango ?

A. It is a South American dance certainly, but it is not the Argentine Tango, but the Brazilian Maxixe. Marquis, as a Brazilian, dances it well.

Q. Do you think that the English audience, or rather the spectators of the dance, are very keen enthusiasts ?

A. Very. At the Queen's Theatre, one day, over 700 people approved of it by vote, as against a mere score who voted adversely.

It is being somewhat largely circulated that the Tango is nearly as old as the hills ; but, while this may be so in a sense, it does not apply to the dance known far and wide as the Argentine Tango. As I have already stated the original name of the dance was *Milonga*, because it was danced to the *Milonga* songs in the Argentine. The *gauchos*, or cowboys, brought the Tango into existence under the name of *Milonga*. Subsequently, through some remote suggestion of the Spanish Tango, a dance which may be, and probably is, very old, the *Milonga* became the Argentine Tango. In the innumerable exhibition dances I have witnessed the real dance of the Argentinos is usually only an item in the programme, which, as likely as not, includes American cowboy dances and variations of the Maxixe. It is natural that the Portuguese South Americans, who populate Brazil, should want to show off their own particular dance, which is the Maxixe. But the Argentinos, who are of Spanish extraction, resent the confusion in the public mind of their famous dance with the dances of the Brazilians. Certainly Señor Marquis is justified in executing the guitar-like Maxixe, or, as it is sometimes called, the Brazilian Tango, which is wonderfully pretty. Still, it is not the real Tango, though it is an effective and even



"EL CORTE" AGAIN.

The Actual Dance

unique figure. As his native dance, Señor Marquis excels in its performance. With regard to the Tango proper, the Argentine Tango, Señor Barrasa, who like Señor Marquis is a civil engineering student in London, may be cited as a fore-front authority. His salaries are so high that practically no publisher could make it a financial inducement to him to write a book on the Tango. He has supplied me with the data necessary to explain some typical steps, because he wishes a correct idea of the real Argentine dance to circulate freely in England. To those who are fortunate enough to see him on the stage the information he gives will freshen a pleasant memory. To dancers outside the reach of the West End it will come as an authoritative, and, I think, a perfectly clear, lesson on the now celebrated dance. I cannot do better than repeat the advice contained in the *Dancing Times*: "Beginners, content yourselves with *El Paseo* and *La Marcha* (the slow and the quick walks); *El Corte*; *La Media Luna* (practically the *corte* repeated backwards and forwards, the right and the left foot describing small 'half-moons' on the floor in the first and fourth steps); *El Ocho* (the scissors), a march—one step to each beat—the partners alternately passing before each other); *Las Tijeras* and *La Rueda* (the wheel). . . . Smoothness is essential. Avoid all resemblance to the One-step or to Rag-time. Take short steps, and try to phrase the figures with the music. Clearly indicate your intentions to your partner, guiding her with your right hand."

There appears to be one healthy sign associated with the Tango, and that is a sharp division of feeling in interesting quarters. For example, we learn that it only just missed being included in the dance programme of the winter's French Parliamentary balls. M. Deschannel, President of the Chamber of Deputies, "after having

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consulted the directors of the Protocole, decided to exclude the Argentine novelty from the winter's arrangements." But this may be partly due to his patriotic sense, since he supported the pavanne, the gavotte, and the minuet. M. Poincaré, President of the Republic, may follow suit at the Elysée. As yet it is difficult to say. Altogether it is not such a dreadful symptom, because, after all, the Tango is very new, and time is required to establish anything in the strictly official mind. For "official" Paris to seize the Tango in both arms and to embrace it cordially would be a scarcely conceivable action at this stage. Unofficial Paris, however, has made amends; even in *chic* sets, as far removed from Bohemia as Buckingham Palace is from Soho. In all truth, Paris is as madly keen about it as London, one might almost say, *as Glasgow*, which from all accounts, is rampant with Tangoism! There can be no earthly question that this dance has spread more universally than any dance since the world began. From the Latin to the Saxon, from the Viking to the Slav, the Tango is eating its way into popularity; it begins with lunch or tea and goes beyond the supper-room, thus in a way preceding even breakfast itself. It is of little importance whether an angry Argentine Minister, sick of interminable questioning, turns with a scowl and shakes his fist at the *gauchos'* dance! No one cares. Nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand allow the wave of Tangoism to sweep them along on its crest. In Chicago, a place of strange happenings, "Miss Florence Eisendrath, to give a final touch of modernity to her wedding ceremony when she was united to Mr. Montefiore Stein," had the *éclat* of the Tango to support her. At the sound of the Wedding March, from "Lohengrin," the hundred and fifty guests were delighted by the sudden appearance of two famous Tango dancers. "In a moment, at the head of

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the roped-off aisle, a pair of dainty ankles fluttered through the opening. Then followed a slender, willowy figure, cadencing and gyrating on the arm of a man. The two dancers rushed forward and then backwards, as though wings were in their heels. They were Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Castle dancing the 'Castle Walk,' following closely behind the bridal couple." The incident seems as appropriate as a Dervish dance at a funeral! It merely shows, however, the effect of the Tango on certain sections of the community—in Chicago! As for London, the *Daily Mail*, forgetful, perhaps, of its recent "Tango Morality," gives a large space to an article on Tango figures—"the most famous dance of the year!" It is more than this; it is more than the most famous dance of the decade. The *Graphic*, a paper of remarkably sound traditions, says: "Since we do not live in the Middle Ages, or even in those stolid mid-Victorian times when we looked upon the foreigner and all his works with deep distrust mingled with contempt, it behoves me to forego my prejudices. England has taken the Tango to her newly-unbigoted heart. Can I do less? Mrs. Grundy herself is satisfied. Not everybody, of course, is in her camp; but it must be admitted that most of our protestants owe the energy of their protesting to a comfortable ignorance of the subject. Personally, they know nothing of the Tango mania except the little they have gleaned from deplorable posters (you can deplore anything, however harmless, if you want to) and drapers' labels affixed to colours which their instinct of British respectability object to as loud and unpleasant." . . . In touching upon the Kaiser's reputed objection to the Tango, the *Sketch* states that "the supporters of the Tango believe that the Kaiser has only seen or heard of the dance as it is performed on the stage, and that if he saw the real Argentine Tango, which is a very smooth and

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gentle dance, neither he nor the Empress would object to it." A relatively similar feeling exists in English people who support the dance. I have seen poor exponents dance a crude dance called the Tango; it was not the dance of the Argentine, but rather a mixture of several dances. It interfered somewhat with the digestion of supper, because it was ugly and inartistic. With dozens of bad, home-born dancers about, who know no more about the Argentine Tango than they do about the King's English, a certain amount of prejudice and misunderstanding is bound to arise. "To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim." That was Oscar Wilde's way of expressing finish. A good Argentine dancer will express his native dance, because to him it is art arising from nature. To us the Tango is art derived from study and skill. There must be some foundation of sympathy, too. Sympathy is not usually difficult to stir for pretty things. It comes eagerly, quite naturally, to most temperaments, and it should be easy to find in people who have watched with any attention the work of good Tango dancers. Russian dancing held London impersonally. Tango dancing holds its sway personally. It is well within the reach of the graceful, pretty creatures who have gained reputation for England as the land of lovely women. It is also not beyond the understanding of men who can really dance. As slow in movement as the minuet, it displays a thousand times the fascination of that dance. Not the fascination of sex, as I have said before, but the fascination of grace and charm and beauty. "Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work of art is new, complex, and vital." The words of Oscar Wilde suggest themselves to the mind in the Tango controversies of the day—the essence of the new dance must have in it a great spark of vitality, to judge from the flaming, torch-lit conflagration which literally burns the

The Actual Dance

world. With such a giant fire, many teachers of Tango dancing have sprung up like firemen, and, since they do not know the dance themselves, they cannot teach it; like firemen, therefore, they *extinguish*—enthusiasm, hope, or whatever the emotion may be. Ten guineas have been asked for a simple explanation of the dance in a few words. "The tremendous popularity of the Tango," to quote the *Dancing Times*, "has caused innumerable 'Dance Teachers' to spring up around us like mushrooms in the night. All sorts and conditions of people, from bar-tenders to railway servants, have discovered that they can dance the Tango, and perhaps the Maxixe, well enough to get an engagement to appear on the stage of some music hall. I have also in my mind young women, who, knowing that they are good dancers, thought they would earn an honest penny during the present boom by teaching. . . ." These people swarm in the West-End now, and their ignorance of the Argentine Tango, in which they profess to be experts, is grotesque, ludicrous, to the Argentinos I have chanced to talk with. Their academic audacity is supreme, for each of these *soi-disant* authorities on the Tango claims a knowledge conflicting in every detail with the actual dance. One said to me: "I wish to disassociate myself entirely with the Tango taught by all other teachers. Mine is the only correct Tango." Whether this person hailed from Brixton or Barnsbury I do not know. I did not wait to ask! The Tango has given the brazen an opportunity to scream their wares from obscurity, and in a country overfull of amiable and credulous people they are able to make hay while the sun shines.

III

TANGO TALK

LEARNING the Tango is not such an arduous undertaking as it may at first sight appear. The matter has been agreeably dealt with in the *Daily Graphic*, which entitles its article, "The Tango Fallacy : Dance which can be learnt in Three Lessons : Only Twelve Steps." After stating that the Tango will find a place at the winter festivities all over England, it proceeds to point out that the two hundred steps of the dance are merely variations of the original twelve :

1. El Paseo (la promenade).
2. La Marcha (la marche).
3. El Medio Corte (le demi coupé).
4. El Corte (le coupé).
5. La Media Luna (la demi lune).
6. El Chasé (les chasses).
7. El Cruzado (les croisés).
8. El Ocho Argelino (le huit Argentin).
9. El Rueda (la roue).
10. El Frotado (le frotté).
11. El Abanico (l'éventail).
12. El Molinete (le moulinet).

These twelve steps can be learnt quite readily in three lessons by those who know the Boston and One-step. That is the view taken by this authority, and it is shared by most

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people who have watched the dance. "The many other variations follow naturally. It is essential in learning the Tango that these twelve steps should be taken as a standard ; otherwise you will have a man attempting one method and a lady another, which will lead to utter confusion."

The *Daily Mirror*, which has given greater attention to the Tango than any other London paper, has granted me authority to use any of the very generous supply of material accumulated by its special experts. I think the following extract will be interesting to Tango dancers, and to those who are still wavering in their ideas about the dance :

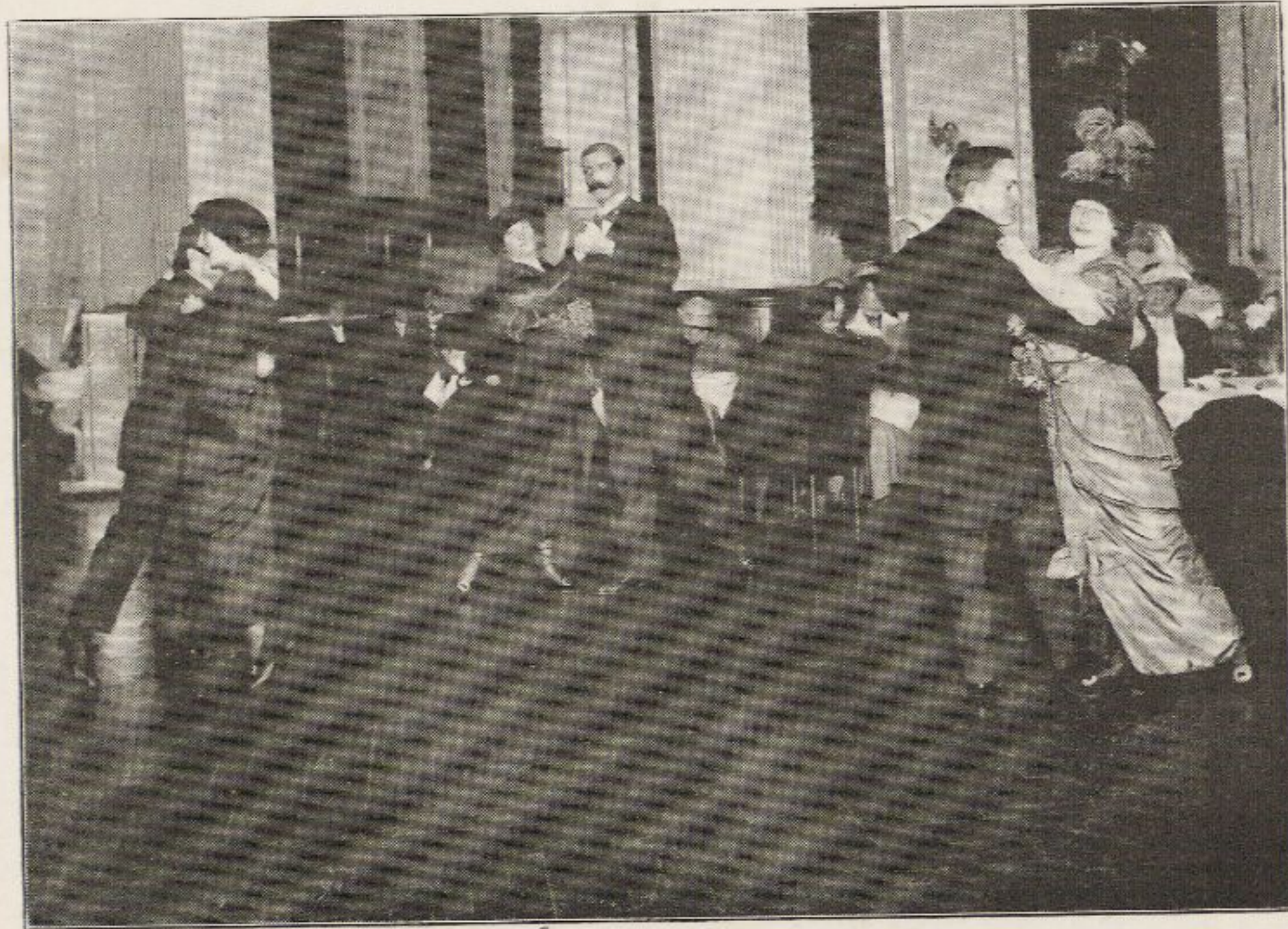
"There is every reason to believe that the Tango will have a very strong influence in starting a new era of grace in the ballroom. For the Tango has scored a very genuinely popular success. Everyone is dancing it or learning its fascinating steps. Not to have seen it danced is not to live in the world. So far as dancing is concerned, it is a revolution. It is an extraordinary change—an absolute volte-face from the jerky dances which have ruled the ball-rooms for the past few years. These dances—the one-step, the two-step, and variations of their kind, pleasantly known as the Bunny-Hug, the Grizzly-Bear and the Turkey-Trot—emphatically did not make for grace. The Tango, on the other hand, is a particularly graceful dance. Mr. A. Wallace Jones, a physical culturist, said 'The Tango dance I consider gives exceptionally beneficial physical results. This, combined with the sociability of the exercise and the improvement it gives to the general poise and up-bearing of the body, is of great value. The movements upon the side muscles of the body tend considerably to improve its balance. I consider it also to be one of the best dances for improving the general deportment and the contour of the figure, while the repeated bending movement—the chief action of which is directed upon the

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large abdominal muscles—improves and strengthens the organs of digestion. Its general effect upon the organs of circulation is splendid, as well as upon the organs of respiration, and it is certainly most useful for keeping one fit.'

"A famous artist gave an interesting opinion concerning the graceful possibilities of the Tango. 'The Tango,' he said, 'danced properly and as it is meant to be, has as much grace as the old Minuet. The Minuet undoubtedly helped to make the folk of that age graceful. Its influence affected the walk and gave a gracious ease to the movements. Men and women knew how to bow in those days, and did it naturally, too. It was a pleasure to see them cross a room and extend a greeting. After that, as far as grace is concerned, came a period lacking distinction. The Polka is to blame for a lot. It really started the jerky craze, from which we have never really recovered. The Tango will tend to check this and make us more graceful again. For a long time past the modern woman has been saying: 'I want my daughter to be made graceful.' Now she is finding that the Tango, danced skilfully, will achieve this.'"

Practically every journal in England has something to say about the Tango, from *The Times* downwards. The popular magazines, too, since one observes, in *The Strand*, that "The introduction of the Tango has brought about extraordinary changes in the fashions. Tango Teas are tremendously popular in Paris, where everybody dresses in very airy-fairy style for them. Imagine trying to dance the Tango in a tight skirt! All the *grandes couturières* now make special Tango dresses, which give plenty of freedom to the wearers. The present vogue for the small hat is also due, in part at least, to the Tango. Large hats were doomed in Paris the moment women found how they impeded their partners."



ANOTHER TANGO TEA.

Tango Talk

Three years have passed since a newspaper published the accompanying wire from its Paris correspondent, and we can now judge the persistence of the dance, with this fine perspective: "A new dance, which is to be the rage of all Paris this winter, is the Argentine Tangle. M. Robert, the director of a well-known dancing academy, states that it is a combination of the shuffle movement of Spanish dances and those of the cakewalk, and that the dance has been very popular in South America. It has been adapted for Paris ballrooms. During the seventh figure of the Tangle the cavalier always remains in touch with the partner. At times he throws himself slightly backwards, while the lady bends forwards, and then he glides along beside her with sliding steps to right and left, his arms rising and falling in harmony."

Three years have intervened, and another modest paragraph has crept into the paper. It is merely headed. "Tango at Every Meal!" This is what it says: "After Tango Teas, Tango Dinners and Tango Suppers—Tango Breakfasts! Not, of course, couples who prance round the breakfast table at one's home, but eleven o'clock affairs at one of the West End *cafés*. Such is the latest development of the latest craze. So profitable have Tango experts found the 'boom,' that every day more experts are coming to London from all parts of the world. When the lucky dancers are not dancing, the majority of them are teaching ambitious learners."

I have lately noticed some little divergence of opinion on the question of the origin of the Tango. Señor Barrasa has assured me that it is merely the name of the Spanish dance applied to the Argentine dance, at first called the Milonga. As an Argentino of education, whose real name is famous in the Republic, his authority is a sufficient support for my statement. The Spanish Tango is, no doubt,

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very old. That is why one constantly finds references to the age of the Tango without the qualifying assertion that the *Argentine Tango* is comparatively new. I have not come across any references to the Milonga songs which initiated the Argentine dance, though to people who are anxious to acquire what one may now call Tango music the appended remarks of the *Daily Mirror* may be extremely useful :

“ ‘ Which is the best Tango music ? ’ This is the question being put by readers in all parts of the country. One letter, typical of hundreds, enquires : ‘ Where can I get good Tango music, and which are the best compositions to dance to ? ’ In order to assist our readers in the choosing of their Tango music, we have made inquiries of the London theatres and restaurants where Tango Teas are held as to which is the popular music most used by the professional Tango dancers. The following are the names of some of the most favoured tunes :

“ La Rumba.	El Choclo.
“ El Irresistible.	My Lindo.

“ Mr. Charles d’Albert, a well-known dancing master, said his favourite Tango music is a piece entitled ‘ La Rumba,’ by J. Tim Brymn. . . . Miss Edna Chase is very fond of ‘ Y Como le Va ’ and the ‘ Viennese.’ All such music can be obtained at the music shops. This is some of the most popular Tango music arranged for piano solos :

Name.	Composer.	Name.	Composer.
“ Y Como le Va	<i>Valverde</i>	Tango	<i>Lucome</i>
“ La Rumba	<i>Brymn</i>	Seduccion	<i>Noceti</i>
“ Venus	<i>Bevelacqua</i>	El Choclo	<i>Villoldo</i>
“ Amapa	<i>Storrini</i>	Maxixe Bresilienne	<i>Salabert</i>

“ Practically all the composers of good Tango music are Spaniards. In fact, a good musician is able to tell at once if music for the Tango has originated in Spain. Spanish

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Tango music possesses a particularly subtle quality of its own. The present demand for Tango music is, perhaps, the most remarkable thing that has happened in the music publishing business during recent years. The popular Tango will completely overshadow the ragtime boom."

Examining the Tango from the standpoint of finance, the *Daily Mirror* gives a few paragraphs to the earnings of professional Tango dancers: "Girl assistants in West London dancing academies can now easily earn from £5 to £20 a week. There probably never has been such a dancing boom. The Tango tide is at the flood. . . . At a well-known West London academy, yesterday afternoon saw two lithe, pretty girls dancing the Tango with delicate fascinating grace. They were assistants to the principal instructor, who proudly boasted that they were the best Tango dancers in England. 'They are extremely well paid,' said the instructor. 'No girl in my employment gets less than £5 a week, and some get £20 a week. Yes, it's a new profession for girls. And what a salary! £1,000 a year! But, of course, a girl to earn that must be an exceptionally fine Tango dancer.'

"'It's Tango all day long here,' said Mr. d'Albert, one of the pioneers of the Tango in England, and vice-president of the Imperial Society of Dance Teachers, at his rooms in Oxford Street. 'We are getting more than 100 pupils a day, and they pay £1 is. for three lessons. I have received £10 10s. for a five minutes' exhibition of Tango at a private house. I am sending out a couple of dancers to the London and provincial music-halls, and their combined salary is £75 a week. There are ten girl assistants in my employment, and they are teaching the Tango from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. Men and women who were my pupils thirty years ago are coming to me now to learn the Tango. One of its many advantages is that it can be

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danced in a smaller space than any other dance. A couple of experts could dance the Tango on a sheet of paper a foot square. You can put a dozen Tango couples in the space required for only seven waltzing couples.' ”

Personally I know a Tango dancer who received thirty guineas for dancing eight minutes in front of a cinema film. He receives £60 to dance for a short time on four or five days a week. Marquis, owing to the number and frequency of his appearances, must receive an aggregate salary of £200 a week, perhaps more.

An expert says : “ There should be no movement of the arms or shoulders. All the movements should be done with the legs, which should move with a graceful rhythm. When the Tango is danced properly, there should be no violent dips, stoops or slides. Everything is graceful. It is the grace that makes the dance so alluring and haunting. The left hand should be held with a slight arch, and the right hand should not be held tightly all the way round the waist, but should rest in the small of the back. The whole of the movements of the Tango are directed by the thumb and fingers. The *corte* is the basis of the whole of the dance. Before the next step is taken you have to come back to the *corte*. There are eight standard figures for the Tango. They are :

- “ 1. *Corte*—three steps and a pause.
- “ 2. *Variations of the Corte*—three steps and a pause.
- “ 3. *Media Luna*—six steps.
- “ 4. *Tijeras*—the woman swings and the man crosses both legs.
- “ 5. *Tijeras*—skating step.
- “ 6. *Paseo*—three steps and a pause.
- “ 7. *Chain*—*ad lib*.
- “ 8. *Media Luna* reverse step—*ad lib*.



“EL PASEO.”

VARIATION OF “EL PASEO.”

Tango Talk

“There are many so-called steps in Tango dancing, but they are all variations of these standard steps; any number can be undertaken. But the one thing to remember is that you must not move above the waist.”

(Mr. Clive Logan, lately of the London Opera House, who learnt the Tango in Buenos Aires, is responsible for these directions. It is interesting to note that he adds: “The partners should both place and carry themselves in an absolutely straight position.”)

Miss Chase, who dances the Tango so charmingly, gives her idea of the now celebrated *corte*, as follows:

“‘Before you do anything else,’ she says, ‘you must know how to do the *corte*, because it gives you the correct rhythm, and from it you can do any step of the Tango. And you must always go back to the *corte* after each figure, so as to give the gentleman time to consider which figure you will do next. There are eight standard figures in the Tango, but from these eight can be developed endless variations of steps. The whole secret is in getting the steps to the correct time of the music and knowing exactly what figure your partner will do next.

“‘Please follow my description of the *corte*, which is as follows:

‘The gentleman places his right hand just above the lady’s waist at the back. The fingers must droop downwards, giving an arch to the wrist.

‘The lady holds her left hand in a similar position, and her right is extended full length against the gentleman’s left hand. In certain steps they bring the arms up towards the head, so as to form an arch.

‘The gentleman now places his right foot forward and the lady places her left foot backward, her right foot being between the gentleman’s two feet.

‘She then throws her weight on the right foot,

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raises her left heel, and turns inward on the ball of the left foot.

' Then she places her right foot behind her left and, raising the right heel from the ground, turns inward on the ball of the left foot.

' After that she places her right foot forward ; and while she is doing that the gentleman throws his left foot backward and slightly upward, and then to the ground. Then he brings his right foot forward while the lady throws her right foot backward.'

“ ‘ That is the *corte*,’ said Miss Chase. ‘ From it you can get into any other figure. The walking dip is really a walk with just a slight bend at the knee. You can start this on either foot, the partners using opposite feet. You cross one foot over the other, then the partners slightly bend the knee and cross the other foot forward, repeating the same movement. That is all there is in the step. You can do it as many times as you like, but don’t forget to go back into the *corte* at the finish.’ ”

Miss Chase’s version is interesting to those who have studied Señor Barrasa’s directions, which I have set out elsewhere in his own words. They both take the same view—that the *corte* is the basis of the entire dance and from it the other steps gradually develop, evolving themselves into the great assortment of finished variations danced by the principal professional dancers. To the *corte*, therefore, we must always look as a sort of guiding star. Once learnt, it leads to all the phases of the dance, to the kaleidoscopic movements which, passing before the eye, express art, and before the mind, technique.

After examining the subject of the Tango from many standpoints, I have come to two conclusions: one, that it is not, as I have endeavoured to show, really difficult for an amateur dancer to learn ; two, that it has qualities

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which display vitality to a very promising degree. It is likely to be alive as long as the waltz in this country, a fact which means that its longevity is assured. It may be a little fantastic, possibly somewhat bizarre, but it has underlying features which cannot be ignored by anyone considering the dance. For example, who can dispute the value of a dance which requires only slow, if graceful, movements? The hall mark of genius belongs to the people who started the Tango "snowball" in its course round the world. For they knew what the world wanted, what it was waiting for. I have seen two couples dance the Tango comfortably on a space only twice the size of a dinner-table. It is incredible to what uses it can easily be put at small parties. Children can dance it well. The terrific business of long practice, which is so essential in successful Russian dances, is entirely unknown in acquiring a good working knowledge of the Tango. Mordkin—a very fine dancer, and quite an amiable person off the stage; Nijinsky; any Russian dancer of experience under the Imperial Government—would find the Tango a pleasant relaxation from hard work.

The Russians began by stirring the dancing impulse to a height in this country. In Russia they were an established institution. But here they came on sufferance, on trial, to be accepted or rejected according to public fancy. They caused a *furor*, as we all know, in the result. This result we find expressed in a sequel, and the sequel is the Tango interest of to-day. I have watched the dances of every professional dancer of international repute, and the more I see of the Argentinos the more I become impressed with their work. They seem spontaneous, yet methodical. They achieve motions and movements calculated to win applause from the unknowing as well as from the *cognoscenti*. In a word, this dance has

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an appeal which is felt by everyone who has seen it properly expressed. I will not say that indifferent and inebriated performers are likely to arouse interest, but where intelligence and skill are embodied in the work, in exhibition work, there can only be one outcome—general approval. The bad Tango dancers will extinguish themselves; they will not extinguish the Tango. In applying the most dispassionate observation to the situation and to the work which has been called into being, there is left no room for doubt, in my mind, that the dance will remain long after it has ceased to be a music-hall “turn” or the draw for a restaurant supper. They merely serve as *media* of popular introduction, neither more nor less. But *The Times* has dealt with the Tango! That fact is an indication of greater value. It seems to solidify the question, to remove from it all trace of hysteria or ephemeral estimate.

“The Tango craze,” it says, “may be exaggerated by report—at some of the largest balls the allowance of Tangoes has been smallest—but it has clearly made a stir in the dancing world comparable only to those caused on their introduction by the polka and the waltz. M. Richepin has recently warned us not to despise the Tango for its lowly origin. Most dances, he reminds us, start among the folk before they reach the ball-room. It may be added that by now reputable teachers of dancing have eliminated from the Tango any traces of vulgarity which it once possessed, and have thus done much to legitimise its success. This has been partly due, no doubt, to novelty, as was the success of the waltz and the polka. Youth, too, may not be averse from a dance which gives an excuse for keeping a single partner for a whole evening. It should be possible, however, to discern more special reasons for the popularity of the Tango.”



A STAGE TANGO STEP.

Tango Talk

The Times proceeds with the case *for the Tango* in a sober, effective way. It aims, primarily, at explaining the reasons which have brought such overwhelming success to the Tango. "These reasons will hardly be discovered by studying the history of the dance," it states. "Experts, in fact, continue to differ as to its true source. If M. Richepin was correctly reported as implying in his famous lecture that it should be traced back to the *Pyrrhica saltatio* and the dances of classical Greece, he must have been giving less a derivation than a rather fantastic analogy. A more scientific theory connects it with the *Chica*, an ancient and unpleasant South American dance, said to have come itself from the negroes. The safest opinion, however, is probably the one which is supported by the strong authority of Mr. Charles d'Albert, the author of the newest encyclopedia of dancing. On this view the 'Argentine' Tango is a variant of the old Spanish Tango. From Latin America it was brought to Paris, where it found its first welcome in quarters sufficiently Bohemian not to be afraid of it in its native shape. In Paris finally was invented* the Tango of our ball-rooms, a dance suggested by the South American Tango, but thoroughly reconstructed to suit the usage of polite society. So much for the past history of the Tango. It is scanty enough to suggest that its true history lies still in the future. We must seek elsewhere than in the folk-customs of South America if we are to explain its attractiveness in modern England."

With such lucid, and at the same time authoritative, material before me I can scarcely refrain from reprinting it *en bloc*. However, it seems that the purposes of this

* Señor Barrasa says the newest Tango was not invented, but varied, in Paris.

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book will be fulfilled if I give the final extract—the one which finds excuse for the present Tango rage: “The old dances were more pleasing to the performers than to the onlookers. The pleasure to be found in watching a couple of exquisite waltzers is strictly limited in duration. This is recognized on the stage, where waltzes are always diversified by steps unknown at balls. Tango dancers, on the other hand, come upon the floor intending—in no unworthy spirit—to ‘show off.’ And they are welcome at a moment when fancy dress balls have become at once more frequent and more ornate. The rage for the Tango is, in fact, part of our new sense of pageantry. The latter days of the waltz in London were days which saw few pomps except the Lord Mayor’s Show. Much has changed since then. The last two reigns have given us a revival of Royal ceremonial. The long series of historical pageants in provincial towns has left its influence behind it. At the present moment feminine apparel has a note of exotic fantasy, while the staid yellow and brown brick of our streets is being daily replaced by Babylonian palaces with majestic columns. The dances of a spectacular age must likewise catch the eye. That is the secret of the Tango.”

It would be futile to dispute any of these points, which seem to me to cover the Tango more perfectly than any which have been raised by the Tango dancers themselves. We already know the basis of the dance, reduced to skeleton form and then covered with flesh in the variations, in some cases personal, in other cases recognised. The art of the Tango dancer is dependent to a large extent on his capacity to elaborate the fanciful steps arising from the original figures. Señor Barrasa has quite an assortment of secret variations. They are secret because he has made them so intricate that no one, without guidance and instruction, could possibly master a set. They stand on

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the exhibition plane, which is not by any means the plane which the public itself aims at. Quite the contrary. What most people want is an intelligent understanding of the ball-room dance, something which can be gracefully expressed on very short notice. To them, the higher flights of the professional dancers are too difficult, *too* spectacular. We would have to hunt ball-rooms in pairs, never on any occasion separating, if the more complex work of the professionals were to be the only model. Thus, by the very nature of the difficulty encountered in reaching perfection, the Tango would be limited to comparatively few dance couples. As matters stand, or, rather, as we may assume they now stand, anyone who has the slightest aptitude for dancing can master a good expression of the Tango. It lies, as I have said, as I say again, well within the reach of every dancer. Perhaps, and this may appear a bold suggestion, some people may be found to dance the Tango who dance nothing else! The suggestion may seem absurd; but, whatever one dances, one must begin with some dance, so why not the Tango? The *Daily Mirror* amusingly describes the mental attitude of the modern Briton, notably in connection with the Tango. Showing insight into a real theme, it has point here: "There is something pathetic about the whole-hearted efforts of the average Briton to be gay. Knowing himself for a dull, serious dog, he sets himself arduously to the task of living down his reputation and earning a name for careless abandon. Though his own evolved ideas of pleasure may be dour, he is no bigot. 'Bring me your laughter,' he cries to the world, 'and I will enjoy it.' And the world, knowing the Briton for a well-to-do, open-handed patron, responds nobly. The world is wider now than it was. Our Briton is not content with the native gaiety of his nearest neighbours; he would seek pleasure from further afield. Once

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he would learn from France to be merry and forget the sorry business of making profits outweigh losses. The stately pleasures of the minuet and the gavotte sufficed to lure him into an idea of abandon Sir Roger de Coverley and his country dances failed to express. But the grey skies of France were too like his own. He tired soon of her delights, and sought for joys further afield. Danced in his mercantile manner, minuet and gavotte became staid and matter-of-fact; our Briton would have something wilder. So he sought the strange gaiety of a further country. Bohemia, that hot-blooded stranger strayed into a phlegmatic Europe, had joys to offer. Our Briton, anxious ever to be in the thickest of the whirl of pleasure, asked her aid, and Bohemia, unconventional, temperamental, inspired first the polka, shocking in its abandon, and later the waltz, with its dreamy lilt and lure. The Briton danced the waltz into respectability, until, fearing that his coveted fame as a gay fellow was in jeopardy again, he thought him to seek for new experience. And it was whispered to him that in far Argentine the loudest laughter of the world was heard. He listened eagerly when they told him of a dance in which the gay Argentinos swayed and turned in happy, careless fashion. So he learned the Tango. Never was he so enamoured of any dance. It was, he proclaimed, the finest, the most graceful, though perhaps a little unusual, of all dances he had known. It was gay, exotic; it savoured of tropic skies and heavy-scented airs, and the grace and carelessness of the passionate South. 'I must Tango,' said the Briton. 'I will Tango.' And he opened wide his money-bags in return for knowledge of *corte*, *media luna* and *tijeras*; for he would be gay at any cost. And he will sway in stiff abandon this Argentine dance until he has Tangoed it into the serious respectability which is of his custom. Then, in alarm, he will

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discover he has fallen again to sombre levels. Panic will seize him, and he will search the world for some new means of expressing the gaiety which he feels should be in his nature, and the Tango will lie neglected, with polka and waltz, while Britain waxes enthusiastic over the supreme delights of the Rio reel or the Japanese jig."

I may perhaps add that before he adopts these wondrous dances our Briton will have made the Tango a classic, a household word; a dance as well-known as the waltz, as picturesque as the minuet. It is because of his underlying seriousness, against which we are told he fights by means of extravagant expression, that he will make, with his perseverance, his tenacity, what lighter races would not do half so securely. As he fights for his joys, so his joys become real, live things, not merely fleeting pleasures. His earnest force, his artificial, and therefore determined, gaiety will link themselves together to batter down prejudice. With him the fate of the Tango is in safe keeping. He took it up when it had a questionable reputation, and already that reputation is vanishing like a thin mist swept from a mountain-top by the morning sun. In the words of *The Times*, "The dance which reigns at a given epoch almost always reflects some characteristic of that epoch. Enthusiasm for the waltz, historians of dancing tell us, reached its climax in France about the year 1830. This was the period of Romanticism, and nothing could better have gratified the sentiment of the time than the languorous and dreamy measure imported from the fatherland of Werther, though Werther himself was shocked by it. The polka, on the contrary, did not come into favour till the forties, and then only after a struggle with the Parisian aristocracy, who frowned upon its middle-class associations. It was, however, just these middle-class associations which helped it, under the rule of the

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citizen-king, to carry the day. Louis Philippe himself practised it, and his mishaps *en dansant la polka avec la reine Victoria* made him once more the butt of a flight of satirical verses. Thus, if the waltz expressed Romanticism, the polka was the triumph of the *bourgeoisie*." In the same way the Tango is a mirror of what is felt to-day, or, it may be that it is the reflection of a hope, the reflection, of what one wants to feel—something a little fantastic which one craves to express.

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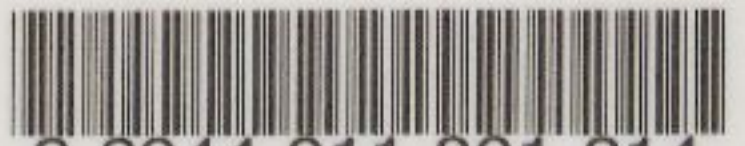
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