

The Fashions in Dancing.

By James Douglas.

HERE are fashions in dancing, as well as in battleships and bonnets. In my time dancing has gone through many permutations, and each of them has been a sign of a change in the public mood. Dancers interpret the prevailing temper of the period, for there is in their art a subtle sympathy with their environment. The public are not conscious of the mysterious process which makes a certain kind of dancing the vogue for a while, but there is no doubt that dancing is an expression of a general frame of mind. The dancing of Kate Vaughan and Letty Lind and Sylvia Grey was a protest against the garish brutality of the Gaiety burlesque. In those days the Gaiety chorus was composed of tall girls in lights, and the public grew so utterly tired of the crudity of tights that they hailed with delight a school of dancing which abolished the parade of flesh in fleshings, and substituted for it the grace of ethereal wisps moving in a cloud of cobwebs. For the bravado of abandonment we were given the dainty reticence of innumerable veils.

Then the fickle soul of the people grew weary of the discreet sylph with her billows of silk and cascades of chiffon, her flashing steps and bewitching ankles. It sighed for a sharper stimulant and a keener sting. In due time Lottie Collins took the town by storm with her epileptic high kicking and her tempestuous acrobaticisms. We turned from the lilies and languors of the diaphanous sylph to the negroid fury of "Ta-ra-boom-deay." The strepituous blast and blare of that famous tune got into our blood, and we gave ourselves up to the madness of the plantation melody, with its alternations of swooning sensuousness and spasmodic violence. The dancing of that wild period was a nightmare of high heels, black stockings and stormy lingerie. When we heard the other day that Lottie Collins was dead we suddenly felt very old, for it seemed a hundred years since her song was growled out by every barrel organ and was whistled by every butcher's boy.

After the acrobatic dance, there was a reaction. The weary heart of the music-halls longed for something sturdier and slower and more sophisticated, for Lottie Collins, one must confess, was crude and vulgar with the dreadful nudity and vulgarity of the Cockney temper. It was Spain that came to our aid in our hour of ennu. There was a wave of Spanish dancing, on the crest of which were planted the insolent feet of Carmenita. Her empire is immortalised in Sargent's portrait. There her savagery, her pride, her defiant arrogance, and her haughty beauty are triumphant for ever. Who that saw it can forget the thrill of her entrance on the stage of the Palace Theatre! She seemed to set her arched instep on the neck of the audience. She did not sue or solicit or allure. She came like a conqueror to receive the submission of slaves. Her dancing was a declaration of feminine contempt for masculine folly and frailty. She gloried in the rhythmical insults which she launched at the astonished audience.

Her beauty was not offered to us; it was flung at us. She smote us on the face with her overweening hatred and contempt. And if she relaxed her mockery for a moment, it was only to lull us into security and throw us off our guard, and then affront us with another gesture of supreme insolence.

After the hot splendour of the Spanish school, we turned with relief to the cool and fragrant childlikeness of Adeline

Genee. In her exquisite spontaneity was the charm and vivacity of girlish joy untainted by passion and unassumed by experience. Her butterfly gaiety matched our mood of satiety. She was like an April day, a miracle of quick laughter and elfin grace, fresh witchery and tender sprightliness.

It took it was the poetry and romance of Genee which prepared the way for Maud Allan, and which disguised the faint morbidity and subtle perversity of the Salome dance. The English temperament is curiously supple in its self-deception and its make-believe. It was able to read into Maud Allan's beaded undulations exactly what it pleased, so that everybody was satisfied, from Silenus to Mr. Stead. But the decadence came swiftly and the cult of beads and bare feet perished in an orgy of vulgar imitation.

For a while there was an epidemic of savagery which came straight from the purlieus of Paris. The Danse des Apaches, the Valse Chalopense, and their like raged violently, and it seemed as if the art of dancing had sunk into sheer brutality. These hooligan frenzies were deliberately ugly; they were a fierce exposition of hideous passions. Of course, they were toned down on their way across the Channel, and while they became unintelligible, they remained sordid. I do not think they pleased the London public, apart from that strange cosmopolitan crowd which haunts some of the music-halls. The culmination of the cult of ferocity was reached in Polaire, and I fear it must be admitted that we laughed at her, in spite of her fourteen-inch waist and her celebrated ankle. There is but a step from the diabolical to the ridiculous. The dance of murderous ugliness died of ridicule.

It was at this stage of revulsion against tortured vulgarity and morbid horror that the Russian dancers leaped into popularity. They brought nature and life into the sickly atmosphere of the theatre. They combined the technical brilliance of Genee with the warmer and richer Slavonic temperament. And yet they were as clear and pure as Genee in their interpretation of emotion. There was nothing muddy in their vitality. To see those Russians was to see the isolated from sorrow and from sin. They were like creatures in the dawn of the world, unconsciously swift and radiant and joyous, with no fatigue or grief or sadness in their intense interpretation of being at its best. For the Russian imagination is fresh and uncorrupted and simple, and in the dance as in literature it has the strong charm of beauty that is young and untarnished, the lovely pathos of childhood, sweet as wood violets and cool as the water in a mountain tarn. The public that delight in "The Blue Bird" and the Russian dancers is not past praying for.

Semi-religious drama with a moral has given place to the irresponsible frivolity of vaudeville at His Majesty's. The Valdire-Garrison show passes an evening agreeably enough. It's about the nearest thing to the class of programme Percy Dix use to put on that we have had since that cheerful worthy departed. Until the "strike" came along last year, Dix was doing very well financially in the show business at Newcastle. The "black diamond" trouble flattened him out for a time, and he was, at latest advices, managing the Lyceum picture show, Sydney.

The Music of Edward Macdowell.

(By D. C. PARKER.)

Oscar Wilde once remarked that the youth of America was its oldest tradition. This was more than a flippant phrase which had escaped from the lips of a clever man. It had some truth behind it. Many people have an idea that the whole of America is in a state of civilised savagery. The great men of concord give the lie to that at once. In a hundred fields of activity America has won an honoured place. In music her position is peculiar. She has her merchant princes and captains of industry but she has not yet found her Beethoven. It is easier to discover virgin soil on the face of the globe than in the region of sharps and flats.

This does not mean that America is not playing a big role in the musical world. The greatest artists are heard from New York to San Francisco and it must not be forgotten that the "Sinfonia Domestica" was first heard in the former city. There is indeed a great band of musical activity reaching from the Eastern seaboard to the towns of the West. But of creative genius the United States have given little to the world, and the peculiar thing is that out of the turmoil of her immense commercial activity there has emerged a voice so quiet and so tender that it is scarcely heard. I mean, of course, Edward Macdowell. It is not long since the composer died, and the fact that he occupied a unique place in modern music has lately thrust itself upon the public. As long as you see a man taking his daily walk and dressed as other men are, as long as you sit near him drinking his beer, smoking his cigar and reading his newspaper it is not easy to value him at his true artistic worth. The average individual finds it difficult to persuade himself that a man who does not wear a Byron collar is more interested in sonnets than in debenture bonds. But when an artist dies, the commonplaces fall from out our reckoning. We do not consider the cut of his coat but the richness or ornamentation of his mental apparel.

Macdowell the man is no longer with us, but Macdowell the artist will remain yet awhile. While representative of much that is best in American culture, his choice of subjects and manner of treating his themes may be explained away by reference to his ancestry. The fact of his having sprung from Scottish-Irish parents gives the clue to nearly all his music. There are some men who talk to daisies by the wayside, not because they have anything to say to them, or can understand the language of flowers, but because others pass them by. These people are merely striking an attitude and they are not to be taken too seriously. There also exists the man who stops to address the meekest thing in nature because it holds in its delicate petals a cup of eloquence such as the gods might envy. When we get a man like Burns pouring out his genius upon some everyday theme we feel how full the earth is of splendid beauties and manifold secrets for those who have the faculty of seeing. There is something of this faculty in Macdowell. He is an unique man among modern composers. With the exception of Grieg, no outstanding writer of our time has devoted his musical talent to such short and simple annals. Strauss has a penchant for subjects with a multitude of interests and a variety of aspects. Take "Ein Heidenleben," "Also Sprach Zarathustra," "Tod und Verklärung"; it is all great workmanship upon a large canvas.

To Strauss nature is not a flower. It is a wide vista of landscape with Zarathustra standing naked on the mountain tops addressing the sun. Debussy, though a quieter spirit, is full of a more studied carelessness and a more artificial naturalness. Macdowell is unaffected in his nature pictures. I have heard it said that when he was composing he liked to bury himself in the woods, and I can well believe it. Solitude must have had much to say to such a man that words and harmonies would merely have obscured. And the result of the impression made upon him is left in his music. It is natural and it is healthy. There is nothing of fin de siècle, welt-schmerz or sehnsucht in his work. This in itself is a great recommendation.

Macdowell possesses in a peculiar degree the power of investing common objects with an uncommon interest. Take some of the best known of the piano pieces and you will find this borne out. It is not the landscape alone which interests the composer; it is the hundred fairies which skip over its grassy meads. There is a legend which tells that children can see elfish forms which older people are unable to distinguish. This is only a pretty way of calling attention to the lovely world of childlike happiness. There is much of this in the composer's music. He revels in little sights and scenes about which others are silent. He is happy in the corner of his flower-garden. Unfortunately he has had to pay the penalty of his choice of subject. Most of his piano pieces are concerned with things of a far too intimate and fragile nature to be really effective in the concert-hall. This is the reason, I take it, that he is not better known. To those who only frequent the highways of music, Macdowell is but a name.

The object of these lines is to point out the interest which surrounds the composer. His place of birth, his ancestry, his tastes, all contribute to make him a man worth knowing well. In his "Sea Pieces" we find descriptive sketches which are unlike any other sea pictures in music. In the "New England Idylls" and "American Wood Idylls" there are numbers full of poetic charm. And the Macdowell of the songs is a delightful companion. These are generally short, but if they be fragmentary they are beautiful fragments. It is in these, I think, that his Scottish-Irish ancestry makes itself felt most plainly. The atmosphere is often that of the Western isle, the charm frequently of a Celtic nature. Some of the music possesses the same atmosphere as is to be found in the poetry of Yeats. The picture of the

"Glimmering girl

With apple blossom in her hair,
Who called me by my name, and ran
And faded through the brightening air"

would surely have appealed to the writer of "The Joy of Autumn." In nearly all his work there is a charm. Sometimes it seems as though the voice of the Celt were uppermost, and his pages turn us to Welsh harpers among the hills and fair ladies in enchanted castles; sometimes there is melody that is Scottish in its character, with just a tinge of melancholy. At others he sketches for us sights and scenes that lie nearer to his home and heart; we find ourselves "at an old trysting place" or brooding upon "the silent mystery of immortal things," and we feel, as we picture him in his garden at Peterboro', that in him we have a man rejoicing in beautiful things, to whom life in a caravan or in a cottage by the wayside can yield more choice delights than are to be purchased by those who dwell in high places.

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