

**AESTHETIC PHYSICAL CULTURE,
A SELF-INSTRUCTOR FOR ALL
CULTURED CIRCLES, AND
ESPECIALLY FOR ORATORICAL
AND DRAMATIC ARTISTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649257034

Aesthetic physical culture, a self-instructor for all cultured circles, and especially for oratorical and dramatic artists by Oska Guttmann

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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FOR

ALL CULTURED CIRCLES, AND ESPECIALLY FOR
ORATORICAL AND DRAMATIC ARTISTS.

BY

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ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS.



ALBANY, N. Y.:
EDGAR S. WERNER,
The Voice Press.
1884.

GV341
.59

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST GERMAN EDITION.

We all, as respects our knowledge and abilities, stand upon the experience of earlier races; and popular progress could not be imaginable if we treated the arts and sciences as mere empirics.
A. CZERWINSKI in "The History of Dancing."

Among the ancient Greeks, all gymnastic exercises, and especially dancing, formed a leading element of the education of youth. Solon, the lawgiver, ordained the study of gymnastics; and Pythagoras, the founder of a rational system, won the applause of the populace as a gymnast. High and low, old and young, cultivated this art. According to Plato, the man who found no pleasure in dancing and gymnastics, was a rude, unpolished clown. The great value the Greeks placed upon these two arts, is evident from their assiduous cultivation by the greatest men: poets, generals, and sages. Sophocles and Epaminondas were renowned dancers, and Socrates did not think it undignified to zealously practice dancing in his old age, because he thought that it contributed to outward and inward symmetry. There were also great poets in those days, who were masters of the art of dancing. Arion, Tyrtæus, as well as Aeschylus, won great repute by their gestures and dancing. The utmost modesty in glance and demeanor was in that day considered an absolute necessity, and a rapid gait was not "good form." Demosthenes placed bold speech and a rapid gait in the same category. The ancient Hellenes went so far as to judge of a man's character by his gait and movements.

With the fall of Greece, a rough athleticism took the place of the noble principles of Pythagoras. Toward the end of the Grecian rule this culminated, and then passed over to the Romans, who witnessed with rapturous applause combats between men and wild beasts, or mortal conflicts between man and man, where, while the dead gladiator was ignominiously dragged from

the arena, the victor received the branch of palm, and was often rewarded with money.

The following example will show what a strict difference the Grecians, in the palmy days of their empire, made between rational gymnastics and the rough antics of athletes and gymnasts :

“To Clisthenes came Hippoclides, the son of Pisandros, a rich Greek, to sue for the hand of his daughter. The father consented. When, at a family feast at which gymnastic sports were usually carried on, Hippoclides, through leaping and other antics, hoped still more to win the favor of the father of his Agarista, and at last, after all possible masterpieces, placed himself upon his head and began to gesticulate with his legs as if they were arms, Clisthenes, long since enraged at these absurd performances, cried out : ‘O, son of Pisandros, thou hast danced away thy marriage !’

In Rome, where, as we have seen, gymnastics degenerated into horrible cruelties, the dance rose at length to great popularity in spite of the opposition of almost all the renowned authors and statesmen. After the introduction of the Greek play, which was a musical declamatory representation, and in which, for the Roman public, dancing and music were the main things, the dancer Dionysia received an income of 42,000 marks,* and the renowned actor Roscius, a contemporary of Cicero, an income of 129,000 marks.

After the fall of Rome there is a chasm of many centuries in the history of gymnastics.

In the middle ages, it was the tournament that demanded skill and decorum as well as strength. After the fall of the tournament, scarce anything was done for physical culture, and only with the Reformation, with Luther himself, does the time begin anew in which the necessity of making mind and body symmetrical, was recognized. Montaigne, the French essayist (born 1533), says : “I would have an outward decorum and pleasing manners cultivated at the same time with the mind. It

* The former over \$10,000 in our money, the latter nearly \$32,000. — *Translator.*

is not a soul, not a body, we educate ; it is a man. Out of this one we must not make two." And Plato says : "We must not break in one without the other ; but must urge and guide both alike, like a span of horses harnessed to a shaft."

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were special dancing-masters who taught deportment and fine manners to grown persons and to children, dancing being considered the basis of all good manners, since more grace entailed greater decorum. And where were more elegance, more grace in gait and bearing necessary than in a court minuet, or gavotte ? An age when gallants wore embroidered garments, and carried swords, enforced a strict attention to the outward proprieties, and to fine manners.

That race is no more. The time has gone by when a Marcel, the most renowned of European ballet-masters (his lessons cost very dear, he being paid 300 francs for the bow to be made at a court presentation, or for a minuet to be danced at some state ball),—could say to one duchess : "Madame, your courtsey is like that of a maid-servant ;" and to another : "You have a gait like a fish-wife. Lay aside these wretched manners and begin your bows anew, never forgetting what you are, and that a consciousness of your rank should control your slightest actions."* Lord Chesterfield urgently exhorted his son to take lessons of Marcel in deportment, so that he might enter a *salon* without any awkward movements of the arms or body ; and, upon his first introduction to society, produce a favorable impression which would be likely to endure.

The age is now gone by when Louis XIV. took dancing-lessons twenty years in order to perfect himself in the minuet and gavotte, where the finest grace must have expression. Those days are past, and those dancing-masters have left no successors. Were there any such, they might starve for lack of pupils ; for, as the public announcements tell us daily, all society-dances may be learned in eight hours, and few are willing to give more time

* Czerwinski's "History of Dancing."

than this. In no society of the present day, at no court, it might almost be said, is a strict etiquette observed.

Modern *turnerei*, with its bold antics, its gigantic leaps, and contortions of the body, is far removed from the rational gymnastics of Pythagoras, and not calculated to produce decorum or grace.

Where shall the youth or the maiden learn anything of deportment? A book should be written from which our young people, anxious for fine manners, may draw counsel. So-called books of etiquette to-day, where everything is reduced to a science, aid, at most, only in attaining a superficial polish. Even a work on decorum must have a strict scientific basis, if it would answer its purpose, if it would be abreast of the times, and take due account of the laws of æsthetics.

Much has been written upon decorum and fine manners. Even our most renowned authorities, such as Goethe, have expressed their ideas upon this subject; but we nowhere find a system, a perfect method. We possess works upon gymnastics, dancing, fencing, the plastic and histrionic arts, etc., but none in which, out of all these, a system is deduced, from which true culture may be derived.

German literature has, indeed, for several years, been enriched by a work which must be placed in quite another category, and for which we have to thank the talent and tireless industry of Herr Hugo Rothstein, Director of the Prussian Royal Central School of Gymnastics. This is an excellent adaptation of the celebrated work of Ling, a Swedish teacher of gymnastics and father of the modern rational science of that name. Its title is *Gymnastics*. But, excellent as the work is, its benefits must be derived indirectly through the teacher; it would be useless for the pupil to seek to master a work comprising five volumes, and over 1600 pages.

If we turn to the literature of the mimic art, we find ourselves in the same dilemma. This literature is very comprehensive, and embraces much that is valuable, from Quintilian down to

writers of our own day; but all these works, in spite of their many excellences, lack one fundamental thing: Instruction in training the limbs to a capability for the mimic art, without which all advice is useless.

The main requirement in the mimic art is to have the body as a whole, and its members severally, so in one's power that the moods of the soul may be easily and gracefully rendered. No treatise upon acting can teach that art by merely laying down rules how to give intellectual expression to our passions; quite apart from the fact that the ways in which our passions may be expressed are so manifold, and so distinct, that it would be almost impossible to establish fixed rules. There can be no real acting until the limbs and the body, as a whole, are made so elastic by training that the physical movements express æsthetically the disposition of the soul.

Hegel says: "My body is the medium through which I communicate with the outward world. If I would realize my intention, I must make myself capable of rendering this subjectivity into outward objectivity. My body is not naturally fitted for this; it conforms only to the physical life. The organic and physical impulses are not yet the results of the promptings of my spirit. My body must first be trained for such service." And Dr. Jacobs expresses the idea of Greek gymnastics by saying that their one great aim was to secure the mastery of mind over body, and represent the internal harmony in the inward and outward appearance.

After these words no especial proof is needed to show that the method of studying certain fixed movements for this or that situation, this or that sensation,—a method adopted by many teachers,—is false and execrable. It should, on the contrary, be our task to make the body so elastic, so strictly subject to the will by correct, regular, and varied practice, that, if we would reproduce a sensation, we may make as through an electric shock, not a certain or fixed, but yet an appropriate movement of the limbs; for varied and still befitting gestures may be made for every