

# **A HISTORY OF DANCING**

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A History of Dancing by Sir Reginald St.-Johnston

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**SIR REGINALD ST .-JOHNSTON**

**A HISTORY  
OF DANCING**



A  
History of Dancing.

BY

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1906.

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## CONTENTS.

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CHAP.	PAGE.
✓ I. The Muse of Dancing in Ancient Mythology, and her alliance with the kindred arts ... ..	9
✓ II. Dancing as a Religious Ceremony ...	17
✓ III. Ancient Forms of Dancing in Greece, Italy, and the East ... ..	26
✓ IV. Some Early Forms of English Dancing ...	40
✓ V. Allegorical Dances among Primitive Nations ... ..	62
✓ VI. Quaint Dances in Civilized Countries ...	77
✓ VII. The Ballet, its origin and development ...	93
✓ VIII. The Stage Dancing of to-day ... ..	116
✓ IX. Dancing as a Social Pastime ... ..	132
✓ X. A Short History of the World's Dancers	159

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Literature on the subject of Dancing ...	194
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REFERENCE

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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A Group of Modern Dancers ... ..	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
Dance of Joy at the Overthrow of Doubting Castle	51
(From an early copy of "The Pilgrim's Progress").	
A Dance in Otaheite ... ..	70
(From a first edition Capt. Cook's "Voyages").	
Signor Vestris ... ..	102
(London Magazine, April, 1781.)	

## PREFACE.

**T**HERE was a time in England, in the far-off past, when dancing was considered as an accomplishment to be acquired by every true knight; has not Chaucer himself given as the quartet of courtly graces, Valour at Arms, Dancing, Drawing, and Writing? Since those days dancing has both gained much and lost much, but grace is still the keynote of the art, an Art that is as true a one as that of Music or of Painting. Let dancing be but graceful and it will always be a thing of beauty.

Of late years there has been a tendency, not only on the stage, but also in the ball-rooms, to wander from "the polished graces of our ancestors," and to introduce, in the former, certain styles of dancing that are far from graceful, such as "cake-walks," high-kicking, and other extravagant forms which can only debase the art; and in the latter, a wild and irresponsible romping, which has made such expressions as "Kitchen Lancers" a bye-word.

In this book I have endeavoured to show from what beautiful origins many of our dances have sprung, and how the great dancers of the past were wont to associate with their dances the poetry and noble thoughts that were the theme round which their skill revolved.

In tracing the history of the subject I have found an almost entirely new field to work upon, for with the exception of two books, one by a Frenchman,



M. Vuillier, and the other, written more from a technical than a historical point of view, by Edward Scott, there have been practically no works on the subject since the year 1712, when Weaver published his "History of Dancing."

It is a subject full of never-failing interest, and the deeper I have gone into it the more curious, and to me hitherto unknown, facts I have been able to bring to light.

I have throughout been careful to avoid technical details, for my object has been not so much to point out how the various dances should be performed, as to trace their gradual development from their origins, and to show how beautiful and picturesque a thing a dance well done may be.

REGINALD ST. JOHNSTON.

*Cheltenham*, 1905.

“Hark! The speaking strings invite;  
Music calls us to delight;  
See the maids in measure move,  
Winding like the maze of love.  
As they mingle madly gay  
Sporting Hebe leads the way.  
Love, and active Youth advance  
Foremost in the sprightly dance.  
As the magic numbers rise  
Thro’ my veins the poison flies,  
Raptures not to be expressed  
Revel in my throbbing breast.  
Jocund as we beat the ground  
Love and Harmony go round.”

CUNNINGHAM, “*The Dance*,” 1766.

CHAPTER I.  
THE MUSE OF DANCING IN  
ANCIENT MYTHOLOGY,

AND HER ALLIANCE WITH THE KINDRED ARTS.

*"Come and trip it as you go  
On the light fantastic toe."*

MILTON.—"L'ALLEGRO."

**D**ANCING—A little word, and yet so full of meaning. What true lovers of dancing are there whose blood does not rush tingling through all their veins, and whose feet do not start an involuntary tap, tapping on the floor, when they hear the word, and its meaning flashes upon them?

To be moving, nay, rather floating through the air, to the sounds of distant music; to be madly rushing, now here, now there with a thrill of delicious intoxication, yet all the while in perfect harmony with the tune; to be now whirling round at an