

**DANCING, AS A MEANS OF
PHYSICAL EDUCATION: WITH
REMARKS ON DEFORMITIES, AND
THEIR PREVENTION AND CURE**

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Dancing, as a means of physical education: with remarks on deformities, and their prevention and cure by Mrs. Alfred Webster

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MRS. ALFRED WEBSTER

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ON DANCING :

ITS USES AND ABUSES.

THE object of this little book is to point out the many advantages of Dancing as an educational exercise—to endeavour to rescue it from the censure cast upon it in consequence of its abuses—to show that, properly taught and practised, it is the very best safeguard against the evils of over mental education, to which young ladies are so subject—to describe its advantages in harmonising the motions of the body, so as to produce habits of graceful ease upon all occasions—and to prove

that it has very decided effects, directly and indirectly, upon the mind; by, firstly, making the body a healthy and vigorous organ for the mind's development; and, secondly, by inculcating the practice of courtesy and politeness (with which it should ever be attended), indirectly inducing its votaries to adopt those habits of self-denial and self-restraint which are so necessary to civilised society, and the best definition of which is to be found in the precept, "Do unto others as ye would be done unto."

Taking higher views of the utility of Dancing than is usual, my remarks on it in my lessons have repeatedly elicited a wish that they might be reduced to a more tangible form. This request has latterly become so frequent, that it must serve as my apology, if an apology be necessary, for thus making my appearance before the public.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ROOM DANCING
AND STAGE DANCING.

IN the remarks I am about to make, it will be observed that I set aside theories that have become dear to their teachers from old associations, and which are, and doubtless will be, clung to by many professors; though I trust I shall be able to show that they are the cause of much misrepresentation as to the art in general, and most prejudicial to the progress of private teaching in particular.

If we inquire what Dancing is, we shall find that it is merely the natural movements of the body subjected to rhythmical restraint, as sound becomes music under similar control. The name of Dancing was doubtless originally given to those

involuntary, impulsive movements of the body occasioned by the exuberant animal spirits of childhood, (which are analogous to the sportiveness of the young of all animals,) and to the unrestrained manifestations of joy by those of riper years at some new and pleasurable sensation, when the limbs would as naturally spring into the dance as the voice would burst into the song. I must not linger to tell of its early adoption as a mode of heathen worship, of its introduction into the Jewish ritual, of its days of honour among the Greeks, or of its decline among the Romans; but come at once to our own days.

Those ladies who have witnessed the choregraphic displays at the Operas, will, I feel sure, agree with me that it is high time a strong line of demarcation should be drawn between Stage and Room Dancing. The former has doubtless great attractions, owing to the ability of celebrated artistes; but, however

calculated to excite our wonder on the Stage, it has most assuredly nothing in it to invite us to imitate it in our Drawing Rooms,— while the largeness of the movements, the unceasing pirouetting, the ungracefulness of many of the attitudes, the unnatural turning out of the legs, and the absence of story or meaning in many of the “pas,” all tell, in my opinion, a sad tale of the decline of the art which has been called the “poetry of motion.” Many of these extreme positions are still taught in Room Dancing by those professors who have been on the Stage, and by many who have not; hence the objection often raised, that it is quite unfitted to impart to children the bearing of ladies and gentlemen, and that it is worse than useless as a means of preventing or removing bad habits or personal deformity. In this way the art is condemned and its teacher discarded.

In the hints I have thrown out relative to a