

DANCING AS A FINE ART.

SCENES IN A NEW YORK SCHOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL DANCERS—A REALISTIC SKETCH
OF THE UNROMANTIC DRUDGERY THAT MUST PRECEDE
THE GLITTER OF THE STAGE.

IT is several hundred years since stage dancing, as a special feature of theatrical entertainments, first received the applause that made its study an art. Naturally enough, it was a member of a royal house, scant of hair and portly of person, who first became bewitched before the trained and studied graces of a woman who had learned to dance. The man was the famous Gian Galeazzo, of the great Milanese house of Visconti, and it was at Tortona, just five centuries ago, that the fascination of the ballet was first felt. It is probable that Galeazzo's enthusiasm set half the pretty girls of Tortona, if not of all Italy, upon their tiptoes, for almost immediately girls began to dance upon the stage, before crowds of admirers, and schools for the training of dancers were opened. From that time the ballet girl and her professor figure in the theatrical history of every generation and of most lands. In some countries stage dancing has been esteemed as one of the highest arts; with the beginning of the present century, however, it has degenerated, sharing in a measure the fate of the theater itself.

In Italy, France, and Germany, where the government recognizes and supports the theater as an institution necessary to the public weal, ballet dancing still holds its place as an art. Most of the *premières danseuses* to be seen on the American stage are graduates either of the school connected with the Paris Opéra or of the one attached to La Scala in Milan. In this country there are of course no such semi official institutions; but there are private schools in New York at which instruction is given to girls who wish to become professional dancers. Most of these places are managed by performers who have retired from the stage, some with the memory of a brilliant life before the footlights; perhaps with the clamorous encores of the Moulin Rouge or the Jardin de Paris still ringing in their ears. Schools with such instructors usually appeal to a cheaper class of pupils, or to can-

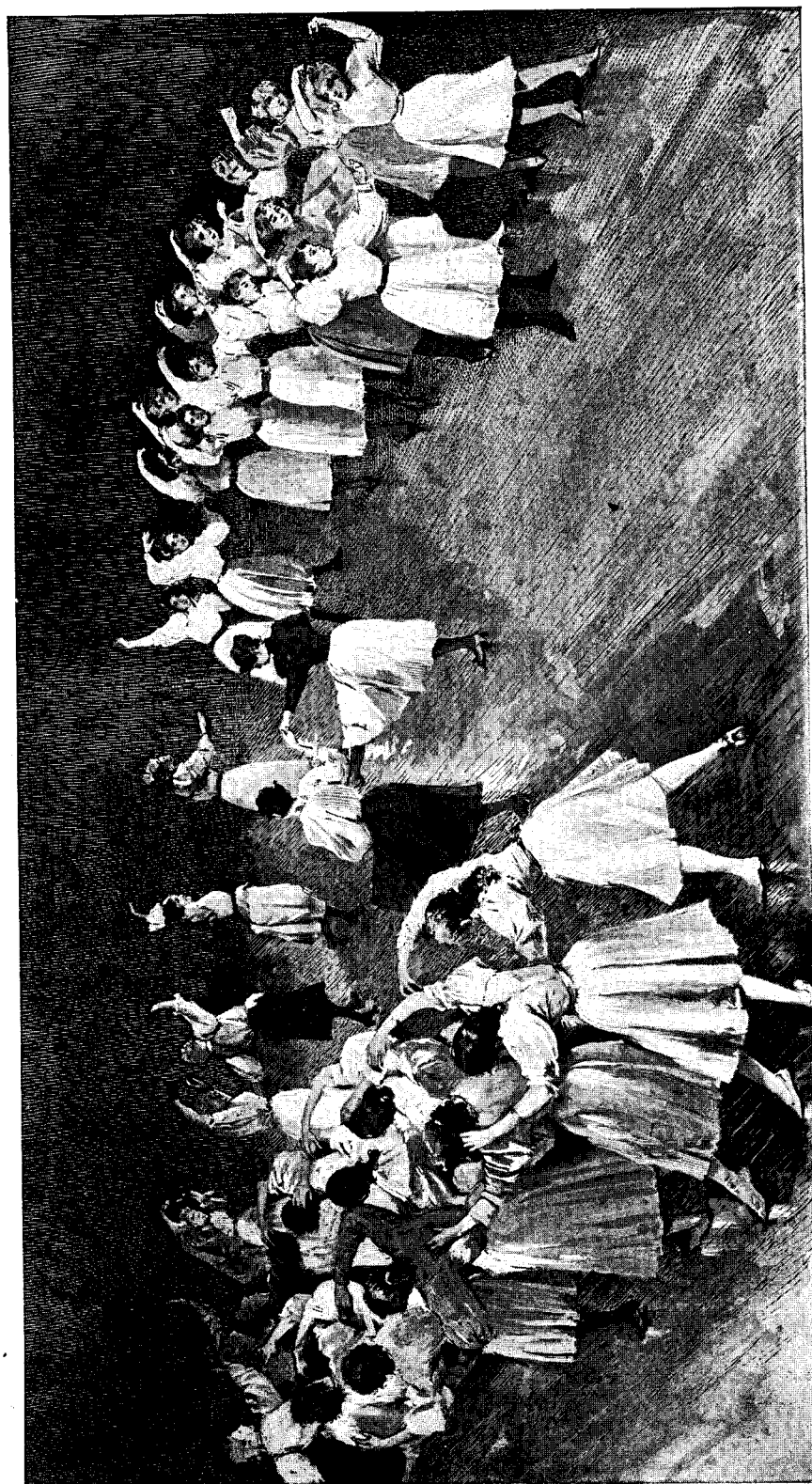
didates for the variety stage, where high kicking is considered fine dancing. The special dances seen in the current productions of burlesque and comic opera, or the classic ballet and the graceful minuet, are taught at schools with less famous instructors.

There is an establishment of the first description near Broadway and Twenty Third Street, in New York. It was organized by a French dancer who was once queen of the Jardin Mabille in Paris. She is reconciled to her compulsory abdication in favor of younger rivals, and contentedly devotes herself to teaching American girls the French gyrations in which she, in her day, excelled. At this school the writer was recently permitted to be present during class time. The class room occupied an entire floor of a long building, the partitions that had divided it having been removed. The floors were carpetless and waxed, and along each side of the room were hard wooden benches. A dozen or more girls in slight, loose fitting gowns, the skirts a little below the knee, with dark stockings and slippers, were about to begin their work.

"*Allons, ladies, commencez—von, two, free!*"

Madame had taken up a classic position in the center of the room, and her pupils advanced down the floor, kicking as they came. It seemed to the spectator that they were unusually graceful girls, but madame was not pleased with their movements.

"*Allons, young ladies, more high zan zat! Sacré nom!*" she said with emphasis, "you will never vin de salt if you no place ze leg more high zan zat!" Suiting her action to her word, madame seized one of the girls' legs and drew it up to a painful height. "Zat is ze way! Von, two! Von, two! *Un deux!* Zat's bettare!" continued madame, moving the rather unskilled leg up and down. It was easy to see that the girls were only beginners. Their limbs refused absolutely to go beyond a certain



"The first class in the ballet takes the floor."

Drawn by E. Grioz from a photograph by Henment, New York.

point. Their muscles needed stretching ; so after exercising the same step for a few minutes, madame instructed them to continue the oiling and massage treatment she had prescribed, and to be on hand again the next day.

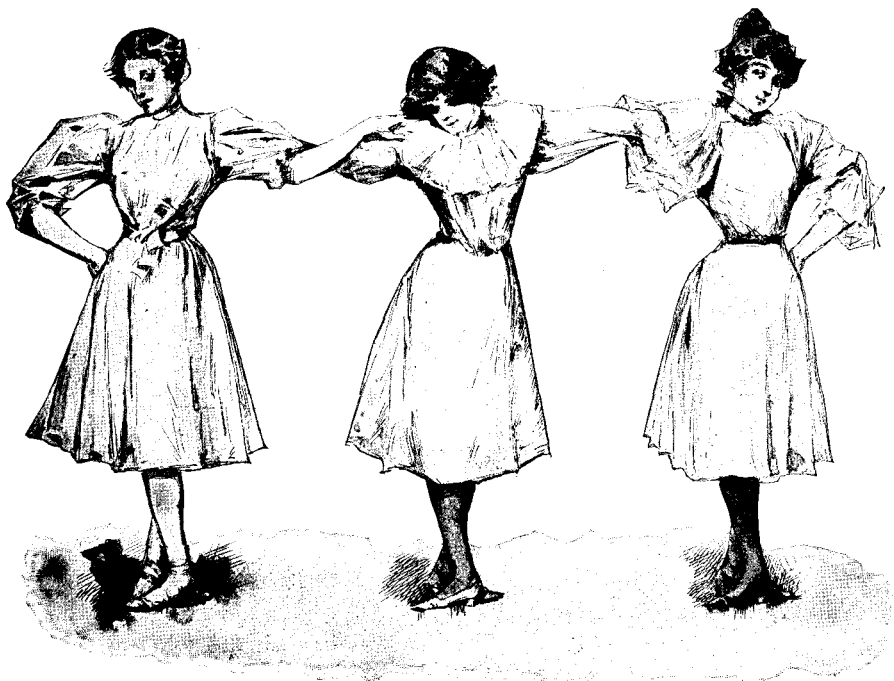
The art of kicking high is not the easiest thing in the world to acquire. Overtaxed nature revenges herself on the dancer, in the early stages of her apprenticeship, by

The girls took their positions, and kicked out vigorously, eliciting madame's decided approval.

"Zat is good," she cried. "Zere, do zat vith Mees Smeeth. Go and mark ze time."

Miss Smith, a little brunette who had been quietly practising in the far corner, by herself, now advanced quickly and stood in position.

"Attention!" called madame. "First



Three Dancing School Pupils.

Drawn by E. Grievaz from a photograph by Heument, New York.

inflicting the most excruciating pains. The human leg in its normal condition refuses to obey the preposterous demands of the professor, and the recalcitrant limb has to be pulled and hauled, bathed and oiled, bandaged and tied, until it is more obedient. These preliminaries, although painful, are cheerfully submitted to by the novice, and the young girl who shrinks from the fatigue of standing behind a counter, or the drudgery of plying a needle, will endure martyrdom if she seeks the questionable glory to be attained on the stage, or in a more or less disreputable music hall.

In the class room was another group of girls more advanced than the first occupants of the floor. These madame called to her.

"Ve must repeat ze step you have learned yesterday," she said.

five times in ze same place! *Très bien!* One, two, dree."

But it did not succeed. "Oh, *mon dieu!*" cried madame. "Vot miserable danzing! Have I not tell you to keep in ze same place? Verefore you vill move away? Zee, like zis!" and the old queen of the Jardin Mabille picked up her skirts, threw her leg out as a signal, then glided up and down the hall with a grace and agility that would have brought a Parisian audience to its feet.

"Have you seen? Now try and do ze same, and *surtout* be graceful! First stoop and pick up your dress gracefully."

To pick up her dress gracefully is one of the hardest lessons the novice has to learn. It seems a very simple matter to lay hands on the edge of a skirt and lift it, but girls have practised it for months without satis-



"The science and success of the ballet lies in the symmetry of its lines."
Drawn by E. Griewz from a photograph by Hlement, New York.



"One, two, three, four!"

Drawn by E. Grivaz from a photograph by Hemment, New York.

fying their teacher. It must be done gracefully. A dancer's success often depends on the first gesture that attracts the eye of the spectator, and most frequently this gesture has to do with lifting the skirt.

From the end of the hall, hand in hand, the girls again advance. Each time their raised legs descend they rest an instant on their toes, then advance a step, and thus come on slowly toward the watching madame.

"Hop! Go! Hop! Go!" counts madame. "Now still! Five times! Von, two, drie, four, five! Don't move! Von, two, drie!" But it does not please. "Vell, vat ze diable have you doing? I told you not to move. Begin again! Von, two, drie, four, five! Turn! *Al-lons*, more quick! Zat is better!"

The special dances taught at schools of this kind have all sorts of curious names. While the writer was present the girls practised the "guitar," the "carry arms," and the "windmill." In the "guitar" the right leg is thrust out perfectly rigid, the foot as high as the head. With the left hand the dancer holds the elevated leg as if it were a guitar, and with her right hand simulates the touching of the strings. The chief difficulty in this, as in many other similar feats, lies in maintaining one's equilibrium.

Since the great success of Loie

Fuller and other "serpentine" dancers, special instruction is given in the art of skirt dancing. The manipulation of many yards of drapery is not easy of accomplishment, and long and tireless practice is necessary to the dancer who would win even faint applause, for now the public know the best of the art and will have none that is not good.

When a girl arrives at the point where she may train with the ballet, she is considered advanced in the art of dancing. The science and success of the ballet lies in the symmetry of its lines. Having mastered the control of legs and arms, the dancer may give her attention to being a graceful part of a whole figure, and if she is quick at this her place is assured.

Among our theatrical managers who make a specialty of the ballet are the Rosenfeld brothers, of the Lilliputian company. In their latest play, "Merry Tramps," there is a ballet of more than two hundred girls, who were drilled by the Kiralfys, in dances specially designed for them by one of the Rosenfelds.

Mr. Rosenfeld says it is as hard to drill a ballet corps as to stage a play, the chief difficulty being the utter stupidity of some of the girls. They seem to be absolutely incapable of grasping the meaning of the evolutions they are asked to perform. Other



"Not the easiest thing in the world."

Drawn by E. Grivaz from a photograph by Hemment, New York.

girls, he says, are quick to learn, and take such an interest in their work that it is a real pleasure to teach them.

Jastamant, a famous ballet master of old, used to compose an idea for a ballet as he would a waltz, jotting down on sheets of paper the various figures and attitudes which he considered would make a ballet harmonious and pleasing to the eye.

The salary of the dancing girl depends entirely on the proficiency she has attained in her art. The very best dancers are receiving as large sums for their services as any people on the stage. But while the *première danseuse* commands a high salary, the ordinary ballet girl receives very little pay—no more, in fact, than she could earn selling buttons in a dry goods store. The usual pay is six dollars a week. This is while her company is playing in the city. While traveling on the road, twelve dollars is generally paid. Even at this low figure three weeks' rehearsal must be given free. Some managers, however, when they require the girls to practise all day, allow them ten cents each for luncheon. In spite of the small wages paid, stages are not



"The dancer may give her attention to being a graceful part of a whole figure."

Drawn by E. Grévoz from a photograph by Hemment, New York.

large enough, nor the demand for this sort of amusement strong enough, to give employment to half the girls who dream of becoming famous as skirt or ballet dancers. Those who succeed in reaching the top of the profession usually discourage beginners, though they may say that if they had all their hardships to go through again they would, nevertheless, be nothing else than dancers.

Managers are very anxious to secure the prettiest girls possible. In first engaging the ballet they are obliged, of course, to take the comeliest that apply, but while the rehearsals are going on constant applications are made for positions, and a weeding out process begins whereby the plainer girls are dropped on some pretext or another, and more attractive faces take their places. It does not seem fair, but the managers say it is business, and the rejected ones have to conquer their jealous rage and try again.

Arthur Hornblow.

THE STAGE

CRANE AND HIS COMPANY.

We hear much about the scarcity of good plays—plays that will live and go down in history as "The Rivals," "The School for Scandal," and "She Stoops to Conquer" have come down to us. To be sure, there are numberless

Take, for example, that sterling artist, William H. Crane. For eight years, from the time when he was eighteen, he appeared in a company whose repertoire for each night consisted of acts from operas, burlesques, and pantomimes. There was no falling into a rut



W. H. Crane as "Elisha Cuninghame" in "A Fool of Fortune."

From a photograph by Pach, New York.

meritorious works brought out, but when success is struck, the mine is worked to its utmost limit there and then, so that the drama lives years, one may say, in a twelvemonth. And it is this very system of long runs that deprives young actors of the training school to which their predecessors were indebted for their thorough grounding in the varied requirements of their art.

with a rehearsal call that compelled the player to be up in the title rôle of the farce "Paddy Miles," as *Count Arnheim* in "The Bohemian Girl," as *Dr. Dulcamara* in "The Elixir of Love," and as the clown of the pantomime, all for one and the same evening—a task that not infrequently fell on young Crane's shoulders.

His next connection was with the Alice Oates opera company. Here he was principal